

MENGINPEHN LIEN POHNPEI: A POETIC ETHNOGRAPHY OF UROHS
(POHNPEIAN SKIRTS)

BY

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To my Nohno, Kimberlee Kihleng,
and our Nahnep, Eliwiter Moses (1932-2012)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis perpetuates a legacy of menginpehn lien Pohnpei (the handiwork of Pohnpeian women) through a poetic ethnography of urohs, Pohnpeian appliquéd and machine embroidered skirts. I trace the “social life” of these valuable textiles and their relationships to the women who make, sell, wear, gift and love them on two Micronesian islands, Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), and the U.S. Territory of Guam where there is a small Pohnpeian migrant community. As a lien Pohnpei poet, this reflexive multi-sited research project is rooted in an “oceanic imaginary.” It is indigenously framed within the scholarship and creativity of Pacific Studies and critical ethnography that responds to the creative, which is so important to urohs and the lives of Pohnpeian women. I explore a genealogy and evolution of women’s nting (writing) from pelipel, tattoos, that marked Pohnpeian bodies to cloth production, including dohr, likoutei (wraparounds), as well as contemporary urohs, to my poetry, another kind of dynamic, textual and textured “writing.”

Pacific Literature evolved from the visual, and in Pohnpei this included various forms of menginpehn lih, which this thesis seeks to continue through experimental ethnographic and poetic practice on the sensual textile art of urohs. Thus, it made sense not only to take photographs to “capture” these stunning textiles, but to visualize my thesis as an urohs—the central design or mwahi are my poems, essential to the making of an urohs kaselel (beautiful urohs), appliquéd or embroidered to the scholarly, academic writing or likou, the fabric, that forms the larger skirt, all sewn together with a misihn en deidei (sewing machine), the theory and methodology, on which this thesis runs. My seven months of ethnographic “homework” consisted of oral history interviews, koasoai (conversations), and time spent experiencing urohs with the women whose lives are so entangled in them. The voices of lien Pohnpei are privileged in this Pohnpei-centric study written bilingually in English and Pohnpeian to best reflect our worldviews and the skirts that often function as our “second skins,” threading us in complex ways to other lien Pohnpei at home and in our homes away from home, such as Guam.

Lastly, this thesis-skirt reveals what our urohs do for us as lien Pohnpei, how they create meaning in our lives, as opposed to having an essentialist “meaning”—urohs are

an unacknowledged force in Pohnpei's and FSM's economy; these textiles are "women's wealth," dipwisou kesempwal (valuable goods) that give women power and agency within Pohnpeian culture, tiahk, and allow them to support their families; urohs are one of the most expressive ways for women today to display their identities as lien Pohnpei at home and in the diaspora. The poetry I write in response to these innovative, colorful textiles reflects the multilayered ways women articulate our relationships with urohs within the social fabric of Pohnpeian lives, which perpetuates our creativity through the labour of our "fine-hands" and minds.

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Chapter 1: An introduction to “Writing” Skirts

My Urohs & me



I open this thesis with a photo of my friends and me taken by my mother on 3 February 1990 in Kurumw,¹ Saladak, U (see Figure 1). This is one of my most precious childhood photos. When I look at it now I know that if it weren't for the time spent growing up in Saladak, a time captured in this snapshot, I wouldn't be writing this thesis on urohs en Pohnpei, the colorful, intricately-designed appliquéd or machine embroidered skirts from Pohnpei Island in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) that are made by women. Neileen (front right) is wearing the classic urohs rohs in black with the magenta flowers; I have the flower mwaramwar on my head and am wearing a white urohs suwain with a finely crocheted iki (“tail,” bottom tier of a skirt). My other friends are wearing urohs en wai (Western or American-style skirts). Urohs² have always been special to me, as they are for most lih³ (women) from Pohnpei. My thesis topic is

¹Kurumw is the name of the peliensapw (farmstead) located in the kousapw (community) of Saladak in wehin U.

² Pronounced “ooros.”

³ As is the case with te reo Māori as practised by the Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori: Māori Language Commission (see: <http://www.tetaurawhiri.govt.nz/index.html>), I wish

motivated by a lifelong love of urohs and a genealogy of studying doadoak en lih (“work of women”) and dipwisou en lih (“women’s things”) as begun by my mother, Kimberlee Kihleng, a cultural anthropologist (1996). The title of my first collection of poetry, *My Urohs*, was taken from one of the poems in the collection (see below, 2008). I wore urohs and began thinking critically and writing creatively about these skirts long before I ever knew it would become a PhD topic. In this poem, urohs⁴ become a metaphor for doadoak en lih, as a highly valued “women’s thing,” and I place it here as an introduction to my thesis. The poem traces the circulation of urohs on women’s bodies at events that form a significant part of tiahk en sahpw (literally “custom of the land,” which refers to Pohnpeian custom), and more importantly, conveys a feeling, a sense of how women’s identities, in all their complexity, are expressed through urohs. This sensuality is something that ethnographic poets and I believe poems can convey more fully alongside academic writing (see Flores 1982, Brady 2004). The poem represents my early thinking about urohs. The ways in which I think and write about these skirts now have evolved significantly since conducting my ethnographic research in 2012.

My Urohs
for Nohnno

my urohs is an isimwas feast
with over a hundred urohs hanging
from the rafters of the nahs
swaying in the breeze

a kamadipw en kousapw
as women marekeiso the soupeidi
it shines on brown skin,
fragrant with coconut and seir en wai

my urohs is a lien Pohnpei
dancing and singing in a nahs in U
after winning a yam competition
the envy of the entire wehi

a seukala
for Likend

to make a statement by purposefully not italicizing the Pohnpeian language and, therefore, not exoticising it given that this research focuses on Pohnpeians and is written by a Pohnpeian. This is also the case in my poetry.

⁴ The word urohs is used for both singular and plural. A woman can be wearing an urohs and can also have many urohs.

inviting her to lunch
at Joy

my urohs is a limesekedil
a weaver of kopwou and kisin pwehl
she has 13 children, 39 grandchildren
and 4 great grandchildren

a mwaramwar
of yellow seir en Pohnpei,
white sampakihda
and red hibiscus

my urohs is a mehla
the body covered in tehi
women with their little towels
bent over the deceased as they mwahiei

a kiam
of mahi, pwihk and kehpa
taken home after a feast
to be devoured by family

my urohs is me
daughter of the lien wai
and ohl en Nan U
a iehros, walking slowly (2008, 49-50)

I end this poem by situating myself within the greater narrative of urohs as the “daughter of the lien wai” (foreign woman) and the “ohl en Nan U” (man from Nan U), “a iehros” (only child), “walking slowly.” Like my poem and the photo I open with, I also wish to locate myself within my research project. This research is personal; it is reflexive. It revolves around a textile that I love and its circulation between two islands that I consider home: Pohnpei and Guam. My parents met on Guam in 1977, and I was born there; I’ve spent different periods of my life living on Guam, and it is where my parents currently reside. Pohnpei is my cultural home, as my father (pahpa) is Pohnpeian, and I spent my childhood there and returned to live on the island in 2007.

Ethnography itself is an intensely personal activity as it requires spending time with people, getting to know them, and often becoming a part of their lives if one is not already (Abu-Lughod 1986; Visweswaran 1994; Behar 1996; K. Teaiwa 2004). As an indigenous ethnographer, I inherit both the pressure of being accountable to people

("my people") from the same small island as me, and the benefit of already having relationships and understanding the mour en mehn Pohnpei (life of Pohnpeians) (see Smith 2012). My ethnographic study required returning to my two island homes, in Pohnpei, to the chiefdom and community where I grew up and on Guam to my "home" away from home. In both of these "homes," I spent time with many different lien Pohnpei, some of whom I met for the first time, some who I am quite close to and others who are also my relatives. It was intimate.

Ethnographic genealogy

The fact that it was my mother (nohno) behind the camera taking the photo of my friends and me is important, as my personal relationship with this research project begins with her ethnographic study of lien Pohnpei, conducted in the early nineties on women and gender in the community of Saladak. Although the focus of nohno's PhD dissertation (1996) was not urohs or Pohnpeian women's textiles, her thorough investigation of women in Pohnpeian social organization and exchange practices, as well as Pohnpeian women's everyday lives and work provides a solid foundation for my research. Nohno is a lien wai who has taught me so much about lien Pohnpei and their lives, along with the valuable work they do. She instilled in me at an early age a love and deep appreciation for doadoak en lih and dipwisou en lih, and their importance not only to women, but to tiahk (custom) and the larger society.

My parents and I returned to Pohnpei in 1987 when I was five years old. At first we lived in Kolonia in my pahpa's family home while my parents worked for the Pohnpei State and FSM National governments the first few years. We then shifted to Saladak, a rural kousapw in the southern part of U where my nohno began her fieldwork. Pahpa is from Nan U, a kousapw quite close to Saladak. We moved into a house in the peliensapw of Nanpailong that belonged to the father of one of pahpa's dear friends, and whose sister was nohno's research assistant. Pahpa also had two great uncles and their large families who lived close to our new home. The photo I open this chapter with, along with the following poem, captures this time in my life living in Saladak, and is based on oral histories of the community as told to nohno during her research (Kihleng 1996).

To Swim with Eels

part of me comes from rodents
a rat surrounded by kemisik⁵
in Saladak, land of lasialap⁶
all my friends are kemisik
while I am only part kitik⁷

I could have been eaten, then
taken to the mouth of the river

the other part of me is empty
with no animals to call family
whiteness mistaken
for nothingness

I swam with lasialap girls
and their ancestors who
lurked behind rocks
and was never afraid although

I could have been eaten, then
taken to the mouth of the river

I have heard of children in Kitti
who swim with sacred eels
in freshwater pools and streams
never to be bit

my fingers bled twice from
the mouths of eels who
tried to eat the food off my fingers
a warning

I could have been eaten, then
taken to the mouth of the river

Saladak is theirs eternally
descendants of Lien Madauleng,
their eel ancestress, who came to Pohnpei
on a school of marep
and gave birth to four eel daughters

I am not one of them
Sounpasedo, of chiefly lineage

⁵ Fresh water eels.

⁶ The ruling clan of U, their eni (ancestral spirit) is the kemisik.

⁷ Rat.

and kemisik blood, yet
we swam and ate together like sisters
but I must remember

I could have been eaten
by kemisik girls and their mothers
long, slick bodies full,
manaman,
swimming upstream
to give birth to male chiefs (Kihleng 2008)

“To Swim with Eels” provides a history of the Lasialap sou (clan), specifically the Sounpasedo subclan of Saladak whose eni (ancestresses) are kemisik or fresh water eels (Kihleng 1996). Many residents of Saladak are Lasialap and, therefore, have the potential of becoming the highest-ranking chiefs. Given that Pohnpei is a matrilineal society, a person’s sou is determined through her/his mother. In my case, I had a lien wai mother and, therefore, I had no clan. I refer to myself as “part kitik” or part rat given that my pahpa’s sou is Dipwenmen and their eni are rodents. Although I was a part of this kousapw and treated as one of its children, I was also different and fully aware of the manaman⁸ of this place. I could swim with eels, but I’d never be one.

At this early age, I had a vague notion of what an anthropologist did through watching my nohno. She participated in community life in ways that other lien wai married to ohl en Pohnpei did not; she learned to speak Pohnpeian and spent most of her time with lien Saladak (Saladak women). She was behind the scenes, observing, taking notes and photographs with her big camera. Nohno went with women to feasts and church celebrations; some of which were in other parts of the island and hard to get to, especially at a time when the road was not yet paved. She frequently visited Saladak homes with coffee and her signature cake. Sometimes I went along with her and the women and their kids, who were my friends, and we’d drive pahpa’s truck. It all seemed like so much fun, and I didn’t realize that it must have been hard for her at times. She went where other lien wai never went and did things other lien wai never did. Nohno was brave.

⁸ Manaman like mana in Polynesia is defined as: 1. adj. Magical, mysterious, spiritual; official. 2. n. Magic, mysterious or spiritual power; miracle; authority (Rehg and Sohl 1979, 56).



Figure 1.1. Nohno with lien Saladak, Kurumw, U, 1991.

Looking back, somehow I knew that doing ethnography meant real participation, putting others first, and going out of one's comfort zone. It meant listening and pretending not to know things even if you did. Sometimes it meant looking happy even if you were sad. Nohno remained connected to the Saladak community long after completing her initial fieldwork in 1992, maintaining friendships that have lasted well over 20 years (see Narayan 1993 for discussion of native/non-native anthropologists). I would have to do many of the same things my mother did during my "home"/field research, although I conducted mine over a much shorter period of time. Unlike nohno, I did not fully immerse myself within one specific community as the focus of my ethnographic work, although I returned to Saladak family, friends and community members throughout. I also did not have a small family to take care of, which allowed me a greater freedom, but at times also set me apart from some lien Pohnpei.⁹ I am grateful to my mother for showing me not only how to do good ethnography, but also how to love gently.

⁹ Pohnpeian women.

Urohs en Pohnpei

Much like cloth and clothing in other parts of the Pacific, urohs are part of a long genealogy of lien Pohnpei's skill, expertise and creativity in the production of clothing and other forms of body adornment, which continues to demonstrate their power and agency in society (Colchester 2003, K uchler and Were 2005, Addo, Leslie and Herda 2007, M ahina-Tuai and M ahina 2011). The making of these skirts, along with the beautiful appliqued and embroidered sheets and pillowcases, also reveals the history of colonialism, and particularly American Protestant and Spanish Catholic missionization on the island throughout much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Hanlon 1988, Hezel 1991). In their various attempts to "civilize" and Christianize, the Protestant missionary wives and Catholic Mercedarian nuns introduced ready-made cloth and thread to women and taught them how to sew and crochet.



Figure 1.2. Urohs for sale at Ester Carl's store, Kolonia and at Nan Dekehu Express, Nan U, 2012.

Given lien Pohnpei's intimate relationship with cloth and its production, they readily made "new" forms of clothing and cloth wealth demonstrating, in the process, not only their ingenuity, but their central role as agents of change. "Cloth and clothing are seen here as integral to new ways of thinking and being, rather than simply as derivatives of a new order that emerged" (see K uchler and Were 2005, xxiii). As will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, in contemporary Pohnpei, women perpetuate this important aesthetic and cultural tradition in highly valued and innovative ways through their production,

circulation and wearing of urohs en Pohnpei. Urohs are textiles that embody who we are as lien Pohnpei, and “as a form of clothing or dress it [the urohs] signifies something distinctively Pohnpeian and definitively female” (Kihleng 1996, 170). They are tangible “things” that connect us to our past, but also continually shift in style and fashion to shape what it means to be lih today in our home island and in migrant communities abroad. In this poetic ethnography, I explore the sociality and materiality of urohs and how these skirts make meaning, create bonds, empower and at specific times and in certain locales, even disempower contemporary lien Pohnpei.

While urohs is the generic word for skirt in the Pohnpeian language, the word most often refers to urohs en Pohnpei, the machine sewn, elaborately designed and colorfully appliquéd or embroidered skirts that are made out of cotton and other synthetic material (nylon, polyester and acetate being the most popular). They are loose fitting and between ankle and knee length. Urohs have an elastic waist and are worn at the waist, but can also be worn above the breasts, usually when around the house. Women sometimes wear several at a time, and urohs are commonly worn under likouli (dresses) and mwuhmwu (Pohnpeian and Chuukese adaptations of the Hawaiian mu‘umu‘u). Elderly men, and those who are sick or injured also wear urohs while at home. For instance, when I interviewed Iso Nahnken en Kitti, one of his male relatives was wearing an urohs because he had been badly burned. Obviously, urohs are comfortable, as well as comforting to wear even by ohl en Pohnpei. They come in many different styles that are continually evolving and coming in and out of fashion. Urohs, in fact, are very much a fashion industry in Pohnpei, throughout Micronesia and in migrant communities where islanders from Micronesia live, including Guam, Hawai‘i and the continental United States. Urohs are, therefore, very profitable as a business venture for women in Pohnpei and as an export to other islands in Micronesia and beyond. However, the economy of urohs en Pohnpei is, for the most part, left out of the macro-economic picture of Pohnpei and FSM in various ways, including statistically. The production and sale of urohs, along with other doadoak en lih, such as weaving koahl (hibiscus fibre skirts), are not accounted for in data collected at FSM’s Office of Statistics, Budget & Economic Management, Overseas Development Assistance and Compact Management (SBOC 2012). I will elaborate in further detail on the female economy of urohs in Chapter 6.

The appliqué and embroidery that is machine sewn on urohs almost always feature floral designs in addition to butterflies, hearts, turtles, mermaids, Pohnpeian sayings, ngaranger (coconut shell used to drink sakau) and tropical island fauna. These designs or motifs are referred to as mwahi. An urohs is not an urohs without a mwahi.¹⁰ Mwahi are an essential part of urohs; the design that is front and center. The Ponapean-English Dictionary defines mwahi as: “n. Color; pattern or design, as of material; stain, mark; freckle, mole, or any skin discoloration” (Rehg and Sohl 1979, 62). In the past the term would have most likely been used to describe pelipel¹¹ designs on the skin, as well as patterns on textiles and more (email correspondence, Robert Andreas, 27 June 2013).



Figure 1.3. Various mwahi designs, 2012.

¹⁰ Although there are urohs that do not have mwahi, such as urohs en mwei likou (patchwork skirts made from scraps of leftover fabric), when I say that an urohs is not an urohs without a mwahi, I am referring to the quintessential urohs en Pohnpei where the mwahi is the focal point of the skirt.

¹¹ Pelipel means tattoo in Pohnpeian. Another word for pelipel is nting, meaning “to write; to tattoo” (Rehg and Sohl 1979, 69). According to Pohnpeian linguist, Robert Andreas, nting is the “real word” for pelipel (email correspondence, 27 June 2013).

Contemporary urohs do not feature as many agricultural motifs as the earlier urohs popular in the 1970s and 80s, although many new mwahi designs continue to draw on old mwahi. The old motifs are updated and sewn on to the urohs of today, including the serehd (Pohnpei's state bird, which is a species of parrot) and mermaid as illustrated in Chapter 4. Urohs are dynamic textiles and new mwahi are being drawn and sewn on a continual basis to make new urohs styles, which are often determined by competition among various sohn deidei (seamstresses/tailors), as I discuss in Chapter 6.

The first urohs sewn and worn in Pohnpei functioned more as slips intended to be worn under likouli. These were urohs suwain, also known as urohs amimono,¹² skirts made from lightweight fabric, usually white, that were elaborately crocheted at the iki. They were worn so that the colorful hand-crocheted work showed beneath the likouli or mwuhmwu, a style of dress that is still popular among lih laud (elderly women), but was the fashion in the 1960s through the 80s. Urohs suwain are still made today, but rarely, and are thus, treasured textiles worn by women who, in many cases, have inherited them from their mothers and grandmothers. According to several of the women I interviewed, plain urohs, without suwain or kapwat,¹³ were first made and worn by women from the island of Pingelap, an atoll that is part of Pohnpei State, but whose people are culturally distinct from Pohnpeians. Pingelapese women wore their style of urohs under likouli, which was frowned upon by lien Pohnpei, who preferred to wear urohs amimono (see personal interviews, Judy S.P. Mauricio and Emiko Emilios). Eventually, the Pingelapese plain urohs were decorated with appliquéd mwahi and began to be worn on their own as skirts, and the urohs rohs (the classic urohs with appliquéd mwahi) became popular throughout Pohnpei. Once they had kapwat, the mwahi, the skirts became Pohnpeian and were identified with lien Pohnpei.¹⁴ Based on my interviews and several discussions with sohn deidei and other urohs experts, I have identified six different categories of urohs made in Pohnpei today. I will consider these

¹² Amimono means knitting in Japanese, although in the Pohnpei case, it is crochet. The Japanese introduced this style of crochet I suspect, although women I interviewed describe wearing likoutei and likouli during the Japanese period, not urohs amimono.

¹³ "Decoration, ornament, or new outfit of clothing; flower, used generically; garland" (Rehg and Sohl 1979, 28).

¹⁴ It is not known who made the first urohs rohs, although it is presumed to have been made in the 1970s, becoming popular throughout Pohnpei by the early 1980s.

categories in the context of the evolution and history of urohs in Chapter 3, but now I turn to a discussion of the prose and poetry I write about urohs as valuable dipwisou en lih.

“A Poetry of Things”

This project is about the menginpeh¹⁵ or handiwork of women, which refers to a wide range of women’s nting (“writing”) from tattooing and weaving in the past, to sewing and crocheting, to drawing urohs designs, to writing with a pen and paper. My thesis is about a specific textile made mostly by women that is worn on the female body. It is about women’s lives and how, for most in this study, including myself, our lives are tied in very intimate ways to urohs personally, culturally and economically. I illustrate throughout the thesis the many ways urohs en Pohnpei embody and “body” the women who make, sell, gift, purchase and wear them linking lih to a past of women’s handiwork, to people they love at home and away, and most importantly, to other women who cherish these unique skirts. Significantly, the urohs is “an art form in itself” (personal interview, Janet Panuelo, 27 November 2012) that demonstrates the creative menginpeh of lien Pohnpei— drawing and tracing designs, cutting fabric, appliquéing and reverse appliquéing, sewing freehand moving the fabric under the needle, cutting and trimming. It is extremely fitting that poet or poetes in the Greek means “maker, author, poet,’ variant of *poietes*, from *poein*, *poiein*¹⁶ ‘to make, create, compose’” (<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=poet>). As a Pohnpeian poet, whose hands do not make urohs, I believe it appropriate and also necessary to respond to my ethnographic research on this important and authentic art form (“authentic” in the Albert Wendt sense of usage determining authenticity, 1983; see also Addo and Leslie 2007) with creativity through the menginpeh of poetry. My poems are, therefore, my contribution to a legacy of lien Pohnpei’s nting.

While not directly about me, my poetry is personal in that I write from ethnographic experience that is never separate from those I interviewed or spoke with and took

¹⁵ Rehg and Sohl define menginpeh as “result of one’s work” in addition to writing (1979, 59).

¹⁶ Selina Tusitala Marsh alerted me to the Greek etymology of “poem” (email correspondence, 7 October 2014).

pictures of, as well as grew up with, lived with and love. In this way, I am always present in my poetry. As ethnographic poet Toni Flores explains:

The self-revelation entailed in doing poetry makes a person think about other people in a slightly but significantly different way. I must observe myself, I must begin to think of myself as an observed “me,” I must recognize that others too are being forced to think of themselves as observed “me’s”...but, more importantly, I have put myself in the same framework with the “objects” of my observation and am no longer under the damaging illusion that I am, somehow, a being apart and distinct from them (1982, 18).

Ethnographic poets or poetic ethnographers, as I call myself, and other literary-inclined anthropologists are breaking down the barriers of anthropology as a social science that used to, and often still does, steer clear of the sensual (Brady 2004; Maynard and Cahnmann-Taylor 2010). The sensuality found in poetry and other writing that is reflexive and creative only brings us closer to those communities we work with making it impossible to maintain that distance originally thought to be so crucial in order to be a good ethnographer (Narayan 1993; Kisiuk 1997; Hau’ofa 2008; Wong 2008; Behar 2009). Recognizing and even sharing a “vulnerability” in ethnographic accounts is a way to resist “the “I” of the ethnographer as privileged eye, a voyeuristic eye, an all-powerful eye” of ethnographic authority (Behar 1996, 21). Taking into account Flores’ “Field Poetry” and Behar’s “vulnerability,” I wish to diminish the “eyes” in my ethnography through exposing my vulnerabilities and “multiple subjectivities” (Narayan 1993; K. Teaiwa 2004) as an observer who is more similar to than different from those I “study,” something I believe my poetry does well (Flores 1982; Behar 1996).

I am writing a “poetry of things,” borrowing from Appadurai’s “social life of things” (1986) and Marcus’ “following the thing” (1998). My poetry and ethnography trace the making and movement of *dipwisou en lih*, specifically *urohs*, and their significance for women and their lives. As I discuss in Chapter 4, my interest is less in answering the question, “what do *urohs* mean?” than in exploring the meaning *lien Pohnpei* give to *urohs* as valuable “things” that move in and from the home island to communities away. The poetry, however, is by no means merely ornamental or decorative. My thesis demonstrates the necessity of the creative with the scholarly. Through my ethnographic poetry, I wish to creatively, as Albert Wendt writes, “explain us to ourselves” in

continuing to move towards a new Oceania (1983, 85). This kind of creativity and critical Pacific study is also what other Pacific scholars, such as Konai Thaman (2003), Teena Brown Pulu (2007), Epeli Hau'ofa (2008), Teresia Teaiwa and Selina Tusitala Marsh (2010), advocate in their work.

The overall aim of my research and writing then is to achieve a synthesis between my poetry and scholarly academic writing, blending both into a finished thesis (T. Teaiwa and Marsh 2010). The creativity of urohs as material culture is primarily visual—from the fabric and thread chosen by sohn deidei and their customers to the sea of colors laid out on tables and floors in the homes of sohn deidei and other women I interviewed, and displayed prominently in Kolonia stores, beckoning. The visual is what captures the eye. To further visualize my thesis aim I've chosen to look at my project as an urohs. My poems are the mwahi (the central design) and the scholarly writing is the likou (the material or fabric), the skirt itself. Once the mwahi is appliquéd and/or embroidered onto the likou and the decorated iki is attached, it is trimmed and cleaned up, thus becoming an urohs. Hence, the urohs is the finished product, the thesis. Mwahi are what make urohs beautiful, therefore, my poems must convey this beauty and effectively capture the significance of this textile for lien Pohnpei. The mwahi I write onto the likou are crucial for the creation of an urohs kaselel (beautiful urohs). The seamless sewing together of the two: the poetry and the scholarly prose, is essential here. I anahne menginpeh mwahu; my handiwork (poetry/prose) must be good. It is often the case that the poetry is separated from the ethnography in ethnographic poetry, however, I intentionally stitch the two together. Why should the poetry that grew out of the ethnographic experience or the ethnography that gained greater insight through poetry be kept apart?

Another important element that contributes to the visual nature of this project is the development of a “visual archive” of urohs. I collected historic photographs of lien Pohnpei, looked at photographs taken by my mother during her research and took photos as part of my own ethnographic project with the intention of best capturing the multiple meanings these skirts hold in the lives of Pohnpeian women in Pohnpei and on Guam (Pink 2007). Telling the stories of this vibrant Micronesian textile would be impossible without a visual component, as it is the most important sense when it comes

to understanding urohs—the innovative mwahi, the multiple colors of thread and fabric, the female wearers, everything that captures the eye. The photographs¹⁷ in my thesis attempt to showcase, as well as interpret the magnificence of these skirts within the context of my ethnographic experience. They, and my poetry, are key to representing a rich and intimate “picture” of the sensual realities of lien Pohnpei and their urohs kaselel at home and away.

Working from a theoretical framework that acknowledges the existence of a Pohnpeian visual literature as evidenced through doadoak en lih, which includes cloth production, weaving, and pelipel (nting), and which persists with urohs making and transitioning into poetry, I borrow from Teresia Teaiwa’s “theory of the polygenesis of Pacific literature” (2010a, 731). My research and writing create a connection between these earlier, indigenous visual literatures and more contemporary forms of nting. I demonstrate the critical relationship between Pacific literature, visual culture and women through the rich textuality of ethnography, poetry, and photography of urohs en Pohnpei. It is the field of Pacific Studies that has allowed me to create this highly textured and multilayered urohs thesis.

The “slipperiness”¹⁸ of Pacific Studies

One of the perceived dilemmas of being in an interdisciplinary programme, like Pacific Studies, is that such programmes are often seen as troubling for their “inbetweenness” (between disciplines), being neither here nor there in the larger academy. Pacific Studies though, like other interdisciplinary fields, can also be seen as transformative and dynamic (Whimp 2008). I was actually drawn to Pacific Studies because of its interdisciplinarity, which has provided me the academic freedom or “space” to cross disciplines and be creative with my research, given that I come from an English literature and creative writing background.

¹⁷ I name the women in my photographs to avoid objectifying them as nameless “natives.” Most of the women in the photos are interviewees who gave me written consent to have their photos taken. Those women photographed who I did not interview gave me verbal permission.

¹⁸ I’ve borrowed the term “slipperiness” from Graeme Whimp in defining “interdisciplinarity” and “what it might contribute to the development of Pacific Studies” in general and at Victoria University of Wellington specifically (2008, 404).

When I applied to Pacific Studies I knew the only way I could complete a PhD would be if I could somehow incorporate writing poetry into the thesis topic I selected. Poetry would save me. I knew urohs. I knew poetry, and had written poems about these important textiles. When I decided to do ethnography, I began calling my “new” methodology poetic ethnography. Not having formal training in anthropology, I was not aware that there were ethnographic poets out there or that ethnographic poetry was an actual sub-field of anthropological poetics (Brady 2004, Maynard and Cahnmann-Taylor 2010). Ethnographic poetry is “verse written by researchers based on “field” study...where ethnography meets poetry on the page, infusing anthropological scholarship with the spirit of creative connection” (Maynard and Cahnmann-Taylor 2010, 5). While ethnographic poetry is very similar to what I am doing in my work, I identify myself as a poetic ethnographer because I arrived at poetry first, and the actual “doing” of ethnography came much later. Most ethnographic poets on the other hand are trained ethnographers first, poets second (Flores 1982; Brady 2004; Hau’ofa 2008; Maynard and Cahnmann-Taylor 2010). I also chose to conduct oral history interviews with Pohnpeian women as a key methodology in my greater ethnographic approach. I had previous experience doing oral history research as an undergraduate and MA student at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa. Oral history, as I elaborate upon in Chapter 2, is a valuable means by which to bring people’s voices, the voices of women in particular, to the forefront while also preserving these voices and the knowledge they convey (Sheftel and Zembrzycki 2013).

Through Pacific Studies, I have been able to fully explore the best way to study and write about the “art” of a specific form of female clothing, urohs en Pohnpei, which embodies the identities of the women who sew, gift, sell and wear them. The social and material relationships these skirts create and maintain as they move in Pohnpei and between the home island and migrant communities, such as Guam, is revealed through this poetic ethnography. I am advancing Pacific Studies research that is multi-sited and focuses on Pacific women’s material culture. This thesis is one of the few Micronesia focused multi-sited studies. While the works of K. Teaiwa (2004), Marshall (2004), and Bautista (2010) are also multi-sited, including research sites in Micronesia, they do not center on Micronesian women and our dipwisou en lih.

This thesis, therefore, seeks to contribute to the field of Pacific Studies by making Pohnpei and greater Micronesia more visible, moving the region from the periphery of the field, and particularly so from an indigenous woman's perspective. As a Pohnpeian poet and scholar, I am writing a creative thesis to respond to the ways in which urohs en Pohnpei materially and visually express the innovation, creativity and agency of a Pacific people, specifically women. The creative also involves a partially bilingual text, combining Pohnpeian and English, in both my poetry and prose, allowing me to be true to my own voice, as well as, and most importantly, the voices of other lien Pohnpei. This bilingual approach furthers the process of decolonizing the academy and even Pacific Studies by recognizing the necessity of researching and writing in an indigenous Pacific language, and not just English. My study of menginpehn lien Pohnpei and my own menginpeh in response to a heritage of women's nting, therefore, fits well with what Terence Wesley Smith describes as the "empowerment rationale" (1995, 124) of Pacific Islands Studies wherein indigenous voices, creativity and knowledge are not only acknowledged, but celebrated (see T. Teaiwa 2010c).

Bilingual Thesis

Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language...Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without always having to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate...I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue—my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice (Gloria Anzaldua 2007, 81).

Like many of Anzaldua's poems, my poetry has been described as bilingual. For me, the Pohnpeian, especially when *flowing alongside* English, is what makes my poems sing. It is my voice, my "serpent's tongue." This bilingual dimension is found in my prose as well. While some readers may find this confusing and difficult to follow, writing in Pohnpeian and English is essential to me because it most accurately represents my positionality as a ahpw kahs (half-caste) bilingual Pohnpeian poet and scholar, and my experience of being frustrated by the existing scholarly literature on Pohnpei, which has silenced the Pohnpeian voice and language through over-translation into English. Visweswaran argues that, "While all ethnographies are properly "bi-lingual," to speak of

a bilingual or multilingual ethnography is to challenge the translation of a subordinated language into the dominant tongue” (1994, 133). Although, Pohnpeian does not become the “dominant tongue” my effort has been to write a thesis that not only reads (the vernacular), but also feels (the poetry) and looks (the photographs) Pohnpeian. The bilingual thesis is also most true to the women¹⁹ I write about—the sohn deidei, the businesswomen, the urohs collectors, the women who wear urohs, and my female relatives and friends. These women talked with me as a fellow Pohnpeian about a textile that is Pohnpeian, and I do not believe most of them took into consideration a non-Pohnpeian audience. All but two of my interviews with lien Pohnpei were conducted in Pohnpeian, and I believe it necessary and respectful in staying true to their voices and giving them voice to quote them in the language in which they chose to express themselves and their feelings about urohs. For those of us like Anzaldúa (2007) who were brought up speaking more than one language, we are fully aware that much gets lost in translation. For this reason, I tried my best to transcribe my interviews as close as possible to how the women spoke, even including the Kitti dialect with those interviewees from this southern chiefdom of Pohnpei. I did not rewrite or rephrase what they said, and my translations into English reflect this. Despite my attempt to stay true to these lien Pohnpei’s voices and our koasoai (talanoa or conversation), some expressions and moments still cannot be fully translated.

Who I write for is also why this bilingual text is important. I write, of course, for Pohnpeians, who I hope will read my thesis and come away feeling that it is *theirs*; to hear voices that are familiar, that resonate, that make them smile to themselves. I pahn nsenamwahu ma nei daropweht sair, kaperenih oh pil ekis kalidorih mehn Pohnpei. I men aramas akan en wadek oh irail kamehlele me lien Pohnpei men me ntingiada oh lien Pohnpei kan me pil kiheng audepeh kan. *I will be satisfied if my paper (thesis) touches, brings happiness and even a slight irritation to Pohnpeians. I want people to read it and believe that a Pohnpeian woman wrote it and that Pohnpeian women provided the content.*

¹⁹ For most of the lien Pohnpei I interviewed in Pohnpei and Guam, Pohnpeian is their first language and the primary language they speak on a daily basis, although many also speak English.

I also write from a kind of “island borderland” having spent much of my life on the Pacific islands of Guam and Oahu, where Micronesians live on the edge socioeconomically and culturally (Anzaldúa 2007; Blair 2011; Hezel 2013). I write for others like me, for other Micronesians, other Pacific Islanders, especially migrants and immigrants, who have been marginalized and misunderstood. Finally, I write for other Micronesian and Pacific students and scholars, as we need to be proactive in researching, speaking and writing in our own languages about our own peoples and cultures, and not only in English. To me, this is critical in terms of our own positionality, and for Pacific Studies to continue to develop as a field that cultivates and preserves indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing (Thaman 2003; T. Teaiwa 2010c). We, therefore, need to creatively express ourselves in our own rich languages to keep our linguistic heritage relevant in today’s globalized world and to have our voices heard.

My bilingual approach has been influenced by the poetry and prose of Sia Figiel (1996a, 1996b) and Teresia Teaiwa (1995, 2008), which I first read when I was a late teen, as they write in Samoan and I-Kiribati respectively, as well as in English. When I realized other Pacific Islander women were writing somewhat bilingually, I thought I could do the same. It felt natural to do so, and helped me find my voice. And when I later read Albert Wendt (1980, 2003) who has a gift for writing beautiful prose in English that seamlessly incorporates the Samoan world and language, I knew I wanted the Pohnpeian and English in my poems and prose to flow like his, like water. My poetry mentor, Juliana Spahr, also encouraged me to write bilingually, to experiment, and incorporate research into my creative writing, even if the poetry that evolves requires more work on the part of the reader. Poetry and certainly academic writing are not meant to be easily understood. They require a certain kind of knowledge that is not always easily translated or explained to their readership. The speaking and writing of all languages requires cultural knowledge, and some understanding of the worldview of the speakers (see Thiong’o 1986). “Not merely a passageway to knowledge, language is a form of knowing by itself; a people’s way of thinking and feeling is revealed through its music” (Trask 1999b, 114). Therefore, as Anzaldúa expresses so loudly, why should we speakers of *other* languages (other than English) always have to translate? We should be free to write as we are, to express our “authentic” selves, a self that is not rooted in imitation. This also allows readers to better understand our way of knowing

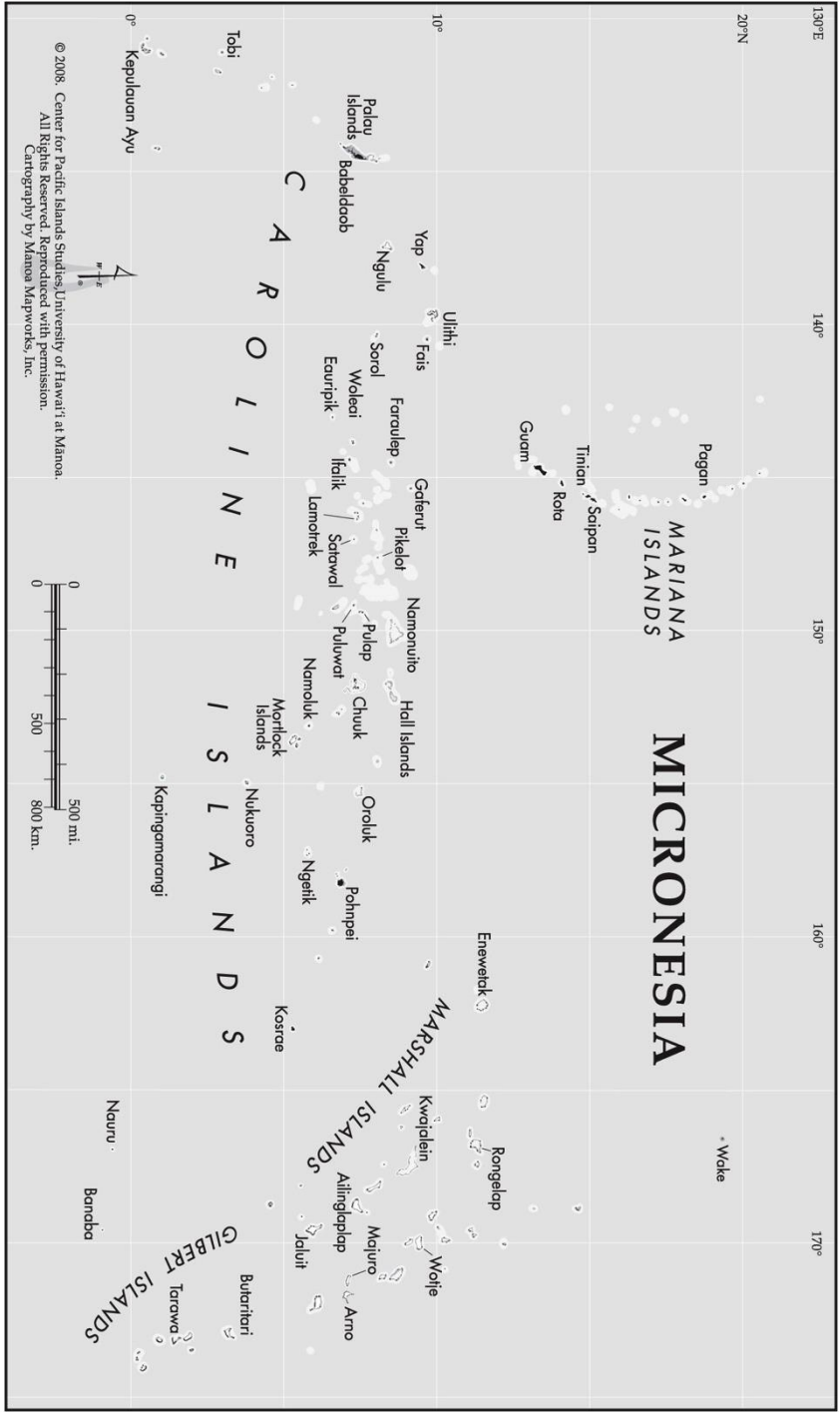


Figure 1.4. Map of Micronesia.

ourselves and the world around us. This indigenous voice and knowledge also proved critical in negotiating my ethnographic “homework” or fieldwork, and the many subjectivities involved.

“Homework”/Fieldwork, on being an indigenous poet-ethnographer

Throughout my life, I have been in a perpetual state of coming and going, moving between my birthplace, Guam, going southeast to Pohnpei, my cultural home, and northward to Oahu and then back again. When I leave these island homes behind, Pohnpei in particular, they continue to haunt me. Physically, I may move further away, yet I seem to move closer at the same time. These islands are always there ahead of me yet forever present in my memory. Yet despite “running away” from Micronesia and moving to an entirely new island, Te Ika-a-Māui, the North Island of Aotearoa, I had every intention of returning to Guam and Pohnpei to do my research (Behar 2007). There was a grumbling in my stomach telling me that I would go back. Being raised on different Pacific Islands, it is not surprising that I chose a multi-sited project (Marcus 1998). I was going to “chase skirts”²⁰ to Guam, Pohnpei and Kansas City, Missouri, USA, where there is a relatively large and long-term Pohnpeian migrant community. However, early on in my research I made the crucial decision not to go to Kansas City mainly for financial and logistical reasons. Having completed my first month of research on Guam, a slow and challenging process, I also feared the quality of my research would be compromised were I to spend only two months in each location. Spending three months in Pohnpei and four months on Guam gave me the quality time I needed to reestablish, form and further develop relationships with *lien* Pohnpei who are involved in the production and circulation of *urohs en* Pohnpei. Having read Ghassan Hage’s critique of multi-sited ethnography as a method with very real challenges that is “not practically feasible,” I was relieved to have chosen only two “home”/field sites (2005, 465). Completing my own multi-sited ethnography, I agree with Hage when he states, “I simply could not be involved in such an intimate way in more than two sites, at the most” (2005, 406). I believe my ethnography would have been greatly compromised

²⁰ The initial title of my thesis was “Chasing Skirts: a poetic ethnography of *urohs en* Pohnpei.” My PhD Supervisor, Teresia Teaiwa, gave me the idea of “chasing skirts,” an obvious play on the expression.

had I gone to Kansas City as well. Guam and Pohnpei as research sites proved best for the project I wanted to carry out, as the following poem conveys.

chasing skirts

I packed urohs in my suitcase in Wellington
one needs skirts to chase skirts
(for luck)
knowing there would always be too many
to take pictures of, to find the makers of,
to want, to give, to be given
to follow...
I arrived on Guam apprehensive
where do I begin?
so like a typical Pohnpeian I went to a mehla
in death I found urohs life
a parade of urohs fashion in bright oranges
neon green thread flickering in the dark
a mermaid that was "always on my mind"
leading me on an urohs path
from Harmon to Pohnpei Public Health to
Nanpailong to Lehpwel Tik...

I interviewed a kedwini who prefers
pants to urohs
new arrivals and long timers
who wear their skirts everywhere
who place orders for mwahi kapw
who only wear to Pohnpeian parties
never to Micro Mall or GPO
not wanting to be mistaken for Chuukese
to stand out in the crowd
still collectors had plastic containers full
closets full
urohs, urohs and more urohs
pineapples, moons and ngarangar
old favorites and mwahi kapw

I chased skirts to P.H. Market, Pohnpei Fish Mart, Angie's Fish Mart
stores full of sakau, pwuh, urohs and fish
to Dededo Flea Market, Fan Itach Retail and Compadres Mall
ate donuts, spicy Cheetos with Kool-Aid, pilawa mwangas
I chased skirts to a wedding in Mangilao
played bingo in Agaña Heights

touchdown Kolonia 96941
an urohs tsunami washes over me
I tell people about my "risihrt"
duwen kesempwelpen urohs en Pohnpei
attempting to articulate my purpose
searching for urohs significance
oang lien Pohnpei

"I kak kohwei inderpiuiuk?"
"pwehda?"
"pwe dir ahmw urohs"
laughter

first Nahnep in Saladak
test run, followed by Kiomy
Pohnpei's urohs world begins to open
as Pahpa and I navigate pot-holed roads
in our borrowed grey Waido taxi
we find Iso Nahnken and his urohs dundun
obtain statistics at FSM Palikir
Pahpa departs with a fever and chills
I spend my first night at Hideout
high on urohs

I chased skirts to kamadipw en kousapw
sat in the nahs looking down at sakau pounders
men entering with gutted pigs on their backs
women dancing, sehu sucking, music blasting
to the PWAC Variety show at PICS
women's groups dancing as if they're in Flamingo
or a cheap Polynesian revue
50 lb. bags of rice and shiny new urohs raffle prizes
I chased skirts to Food Mart, Middar, H&D, Linda's, Ester's...
smell of dohnas en Namiki, stray dogs, sweat trickling down my back
pidakihdi Pohnpei numerous times
tire pops in Awak Pah
boy changes my tire for free
I buy an urohs en mwei likou for \$10
iki o lel

life history with Nohno Emi on Nintu St.
stories of the old Nan U, the Japanese, men
daily hospital visits to see Nahnep
breathing through the respirator
Wasahi's boil festering
four days of mehla
urohs purples, reds and yellows on black
pwelmatak, pools of pig's blood

smoke rises from the uhmw
rain pours down on sorrow

still I chased down to Wone
up to Lehpwel Tik
met sisters-in-deidei
chatting with customers ordering mwahi kapw:
mermaids with red lipstick and dirty brown hair
the girl with her hands folded, surrounded by flowers
Disney-like, Island style fairy tale
sisters sewing, hands moving steady
carefully rotating fabric and paper
singing babies to sleep

Victoria Secret lotions gone
tears dried up
interviews complete
we go swimming nan painahu
in the deep clear blue
I am that saledek girl again
farewell dinners consist of:
elimoang, kehp tuhke, sasimi, uht sukusuk
pwhik, pizza, cookies, pihlohlo, pineapple
I'm stuffed full on food
sick from urohs

I borrow the term “homework” to refer to my ethnographic research on Guam and Pohnpei from Katerina Teaiwa (2004), who relied on Visweswaran’s critique of the centrality of fieldwork and ethnographic authority for anthropology (1994) to frame her multi-sited research project. As K. Teaiwa explains: “Aside from the obvious relevance to my ancestral homeland, “homework” became not so much a play on words or a tool to critique anthropological fieldwork traditions, but a deeply troubling experience of navigating contexts in which I was neither insider or outsider” (2004, 217).

Similar to K. Teaiwa, to carry out my research I returned to my cultural home, Pohnpei, where I spent much of my childhood, and to my “home away from home,” Guam, where I was born, have spent different periods of my life and where my parents currently live (Clifford 1994, 302). My homework experience on Guam was more personally “troubling,” although I initially had more anxieties about my ethnographic research in Pohnpei, which I think reflects it being “closer to home.” There were also moments

when, like K. Teaiwa, I felt like “neither insider or outsider,” but for very different reasons, which I detail below.

It’s also important to point out that in preparing for my ethnographic experience I had read K. Teaiwa’s article and parts of Visweswaran’s book, but had really only thought about “homework” on a surface level, focused on the obvious, that I was returning “home” to do ethnography. While I have to admit that I thought doing “homework” as opposed to fieldwork sounded cool, almost sophisticated and more indigenous, I don’t recall ever telling anyone I was doing “homework.” For me, “homework” was more of a state of mind. I wasn’t focused on analyzing my relationship to the islands I call home because I was too caught up in getting (having my proposal approved and applying for research funding) and “dwelling” there (Visweswaran 1994, 102). Once “home,” I was busy carrying out my research. Now that I am writing and reflecting, I can better “interrogate my reasons” for choosing Guam and Pohnpei as my home sites and what my research revealed about my relationships to these “homes.” Notably, I have been writing from Wellington, NZ and Guam, which also repositions my thinking about “home.”

In what follows, I explain my positionality and “vulnerabilities” as an indigenous researcher going home to engage in a critical, reflexive and multi-sited ethnographic study. My two research sites are constituted by places I call home, Pohnpei and Guam, and by the people who make me feel “at home.” In Pohnpei, I spent a great deal of time in kousapw Saladak, where I grew up, with Nahnep and Wasahi U, as well as with other friends and family, and in Kolonia, the island’s commercial center, at Hideout in Dolonier with my dear friend, Antonia “Sipwoli” Panuelo and her family, and at Ohmine with my paternal great aunt, Nohnno Emi. On Guam, I lived with my parents in Yona, and reconnected with family, particularly with Aunty Ninang and Uncle Kin, and friends, some of whom were other lien Pohnpei. Following my seven months of “homework,” I returned to New Zealand, my temporary island “home” to begin my ethnographic writing and reflection.

Guam

I started my research on Guam, also referred to as Guahan, homeland of the Chamorro (or Chamoru) people, the indigenous people of the Mariana Islands (see <http://www.guampedia.com/about-guam/>; Perez 2008). It is the largest and most developed island in Micronesia, and was initially settled by Chamorros approximately 4,000 years ago. Spanish colonialism began in 1668 and continued until the Spanish American war in 1898 when the island came under the control of the U.S. Navy. Guam has remained an American possession ever since, only falling under Japanese rule briefly during WW II, from 1941-44. Guam became an unincorporated U.S. territory in 1950 and the island remains a strategic location within the Asia Pacific region for the American military, which has two large bases on the island and controls one third of its landmass. Militarism and tourism make up Guam's economy today. Tourists from Japan, Korea and now Russia frequent the island. The island is ethnically diverse with a population, according to the 2010 Census, of 159,358. Chamorros make up the largest ethnic group (37%), followed by Filipinos (26%), then "Micronesians" (11%), Whites (7%), and other Asians (6%). There is a population of 17,974 Chuukese on Guam and 3,942 Pohnpeians (Temkar 2012, Government of Guam Bureau of Statistics and Plans, 2010).

Other Micronesian islanders from the Freely Associated States (FAS), which includes the FSM and the Republics of the Marshall Islands and Palau, can travel freely to and from America and its territories. This has resulted in a large out migration from Pohnpei and other islands in the FSM since the Compact of Free Association was signed into law in 1986. Pohnpeians, however, have been traveling to Guam since the 1950s, and many, like my father, went to study at the University of Guam in the 1970s. Since then, a small community of Pohnpeians has existed on the island. I spent a total of four months doing research with this community beginning in July 2012, two months prior to going to Pohnpei and two months after.

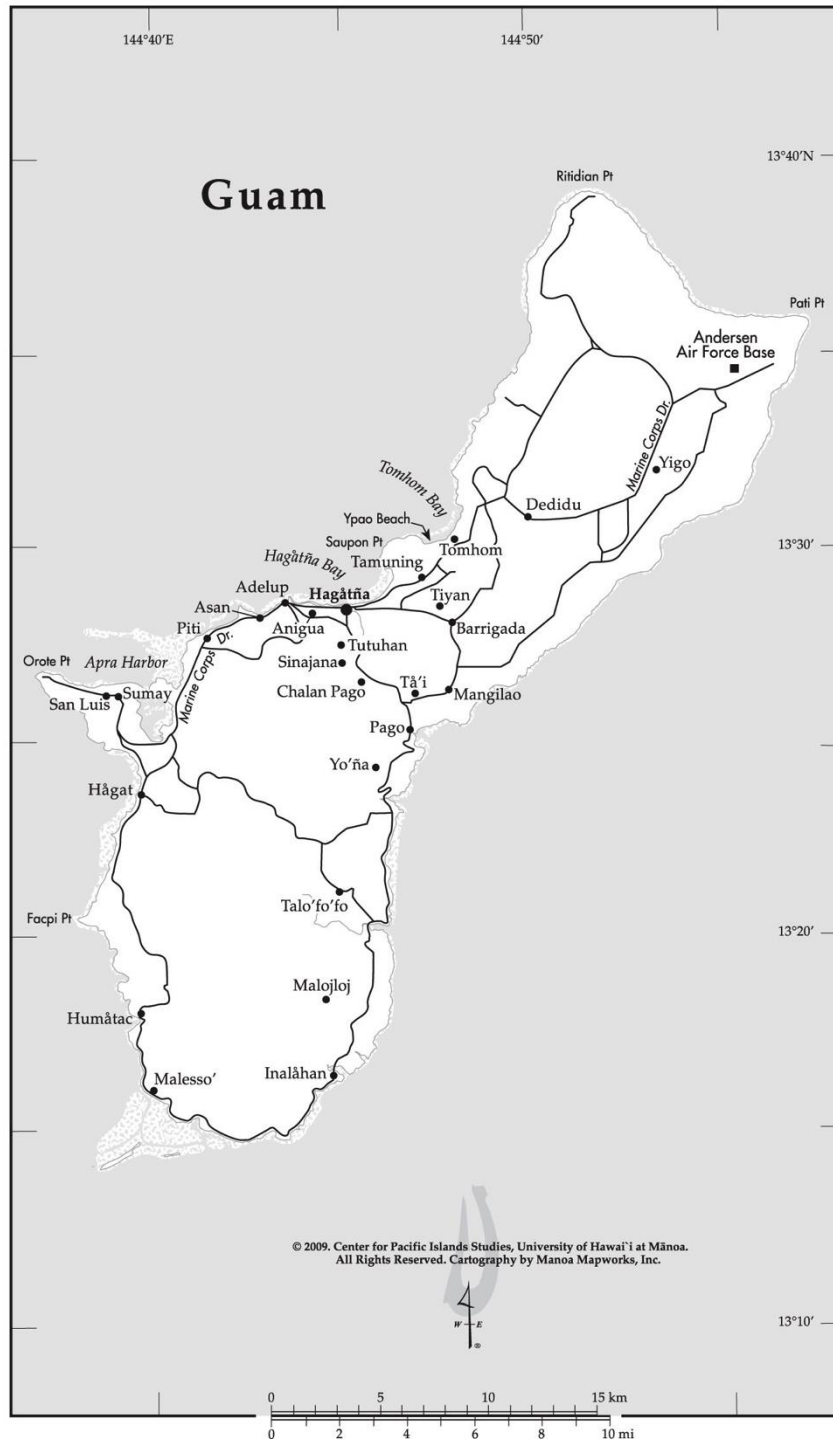


Figure 1.5. Map of Guam. Reproduced with Permission.

I chose Guam as a research site because it is familiar, as previously mentioned, my “home away from home.” I knew I wanted to write about these urohs kesempwal (important/valuable), from Pohnpei, their place of origin and primary place of production, as well as from the outside, within a migrant community, such as Guam, where these skirts represent a complex Pohnpeian/Micronesian migrant identity, which, therefore, makes for a more layered and textured study. Guam also has one of the oldest Pohnpeian migrant communities, and Pohnpeians have been passing through Guam on their way to Hawai‘i and the continental U.S. since Continental Air Micronesia, fondly remembered as “Air Mike,” started flying throughout the region in 1968. By doing a multi-sited ethnography on Guam and Pohnpei, I was also keeping my project Micronesia focused which was important to me, as I believe the region needs to be the focus of more scholarly research like mine. As discussed earlier in the chapter, Pacific Studies is lacking in indigenous research centered on Micronesian women—our lives and experiences, our creative and artistic genealogies, our contemporary clothing and fashion and their relationship to identity and agency, and, most importantly, our voices.

While I consider Guam home, I don’t always feel “at home.” But as Visweswaran, K. Teaiwa and Narayan remind us, our “homes” are often complicated and difficult to navigate. Rather, it is the work and thought that goes into our “homework” that matters most. “Going home” especially as an indigenous researcher is never simple or easy (see Narayan 1993; Visweswaran 1994; K. Teaiwa 2004; Smith 2012). I was born on Guam, and left when I was 2 years old, returning when I was a sophomore in high school. While I didn’t grow up on the island, I have lived here on and off for many years. Guam always feels like a transitional place for me, the place I return to before I go somewhere else. My relationship with Guam is, therefore, one of ambivalence, and perhaps of being “unhomed” (Bhabha 1994; Golparian 2012), as I have always felt that I didn’t belong primarily because I do not identify as Chamorro.²¹ I am Micronesian, and this is an identity that is not celebrated on the island despite Guam being a part of Micronesia.

²¹ I am part Chamorro, as my great grandfather, Joaquin Villagomez, was a Chamorro from Saipan. I have Chamorro relatives on Guam and Saipan, and in Pohnpei. Nevertheless, this is not an identity I have felt able to claim.

Chamorros themselves can be considered Micronesians, but on Guam “Micnesian” refers to those of us from the FAS. The term Micronesia (and Micnesian) is colonial²² in origin, although those of us who belong to this “Micnesian” ethnic category identify much more closely with our own home or ancestral islands. When asked where I am from, I say I am Pohnpeian and was born on Guam, with an American mother (which means White if you’re from Guam even though Guamanians are Americans²³) and a Pohnpeian father. I don’t say “I’m Micnesian,” and actually, no one wants to be Micnesian on Guam where we are often mistreated and discriminated against (see Kihleng 2005; Bautista 2010; Ridgell 2013). As the most recent “regional migrants” to Guam, Micnesians are oftentimes convenient scapegoats targeted in the media and by campaigning politicians (Limtiaco 2012). For example, the 2014 Republican candidate for Guam delegate to Congress, Margaret ‘Pudding’ Metcalfe’s campaign platform claims that “possibly implementing a quota or a limit to the number of [FAS] migrants allowed into Guam is a solution to the strain on Guam resources”²⁴ (Stole 2014). As a high school²⁵ student and even as an adult it has been difficult to feel “at home” on an island where Micnesians like me aren’t welcome despite cultural similarities and historical connections to indigenous Chamorros. I became even more aware of how difficult the situation is for us Micnesians on Guam when I moved to New Zealand and witnessed the pride Polynesians (non-Maori) have in their cultures despite coming (or being descendants of people) from other South Pacific island nations. I do realize, however, that they have been in NZ longer than we have been on Guam.

Despite my fraught and complex relationship with Guam, I initially believed that starting my ethnographic research on Guam would be less difficult than in Pohnpei, as briefly explained above, but I was wrong. Guam became the more challenging research

²² See Petersen Chapter 2, which includes a section, “Does “Micnesia” Exist?” (2009, 12-19).

²³ People born on Guam are Guamanian, and automatic U.S. citizens.

²⁴ Former Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, Anthony Babauta, replied to Metcalfe’s proposal in which he pointedly disagrees with the candidate and shows support for Micnesians whom he refers to as “our Micnesian brothers and sisters” (“Addressing FAS migration: It’s not as simple as pudding,” 20 September 2014, 10).

²⁵ I attended one of the largest public high schools on Guam, George Washington, where I witnessed and experienced discrimination first hand. My poem “The Micnesian Question” (2005) describes some of these experiences.

site. Looking back, this was precisely because it was where I began my ethnographic work. When I arrived on the island in July of 2012, I felt lost. There was a period of adjustment to being back in the islands. It was hot. I had to drive everywhere, which I hadn't done since moving to Wellington. I knew I needed to get out there and start talking to the Pohnpeian community, to Pohnpeian women. This seemed fairly straightforward, but we Pohnpeians are an interesting people. We are not one: that we are not united or "Pohnpei sohte ehu"²⁶ speaks to this fact. Even when living away from our home island we are not cohesive; we are less so precisely because we are away and have the freedom to choose to participate in Pohnpeian feasts, sakau nights and baseball games or not. We rarely come together as a "community," and there are actually many different Pohnpeian communities on Guam. I knew this, but hadn't thought about how it would affect my research. Locating women who would be interested in participating in my project took more of a concerted effort than I initially anticipated.

I called the Pohnpeian women I knew and wanted to meet with and possibly interview, and visited the two Pohnpeian stores where urohs are sold and spoke with the storeowners. I also went to a mehla (funeral) that reconnected me with some friends and family members. Mehla are the most important ceremonial events that Pohnpeians attend both in Pohnpei and on Guam. They are also where women wear their most stunning urohs (see Kihleng 1996 for a discussion of urohs and rituals of death). I saw several mwahi kapw (new mwahi) at this funeral, and ended up interviewing the makers of one particular skirt when I was in Pohnpei, which I discuss in Chapter 5. One of the biggest challenges early on was also finding the houses of the women I wanted to talk with and interview. My parents' home is located in the southern part of the island, and many of the women lived in northern Guam, which can be quite a distance. The northern villages of Dededo and Yigo are also unfamiliar territory to me. My dad had to drive me. This was not feeling like "homework" or maybe it was. Early on I realized that "homework" cannot be forced; it takes time and flexibility. I was relying on other people to help me, and eventually things started to flow. I interviewed a few women who led me to other women. I began to feel more comfortable being back "home" that is until I had to prepare for Pohnpei...

²⁶ Hanlon also writes about this common expression (1988: 25).

Pohnpei

Pohnpei is a high, volcanic island and one of the wettest places on earth with more than 300 inches (7,600 mm) of rainfall per year in the mountainous terrain. More than two hundred years after Guam, Pohnpei was claimed by Spain in 1886 followed by successive colonial governments, including the Germans in 1899, the Japanese in 1914, and the Americans in 1947, following WW II. Pohnpei is the capital of the FSM, the political entity that was created after the dissolution of the U.S. Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. The Federation includes the island states of Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei and Kosrae. The main island of Pohnpei is politically and culturally divided into five wehi or chiefdoms, and five outer islands are also part of Pohnpei State, each of which is culturally distinct, with their own unique languages. Most indigenous Pohnpeians live in the rural chiefdoms, and Kolonia, which served as the seat of the four colonial administrations and is now the commercial center of the island, is ethnically diverse with Pohnpeians, outer islanders, other Micronesians, and expatriates from America, Japan and the Philippines. I spent three months in Pohnpei moving between Kolonia and the wehi, particularly U, while engaged in ethnographic research.

“Running Away from Home to Run toward Home” is the introductory chapter to Ruth Behar’s book *An Island Called Home: Returning to Jewish Cuba* (2007, 1). In this chapter she describes her relationship with her homeland of Cuba, the island where she was born and that she and her parents left when she was just 4 years old, an island she has no memories of as a child. As she confessed, “I was running toward the home that I and my family and thousands of other Jews had left on the island. I wanted to reclaim that lost home—the home in Cuba I believed was my true home” (2007, 3). Anthropology was her “magic carpet” to visit Cuba frequently, something most other Cubans couldn’t do at the time (2007, 18).

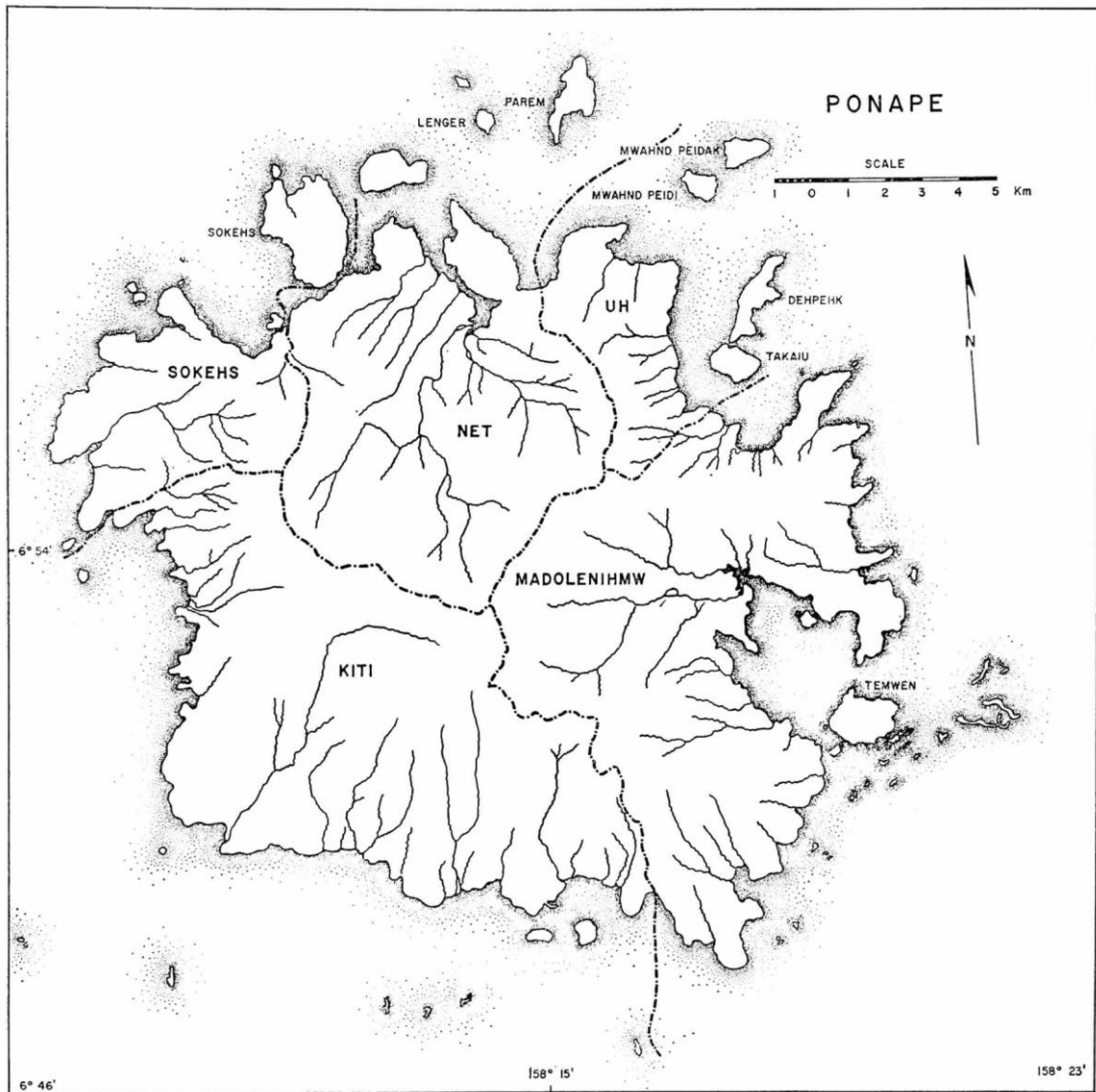


Figure 1.6. Map of Pohnpei, Reproduced from Saul H. Riesenbergs *The Native Polity of Ponape*, Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology, Number 10, 1968.

When I read Behar's chapter title I felt she was channeling me. Unlike Behar though, I left my home island when I was 9, and have many memories of my childhood in Pohnpei, perhaps too many, too many blissful, *saledek*²⁷ (carefree) moments that sometimes stifle me into the realization that I will never be that happy again. Like Behar's Cuba, there is always a pull, a tug towards the island that continues to shimmer from afar. Since the heartbreaking departure in 1992, my island "paradise" of "imagined space" (Appadurai, as quoted in Sandhu 2007, 33) lived on in my mind and memories. I was caught up in a nostalgia for home and the feeling of belonging in this home that perhaps no longer exists. Family visits to Pohnpei throughout the years maintained this fog of nostalgia. I learned the hard way that I could never really go back to my imagined and nostalgic home by doing something that Behar was unable to, return to live. Returning to live in Pohnpei as a young, single university educated 25 year old woman had a way of smacking me in the face with a huge dose of reality because I was now a part of home in a way that I had not been when I was merely dreaming and yearning for it. My island home no longer shimmered when I returned in 2007 after completing my MA to teach at the College of Micronesia. I felt like Epeli Hau'ofa when he writes "I often long to enter, to belong to the community in which I live at any particular time; but only in Tonga [in my case, Pohnpei], for reasons of ancestry, and forced and voluntary identification, could I come close to belonging...But I could not, and the internal conflict was often painful" (2008, 104). I will always be a part of Pohnpei and it will always be a part of me as home, but I may never "belong" again and be at home the way I did when I was growing up in Saladak, and I finally realized that it is okay.

Ethnographic research is complicated, especially so for indigenous people who already have a history in the places or "homes" we return to do our work (K. Teaiwa 2004; Barker 2008; Smith 2012). In her critique of anthropology's long-standing assumption that "Native" anthropologists are automatic insiders, Kirin Narayan writes "it is only appropriate (and this may be the result of our own identity quests)" that those of us anthropologists of mixed ancestry will "sooner or later...study the exotic societies with which we are associated" (1993: 677). While I don't believe I am on such an identity quest, I do believe in doing work that is close to one's heart. Pohnpei, *doadoak en lih*

²⁷ Saladak is known as *sapwen saledek*, a carefree place where people indulge in pleasure seeking (see Kihleng 1996; E. Kihleng 2003).

and dipwisou en lih, particularly urohs en Pohnpei, are close to my heart, and if researching such topics brings me to a better understanding of myself and Pohnpeian society, then it's all the better.

I was quite anxious about returning to Pohnpei to do “homework” given some of my experiences while living there in 2007. I knew it would be difficult to rely on members of my extended family for help, especially for emotional support. While living in Pohnpei, many of my relatives came to me on a continual basis in need of something, most often money, while offering little in return. There was an assumption that I had money to give, which can be partially attributed to my father being the eldest son²⁸ in his family, my mother being White, and my parents being educated with good jobs on Guam. This time though I would be a student incapable of providing financial assistance, and I was nervous about turning relatives away and being perceived as lehk, selfish. There would also be some requests and obligations I knew I would not be able to refuse. What these would be I would only find out during my “homework,” which was full of surprises.

There were also the issues of still being unmarried and without children (not to mention, still in school at age 30!). These were issues in 2007, and here I was returning 5 years later in the same “pathetic” situation (K. Teaiwa describes something similar in her “homework” experience in Kiribati, 2004). I was dreading the invasive questions, questions that are perfectly appropriate to mehn Pohnpei, which only left me feeling more inadequate. Thankfully, my parents came with me to Pohnpei for a little family holiday before I began my research. My dad stayed on an extra 10 days to help me meet with certain individuals, such as the high chief, Iso Nahnken en Kitti, who I write about in Chapter 4. Pahpa’s assistance was crucial at the onset of my “homework,” as his presence guaranteed a kind of safety and security that continued after his departure. When I read Lila Abu-Lughod’s account (1986) of her Palestinian Arab father taking her to the Western Desert of Egypt to meet the Awlad ‘Ali family she would be staying with while doing her ethnographic research, I took comfort in knowing that I wasn’t the only

²⁸ My pahpa is the eldest son in a family of 12 siblings. His parents passed away many years ago.

ethnographer who needed her pahpa. I wrote the following poem prior to embarking on my research in Pohnpei.

Pohnpei

I love you so
how is it that you
continue to make me sick
a kind of menmadau
nausea and apprehension
love sickness sensation
I imagine pregnant women must feel this way
in the first trimester

I don't want to go back
it isn't all elinpwur and mwenge piaia
excitement, adventure
"giving back"
fieldnotes, tape recorders
Facebook-worthy Island photographs
black haired children squatting, big smiles
teeth missing, eating mangoes
Kepirohi, Nan Madol, And atoll
glossy pictures meant to create envy
there are things and people I'd rather forget
they won't be in my photos
besides, Kepirohi waterfall
might look nice in pictures
but you're swimming in
even swallowing pig shit

not everyone will be welcoming
to the ahpw kahs in her urohs
pihs kohr looking
30 year old lih kiripw
still in school
yes, still in school
ke saik neitik? (you haven't given birth?)
ke saik pwpowoud? (you haven't gotten married?)
pwehda? (why???)

ohiei

I should just say I'm a lesbian...
ask me something new people!

yet I keep coming back for more

what if I see him?
at Palm Terrace?
driving past his house
Flamingo even?
I don't want to see her
it's inevitable
the one I called my daughter
what if?
what if?

pwehki ngehi mehn Pohnpei
despite how I may look
I'll wear my urohs
slip on my kil mwusul
my lih tohrohr
and go!

Epeli Hau'ofa and Katerina Teaiwa, two Pacific Islander anthropologists, write about feeling like insiders and outsiders or "somewhere in between," albeit for different reasons, in their home islands of Tonga and Kiribati (2004, 217; 2008). It was also difficult for me to explain when I felt like an insider and when an outsider. I was walking a thin line between the two, and as a ahpw kahs Pohnpeian I've grown up feeling somewhere in the middle. It is an identity that is never easy or comfortable.

After pahpa left Pohnpei, I stayed with my close friend Antonia or Sipwoli, her husband Kumer, and their three sons²⁹ in their large, comfortable home in Dolonier, Nett. On their property they also have a small store called Hideout, and the entire property has come to be known by this name. I was living at Hideout, and it became my sanctuary, my safe place, my "hideout." Sipw, short for Sipwoli, was the most gracious hostess and friend—always making sure I was happy, feeding me constantly, taking me places,

²⁹ They have four sons, but the eldest lives in Florida where he is attending University.

buying me urohs, and even providing me with a little Japanese car to drive around the island to do my research. I was spoiled. Much of the anxiety I felt about doing “homework” in Pohnpei was alleviated by the way she made me feel “at home.” Sipw used to introduce me to people she knew as her pihs kohr (Peace Corps) as a joke. I used to laugh and play along. Although I didn’t mind, and knew Sipw meant no harm, it was an example of how despite being “half” Pohnpeian, I was still an outsider. I could pass as a pihs kohr being hosted in an island that is in fact my “home.”

New Zealand

My research did not end when I left Micronesia and returned to Wellington. My observations, thoughts and grief continued months after my homework ended. I wrote “I tamtaman komwi,” which is in Chapter 2, while writing Chapter 3: Flowers, hearts and mermaids after I discovered the photo of the tattooed Rohnkiti woman. The person I wanted to share this photo with the most was Nahnep, but I couldn’t because of her passing while I was in Pohnpei. She was the first person I showed the photo of the urohs dundun (penis urohs) made by Iso Nahnken en Kitti and, of course, she loved it. Her “Nahnep” comments made me roar with laughter.

I end this introduction by outlining how this creative urohs thesis unfolds to reveal the lives and identities of the lien Pohnpei who are so closely associated with them. In the following chapter, I present my theoretical argument and the methodologies employed in my research by envisioning them as a misihn en deidei, a sewing machine, which is a critical component in creating urohs. Like the misihn en deidei, my theory and practice provide a framework for best explaining the importance of the menginpeh of women in expressing the meaning and value of women’s work. Throughout this thesis I blur the boundaries between scholarship and art using prose, poetry, photography and a bilingual text to privilege the voices of lien Pohnpei and the highly visual nature of their wealth.



Figure 1.7. (clockwise) Nahnep and me at Pohnpil, Saladak; Wasahi and me; the Panuelo family on their boat; my Pahpa at home in Yona; my Nohno and me; Sipw and me in Madolenihmw, 2012.

My immersive ethnographic experience and interpretation begins in Chapter 3, as I trace the evolution of urohs en Pohnpei and a genealogy of women's nting that reveal their agency in Pohnpeian history and society. Beginning with pelipel and the production of textile valuables, such as dohr (elaborate loom woven banana fibre belts or sashes worn by chiefs), to the sewing of urohs and other forms of cloth wealth with new skills, as well as imported fabric and thread, and now to the writing of poetry with pen and paper or the computer, I capture the creativity and innovation of lien Pohnpei and their important role as agents of change. I also present a life history of Nohnno Emi, which tells of the ways in which urohs and other dipwisou en lih embody women's identities.

In Chapter 4 my focus is on contemporary urohs and what they do and the multiple meanings they hold for the women who make, sell, gift and wear them. I examine six special urohs to highlight the multilayered relationships they represent, both social and material, for mehn Pohnpei (Pohnpeians) – gender, hierarchy, sexuality, notions of the body, production, humour, etc. An ethnographic case study of Iso Nahnken en Kittu and his "special" skirt is also offered to reveal how this transgressive figure adds to the prestige of the art form of urohs as one of only a very few men who sew skirts.

I look under the urohs, pahn urohs o, in Chapter 5 to examine the importance of these skirts as vital fabrics and threads to "home" and identity for lien Pohnpei living on Guam, who can oftentimes feel "unhomed" (Bhabha 1994). Urohs also take on different meanings, shifting contexts and "sites of wearing" (Sandhu 2007) in this migrant "Micronesian" community where identity is much more fraught and complex. Insights into women who are urohs collectors with extensive wardrobes are also discussed to reveal how these urohs archives function as a mirror of ourselves as lien Pohnpei reflecting back on genealogies, relationships and identities, thus, making us feel closer to home yet more "at home" away.

In my final ethnographic chapter, I explore the creative forces behind urohs production and their economic value with a detailed investigation into four sohn deidei and eight lien pisines (businesswomen), who are sewn together through the business of urohs. The four sohn deidei are two sets of sisters who work alongside one another to make

beautiful skirts and in the process demonstrate the continuity of female skill and ingenuity, as well as matrilineality. For the eight lien pisines, four each in Pohnpei and Guam, urohs are not only significant commodities, but are also a distinctively female valuable and form of dress that are in high demand by Pohnpeian, as well as Chuukese women. The complex and dynamic relationships between these women, whose identities are entangled in urohs, tell a great deal about the mutual agency of women in the economy of urohs at home in Pohnpei and away on Guam.

I turn now to the misihn en deidei of my poetic ethnography on menginpehn lien Pohnpei.....

Chapter 2: Misihn en deidei: the theory and practice of urohs¹

“Oceania deserves more than an attempt at mundane fact; only the imagination in free flight can hope-if not to contain her-to grasp some of her shape, plumage, and pain.”

~Albert Wendt² (1983, 71)



Figure 2.1. Evenglynn Andon shows customers some of the newest urohs she and her sister, Vengelynn, have sewn along with her sister’s drawings in Sounkiroun, Wone, Kitty, 18 November 2012.

Women’s nting of the past, which was tattooing, revealed clan and family genealogies and histories on the bodies of mehn Pohnpei. Today this nting, which I use to refer to sewing, is part of a greater menginpehn lih (women’s handiwork), and continues to tell stories and embody relationships, as well as provide economic stability and agency for lien Pohnpei through the making, selling, wearing, collecting and gifting of urohs. As a

¹ Misihn en deidei is the sewing machine, a necessary tool for the making of urohs en Pohnpei. I visualize my thesis as an urohs with my creative writing as the mwahi appliquéed or embroidered onto the likou, the academic writing. The misihn en deidei, like theory and methodology, serves as the mechanism that “sews” the urohs thesis together.

² I often reference Albert Wendt’s “Towards a New Oceania” which was originally published in *Mana* (1976).

poet and Pacific Studies scholar, my poetry, another, newer form of writing, seeks to creatively express the meaning and significance of these skirts within the context of my ethnographic research, which is experiential and grounded in the particulars of the lives of Lien Pohnpei. My thesis as a whole combines the sensual, aesthetic and personal with the intellectual and scholarly. The intent is to offer a critical “approach to indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing” (T. Teaiwa 2010c, 117) about an important female textile and form of dress, as well as to blur the boundaries that continue to exist within the larger academy between creativity and scholarship making room for greater reflexivity and a critical positionality (T. Teaiwa and Marsh 2010; Kisliuk 2011, 1997).

I selected the above photo of Evenglynn Andon not only because I find it visually stunning, but because it shows some of the essential materials that go into making urohs: the Janome misihn en deidei, her sister Vengelynn’s drawings, some completed mwahi, and most importantly, Evenglynn herself, the artist whose menginpeh shapes each urohs. The photo also reminds me of the different pieces that have gone into creating this thesis: my ethnographic experience with Lien Pohnpei, many of whom I grew up with, have known for many years or met while doing “homework” (as described and practiced by K. Teaiwa 2004), my poetry that is part of and about this experience, the visual documentation of women, urohs and important community events and activities, as well as the everyday lives of these women, and my thoughts and feelings as the author, a Pohnpeian woman researcher (Narayan 1993; K. Teaiwa 2004; Wong 2008).

Menginpehn Lien Pohnpei: a poetic ethnography of urohs (Pohnpeian skirts) theoretically draws on the interdisciplinarity of Pacific Studies and its scholarship, as well as Pacific literature, critical and experimental ethnography, including ethnographic poetry and sensory ethnography, and material culture studies. My ethnographic practice was grounded in immersive research that included participant observation, oral history interviews, poetry, conversations or koasoai about the social and material relations of urohs, talanoa, questionnaires with college-age Pohnpeian women, and the development of a visual archive of urohs and their makers, wearers and collectors. In my ethnographic writing I privilege the bilingual and the creative as being critical to interpretation and giving voice to Pohnpeian women, including myself.

Pacific Studies – the critical and creative

As discussed in Chapter 1, I came to Pacific Studies with an MA in English, Creative Writing having been fortunate enough to study under the esteemed Samoan scholar and writer Albert Wendt and the experimental poet Juliana Spahr. In my undergraduate and graduate studies, the work of Samoan writer Sia Figiel, scholar, poet and activist Haunani-Kay Trask, anthropologist Epeli Hau'ofa's 'sea of islands,' and the poetry of Teresia Teaiwa also influenced me. My research and writing are, therefore, informed by creative, as well as critical production in and about Oceania (T. Teaiwa and Marsh 2010, 241). As a firm believer in the words of Wendt quoted above, I seek to contribute to this "oceanic imaginary" (Subramani as quoted by T. Teaiwa 2010a, 732) through this Pacific Studies thesis about urohs en Pohnpei. Like "the imagination in free flight," urohs cannot be contained. They are wild and colorful like the women who make and wear them, dynamic in their ever-changing styles and mwahi, yet constant like our islands, which may be sinking and shrinking due to global warming, but are always with us in our minds, our DNA, and on our bodies in tattoos, appliquéd and embroidered skirts, Tav and Mena³ dresses and the flowers in our hair.

My research with Pohnpeian women and urohs is very much engaged with the creative given my training as a poet and the fact that urohs themselves are works of art. Creativity and imagination are thus at the heart of urohs making and wearing. Lien Pohnpei, as well as non-Pohnpeian women, appreciate the beauty of urohs, which only become more pleasing to the eye when they are worn and admired. How better to express this creativity and aesthetic sensibility and "loosen the boundaries of ethnography" than by writing creatively with attention to the sensuality of urohs (Bochner and Ellis 1996, 42). Writing poetry about appliquéd and embroidered skirts and their female makers while doing ethnography brought out the ways in which these textiles are aesthetically, culturally, historically, emotionally, as well as economically meaningful to lien Pohnpei in two diverse yet connected locations, Pohnpei and Guam.

³ Tav and Mena are Pacific Islands inspired "resort wear" founded and run by Polynesian women, Ellena Tavioni, a Cook Islander, and Mena Loheni, a Samoan (see <http://www.tavresortwear.com/> and <http://www.menashop.com/page/about.aspx>).

Many Pacific scholars have emphasized the importance of incorporating the creative into Pacific-centered research and writing in order to be more representative of Pacific peoples and our voices (Wendt 1983; H. Trask 1999a & b; Thaman 2003; Hereniko 2003; Hau'ofa 2008; Teaiwa and Marsh 2010). This is part of an ongoing effort to decolonize and indigenize Pacific Studies (see Thaman 2003). As Vilsoni Hereniko so forcefully expounds, "Without the arts, we have Pacific Studies without soul. To be truly dynamic, alive, and transformative, Pacific studies needs the arts to give it humanity" (2003, XVII). Urohs are textile (and textured) works of art and fashion that are vibrant and alive. My poems, a textual art form and newer kind of nting (writing/sewing/tattooing), are an ethnographic response to these skirts and the women who make, wear, gift, collect and sell them. The poems work to evoke the sensuality, soul and humanity in this thesis and, thus, the greater field of Pacific Studies.

Terence Wesley-Smith, the director of the Center for Pacific Islands Studies at the University of Hawai'i, describes three rationales for Pacific Studies, one of which is the "empowerment rationale," as mentioned in Chapter 1. He writes:

Of greater significance is the perceived need to create "systemized bodies of knowledge," rooted in indigenous histories and cultures, on which more appropriate forms of scholarship can be based...Meanwhile, the creative writings of Pacific poets, novelists, and playwrights are undoubtedly the richest sources of indigenous voices and representations currently available" (1995, 126).

In a similar thread, in the introduction to *Flying Fox Excursions: Albert Wendt's Creative and Critical Legacy in Oceania* scholars, poets, and co-editors Teresia Teaiwa and Selina Tusitala Marsh write:

What we hope to both signal and project is that our generation of artists and scholars, and subsequent generations of Pacific public intellectuals must begin or purposefully continue to (a) draw on both scholarship and art as equally valid sources of critical and creative perception for the consolidation and invigoration of social and political analysis in Oceania; and (b) foster a sense of intellectual history to successfully navigate the ongoing challenges of representation by and for the Pacific (2010, 243).

What Wendt, Hereniko, Wesley-Smith, and Teaiwa and Marsh describe is Pacific scholarship that is "on the edge" (Diaz and Kauanui 2001)—groundbreaking, innovative, experimental, analytical and creative. The empowerment of Pacific peoples is seen as going hand in hand with reflexivity, self-expression, art and a critical

framework (Wendt 1983; Thaman 2003). Artistic expression and scholarship about the Pacific Islands ought to reflect the region in all of its diversity. This body of scholarly work, inclusive of my thesis, also does not necessitate separation,⁴ and is in fact all the more powerful when interwoven. Urohs en Pohnpei express the creativity of a Pacific people, and it is, therefore, a matter of ethical reciprocity for me, as a Pohnpeian scholar, to respond with both academic inquiry and creativity.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) advocates for the necessary development and use of indigenous research methodologies, or indigenizing existing ones to facilitate research that reflects indigenous people's ways of living and being in the world. As outlined in Chapter 1, I envision my thesis as an urohs with my poems as the mwahi and my academic writing as the likou, sewn/ appliquéd/embroidered together using a theoretical and methodological misihn en deidei to create an urohs thesis. By envisioning my thesis as an urohs, I seek to achieve a synthesis between my poetry and scholarly writing with the misihn en deidei as the mechanism that is required for its production. All three—the mwahi, likou and misihn en deidei—are necessary parts of the urohs thesis. I later write about Teena Brown Pulu, who is the leading actress/director in her autoethnographic thesis-play (2007), and in a very similar way, I perceive myself as the poet/sohn deidei who sews my thesis-skirt together. This urohs template is indigenous, female and Pohnpeian. Other Pacific scholars have used indigenous methodologies drawing from their own and greater Pacific Islander cultural knowledge to make their research appropriate, relevant and meaningful to themselves, the people they represent and their audience (Thaman 2003; Sommerville 2006; Jetnil-Kijiner 2014).

Teresia Teaiwa's essay, "What Remains to Be Seen: Reclaiming the Visual Roots of Pacific Literature," theorizes that Pacific literature has always existed in the visual (and sensual) arts, as well as the oral. Overwhelmingly what is "read" as Pacific literature today is believed to have evolved solely from the oral, however, Teaiwa points readers in the direction of what is "seen," the "visual roots" of Pacific literature. As she illustrates:

⁴ I am also talking about the historical and colonial separation of Oceania into Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia.

In Tahiti and throughout the Pacific, complex visual systems have also been found in architecture, the landscape, and even markings on the human body...By proposing that Pacific people had technologies similar to writing, I seek to demystify and domesticate, even indigenize, Pacific literature for Pacific people...The perception that Pacific literature is underdeveloped then cannot go unchallenged because the logical extension of my proposition is that Pacific literature is not just about writing but is more broadly about the visual, in addition to the oral (2010a, 735).

Teaiwa's article is a platform for indigenous scholars, artists and writers to better articulate the ways in which our work perpetuates the indigenous. As a poet who writes about the visual and material art of urohs en Pohnpei and how they are connected to the nting that lien Pohnpei of the past tapped into skin, which is explored in greater detail in Chapter 3, and that continues in my scholarly and creative nting, I believe Pacific literature goes beyond having just oral roots. Teaiwa's essay serves to confirm this for me and others, such as Marshallese poet Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, whose MA portfolio (2014) examines the history of Marshallese literature beginning with the visual through tattoos, weaving, stickcharts and navigation. She acknowledges the influence of Teaiwa's essay, and employs a Marshallese methodology shaped by the visual metaphor of the Marshallese stickchart.⁵ Jetnil-Kijiner concludes her thesis with a collection of her own poetry, which she likens to a woven basket, iep jāltok,⁶ her offering (2014, 117, 118). My urohs thesis adds to this Pacific (visual) literature, and along with Teaiwa and Jetnil-Kijiner, a Micronesian female creative, poetic consciousness. Such a consciousness is significant in a field where the Polynesian is most celebrated and dominant with the Micronesian often "othered"⁷ and marginalized (see Hanlon 2009, 1989; Kihleng and Teaiwa 2012).

Alice Te Punga Somerville's PhD thesis (2006) makes a concerted effort to be "Maori-centric" in its methodological approach to Maori writing in English drawing from Kaupapa Maori, Maori research (see Smith 2012). As she writes, "Even though this project focuses on critical contexts and approaches that are non-Maori/ comparative, it

⁵ "Marshallese stickcharts are based on Marshallese knowledge of navigation and voyaging which are at least 2000 years old" (2014, 25).

⁶ "'A basket whose opening is facing the speaker,' said of female children" (2014, 118).

⁷ I refer to "othered" in the sense used by Behar and Gordon in *Women Writing Culture* (1995, 8) in their discussion of how the contributors to their volume, specifically women of color, immigrants and people of hybrid identity, have been othered in society, as well as in anthropology. They therefore bring a "rebellious undoing" to the discipline, and with the editors seek an "anthropology without exiles."

is important to me that the methodology by which I explore these comparative ‘frames’ is Maori-centric; that the project of comparison *itself* is conducted from a Maori location” (Somerville 2006, 5). She uses a whakatauki or Maori proverb, ‘Nau te rourou, Nau te rakau,’⁸ as the “foundation for the methodology of” her project (2006, 17), and employs this whakatauki, which she “thoughtfully interrogates” the complex meanings of, to explain the structure, critical approach, contexts, offerings and limitations of her research (2006, 19). Like Somerville, I am writing a thesis that is Pohnpeian-centric, although my methodologies are quite different, being framed around urohs: my experimental and immersive ethnographic experience with lien Pohnpei, including oral history interviews that captured and shared women’s voices, the urohs themselves, which are Pohnpeian, my poetry, as an extension of this indigenous female nting (with obvious western influences), as well as the visual through the photographs of skirts and the women who embody and “body” them. I had to create my own Pohnpeian-centered research⁹ paradigm, as there is no vast archive of indigenous research to draw from.¹⁰ Creating this Pohnpei-centric project, required framing it within the context of my growing up, living and spending time with, talking to, being respectful of and knowing mehn Pohnpei, as well being Pohnpeian. It also necessitated an intimate understanding of the Pohnpeian language and notions of living and being in the world, our world.

In Konai Helu Thaman’s critical work on Pacific education, she often weaves a kakala¹¹ that forms a methodology or framework for how she approaches her topic, always with careful humility and respect (1993; 2003). Her poems are flowers¹² deliberately “strung” throughout her academic papers providing a personal touch and making space

⁸ “Literally, ‘with your foodbasket, and with my foodbasket, the visitors will be satisfied’” (Somerville 2006, 18 footnote 51).

⁹ There is no Pohnpeian word for research. When I translated my consent forms into Pohnpeian with the help of my pahpa we referred to research as “pwukohn repen,” which I loosely translate as “the responsibility to search.”

¹⁰ I know of two PhD dissertations written by Pohnpeians: Rufino Mauricio’s in archaeology (1993) and Deeleeann Daniel’s in education (2014). The few other Pohnpeian texts focus on the history of the island and not on contemporary life or women.

¹¹ “Tongan sacred or fragrant plants used in garlands and to scent coconut oil; commonly referred to in Tongan legends, songs, dance and poetry, as a symbol of respect and love” (Thaman 1993, 91).

¹² “Three of Thaman’s four [poetry] collections are named after sacred flowers native to Tonga” (Marsh 1999, 347).

for the humanity and soul Hereniko writes about, and that I mentioned earlier (2003; 2008). Thaman uses her poetry to draw her readers and listeners deeper into the heart of her scholarship. The poems themselves also draw from Pacific thought as she writes, “I draw from the richness of Polynesian epistemologies as well as contemporary Pacific cultures” (2003, 13). Similar to Thaman’s kakala and her poem flowers, the scholarly likou and the creative mwahi that make up my urohs research template serve to inform my thesis in a manner that evokes the humanity, humility and respect of the ethnographic moment and the women, who are an essential part of it.

In creating what I call a “poetry of things,” specifically “women’s things” or dipwisou en lih, I follow other Pacific women poets who have also written about the sensual and visual (T. Teaiwa 2010a) arts of the Pacific, including tivaevae,¹³ tapa and tattoo, as well as urohs. Given that these art forms require creativity, and are highly sensual and inherently visual, it is of no surprise that poets, who respond through the senses, write poetry about them (see Rasmussen 1992; Devatine 1998; Mason 2001; Brown and Vaevae 2004; Avia 2004; Barford 2007; Qolouvaki 2010; T. Teaiwa 2010; Ho’omanawanui 2010). In situating the poetry I write in this thesis about and in response to urohs en Pohnpei among other Pacific women poets who also write about the cultural and sensual arts, I also wish to privilege and draw attention to an important and broader legacy of menginpehn lien Pasifik. This “handiwork” or “fine-hands” (Māhina-Tuai and Māhina 2011, 25) of Pacific women continues these definitive and distinctly Pacific art forms, which largely necessitate the labour, skill and ingenuity of women’s hands and minds, through the poetic medium.

Audrey Brown and Veronica Vaevae’s “collaboration of words and images,” *Threads of Tivaevae: kaleidoscope of kolours* (2002) uses tivaevae as a metaphor for the visual artwork and colorful poetry in the collection. Brown’s poetry itself is visual in the deliberate way she lays out her words on the page. Vaine Rasmussen introduces her readers to Cook Islands tivaevae in her poem “In the Tivaevae” (1992). The first stanza begins with:

¹³ Emma Powell’s MA thesis uses a metaphorical tivaevae/tivaivai as a framework to survey Cook Islands writing in English and “develop a Cook Islands literary aesthetic” (2013, 3).

“My mother sews her love
into each stitch
That joins the tivaevae* pattern
to the backbone” (1992, 14).

In the poem Rasmussen describes a mother who “stitches” her love for her children into the tivaevae that she sews for each of them. Through her poem we learn that tivaevae making is an art form belonging to Cook Islands women, one that is culturally significant and strengthens family ties. Although the following definition of tivaevae follows the poem: “hand embroidered bedspread[s] based on flower, fruit, or ornamental themes,” we learn so much more about what this textile means to Cook Islands women from the poem itself (1992, 14). For Rasmussen and other poets who write creatively about textiles made by Pacific women, it is obvious we find poetry to be the best medium through which to express what these forms of material and visual culture mean to the people who make and use them, as well as to us. Such nting, the poetry as well as the sewing, whether it be the three dimensional tivaevae flowers, the appliquéd/ embroidered flowers on urohs, or the poems about them, is sensual, full of love and power.



Figure 2.2. My reverse appliqué “tivaevae” urohs.

Similarly, in poetry written by Pacific women about pelipel there exists a strong sense of “*beingthereness*” that is ethnographic and speaks to the poets’ personal experiences with this art form (Behar 2009, 107). The example I discuss here refers to Samoan tatau (tattoo), which is performed by men, unlike in Pohnpei where women (kedin nting) were the tattoo specialists, which is discussed in the following chapter in the context of

lien Pohnpei's first textual form of clothing. My point here, however, is that such an art form makes poets want to write poetry about it; it is the sensual responding through the sensual. In Tusiata Avia's well-known poem "Wild Dogs Under My Skirt" (2004) she describes the kind of malu¹⁴ that the female speaker wants. She writes:

"I want my legs as sharp as dogs' teeth
wild dogs
wild Samoan dogs
the mangy kind that bite strangers.

I want my legs like octopus
black octopus
that catch rats and eat them.
I even want my legs like centipedes
the black ones
that sting and swell for weeks" (2004, 65).

Her poem is intensely sensual in a vivid and almost disturbing kind of way. It would be hard to mimic the images created in the mind through prose, even the most sensual of prose. In the poem, Avia refers to patterns found in Samoan tatau, such as the centipede; her words bringing these creatures to life on skin and more. There exists a space, a connection, a va or wehwe¹⁵ between the words on the page, on the skin and in each stitch and pattern (Wendt 1999). This wehwe or va is also found in the relationship between the poetry and ethnography in my thesis, between the critical and creative or the creative that is the critical.

Ethnography: the creative and critical

As a student of Pacific Studies, I am writing an experimental and reflexive "ethnography of the familiar," (Simpson 2007, 69), the likou of my urohs thesis, that itself is interdisciplinary, drawing from anthropology, ethnomusicology, indigenous studies and creative writing, to develop a framework that best informs and reflects my research and

¹⁴ Samoan "female tattoo from upper thigh to lower knee, sometimes also on the pubic area" (Avia 2004, 70).

¹⁵ Albert Wendt (1999, 402) defines the Samoan term va as "the space between, the betweenness...not space that separates, but space that relates." The literal translation of the Pohnpeian term wehwe is "vi., to be understood, n., meaning; opening" (Rehg and Sohl 1979). I use the term in this context to mean "a space of understanding or connection."

writing about Pohnpeian women and urohs. Throughout this work, I clearly position myself and my own subjectivities and vulnerabilities (Behar 1996) as a Pohnpeian woman learning, as well as unlearning (K. Teaiwa 2004) from other lien Pohnpei, whose lives are often intimately entangled in urohs (Thomas 1991), as an urohs connoisseur of sorts, as a PhD student doing ethnography in my home islands of Pohnpei and Guam, and, as a poet writing poetry or creating mwahi, based on and as a part of my immersive research with lien Pohnpei and our skirts. Similar to how Wong (2008, 77) describes her positionality as a performative ethnographer studying taiko drumming and as a taiko drummer herself, I too write from a place of familiarity, from a place and a people I know and am a part of, as well as from my own ethnographic experience as a Pacific Studies poet and scholar and as a lien Pohnpei. Like Wong, I too ask that you trust my interpretation and representation of Pohnpeian women and identity as these are sewn together through the many dimensions of urohs.

My research focus has not been on the making of urohs, but rather on the multiple “meanings”¹⁶ these dynamic skirts hold for Pohnpeian women as representations of an earlier form of menginpehn lih and of our lives and identities today. Through this kind of cultural analysis, I move closer to what matters in the lives of the women I spoke with, interviewed, photographed and spent time with, and write about these “matterings” in such a way as to give voice to Pohnpeian women and their complex, multifaceted relationship with an important textile (Simpson 2007, 68). This relationship and the writing that captures it have entailed an analysis that is indigenously grounded in the different forms of women’s nting through time and the legacy of menginpehn lih they created, in dipwisou en lih and contemporary urohs categories, in what urohs do and why they are kesempwal (important, valuable), in the love of urohs, including six special urohs and the Micronesian skirt, in urohs and migration and the sites of wearing, and in sohn deidei, lien pisines and the economy of urohs. So much of my research was experiential and embroidered with the lives of other lien Pohnpei where urohs stores became threaded to nahs (feast houses) that were threaded to Nahnep’s mehla, threaded to homes filled with crying babies and piles of urohs that were threaded to Nohno Emi in Ohmine, threaded to kamadipw (feasts) and

¹⁶ In Chapter 4 I discuss how my project steers away from essentialist notions of what urohs mean by examining what urohs do.

the Andon sisters in Wone, threaded to the road from Kitti through Madolenihmw to Saladak, and to my hideout in Dolonier. Throughout the ethnographic process I began to “share the same narratives” (Kisliuk 1997, 183) as the women who participated in my research and the multiple subjectivities involved became layered, like the urohs itself with its appliqued or embroidered fabric and at times paper, with self/other (Kisliuk 1997, 183), ethnographer/Pohnpeian, fieldwork/ homework, creative/scholarly, friend/family member/interviewee sewn together into a finished urohs. Pulu describes similar subjectivities or blurred boundaries in her research where, “This thesis has constituted my family as ‘the field,’ my life as the field, so the border between private and public, personal and professional is blurred, murky and for the most part, indistinguishable” (Pulu 2007, 38). Although my project is less personal, I feel similarly to Pulu in the often “indistinguishable borders” or layerings that occur in the ethnographic experience (2007, 38).

In discussing the critical approach I use to situate and ground this ethnography, I’ve been drawn to the work of ethnomusicologists, specifically that of Wong (2008) and Kisliuk (1997; 2011), and to that of anthropologist Pulu (2007), as their research privileges the creative, specifically musical performance and a three-act play, while mine poetry. Our work also engages with reflexivity and the first-person narrative, which directly positions us within the ethnographic experience. Visweswaran poses the question, “What is it, then, about the power of the fieldwork experience that cannot be contained in the traditional introductory and concluding margins of anthropological discourse? I shall argue that first-person narratives are being selected by women as part of an implicit critique of positivist assumptions and as a strategy of communication and self-discovery” (1994, 23). I’m drawn towards writing that reflects a vulnerable “I/eye,” that resists being all-knowing (Behar 1996), an “eye” that does its best to see and write without judgment, that is critical and reflexive. This is the type of writing necessary for effectively “explaining us to ourselves” (Wendt 1983, 85).

As mentioned in my Introduction, I initially began to write poetry about urohs while I was doing my MA. Many of my ideas surrounding how lien Pohnpei make meaning of urohs, negotiate the wearing of urohs in the diaspora, and “make beauty” or kapwata (decorate) with urohs evolve out of poems and ideas I have for poems. As a poet, my

academic writing is very much informed by these ideas sparked by the creative. The two go hand in hand. Kanaka Maoli political scientist and poet, Haunani-Kay Trask, writes “Like most Native people, I do not perceive the world of creative writing as divided into categories of prose and poetry or fiction and nonfiction. Nor do I imagine myself crossing from political resistance into artistic creation and then back again” (1999a, 18). Like Trask, I view my writing as fluid, moving between the aesthetic and academic. Composing poetry as a form of creative expression contributes to the overall depth and cultural insight into soaren¹⁷ lien Pohnpei and its connection to urohs. The production of urohs itself requires a kind of aesthetic creativity that poetry can reflect or mirror back.

Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*¹⁸ was the first book I read by an anthropologist, and it’s not surprising that it was a work of fiction. Clifford (1986) writes about ethnography as fiction, as does Visweswaran; ultimately we are all trying to construct our own versions of “believable worlds” whether it be through writing novels, autobiographies, poetry or ethnography (Visweswaran 1994, 1). There exists a literary tradition in anthropology partially initiated by women of color, such as Hurston and Ella Cara Deloria (Behar and Gordon 1995). The ethnographic literature by other women of color, most of whom call themselves feminists, including Lila Abu-Lughod (1986, 1993); Kirin Narayan (1993); Kamala Visweswaran (1994); Ruth Behar (1996, 2007); Katerina Teaiwa (2004) and Teena Brown Pulu (2007), has also helped me develop my own ethnographic voice by showing me that ethnographic writing can be experimental, reflexive, creative and scholarly. Like many others who came before, I am creating my own ethnographic fiction, informed by my own life and relationship to Guam and Pohnpei and the research I carried out with Pohnpeian women on these islands I call home.

¹⁷ Soar (or soare, the possessive) is defined as the “Inner quality, of a person” (Rehg and Sohl 1979, 103). It is not easily defined in English. Soar defines a person, gives them substance, soul. If you say “urohs wia soaren lien Pohnpei,” (see personal interview, Fatima Saimon, 21 November 2012) it can mean that urohs define Pohnpeian women; urohs are Pohnpeian women’s identity (personal communication, Simion Kihleng, 2012-2014).

¹⁸ First published in 1937 and now in its 75th anniversary edition (2006).

In their introduction to their co-edited forum on *Poetry and Other Englishes*, David Buuck and Juliana Spahr share that:

The vernacular cosmopolitan poet, if we can use such a term, instead tends to see poetry as a crucial part of larger popular resistance to colonialism and neoliberal globalization. The vernacular cosmopolitan poet refuses to play the role of Native Informant, instead producing texts that challenge Western expectations of transparency, exoticism, and recognizable otherness (2006, 4).

Poetry can function as a decolonizing methodology of response to the indigenous creativity of urohs, especially as a means to distance myself from “anthropologizing” my fellow Pohnpeians. Poetry allows me a kind of self-reflexivity that goes further than scholarship, which I argue is significant in an analysis of a textile such as urohs.

“When I was a young woman, I wasn’t confident enough to call myself a writer. That felt too presumptuous. But I could say I was an anthropologist who wrote” writes Ruth Behar (2009, 114). I call myself a poet. I am comfortable with this identity. I arrived at poetry first as literature is my first love. I am still learning how to be an ethnographer, as I came to ethnography through my PhD programme in Pacific Studies. However, as I write in the introductory chapter, I have felt “at home” with the practice of ethnography from an early age having a cultural anthropologist as a mother. My poetry was described as ethnographic (T. Teaiwa blurb, 2008; Kihleng 2008) before I took up a multi-sited ethnographic research project with the guidance of my supervisors. I knew writing poetry would be a critical part of this research, and I would therefore find a way to incorporate my own creativity. I prefer to identify myself as a poet ethnographer rather than an ethnographic poet. Given my training, I deliberately place the poetry first and the ethnography second not to say that one is more important than the other, but more as a means to express my intimate relationship to poetry. Before I knew there were others like me (other ethnographic poets), I developed my own version of poetic ethnography as a methodology and theoretical approach for exploring lien Pohnpei’s complex identities through their relationship with urohs.

Poetic ethnography is a small and growing genre of ethnographic writing and interpretation that falls under the larger field of anthropological poetics (Brady 2004; Maynard and Cahnmann-Taylor 2010). There is a history of anthropologists who write poetry, one of whom was Ruth Benedict, who published her poetry under a pen name

(Behar 2009). One of the first anthropologists to publish poetry (under her own name) written while she was in the field in Asturias, Northern Spain was Toni Flores in “Field Poetry,” (1982). Through her beautiful prose and poetry, she demonstrates how poetry can do what mere ethnography cannot (or refused to do in the 1980s). Her poetry revealed herself, her vulnerabilities, her “outsider” presence among the people of Cangas, her sensual experience while in the field in ways that prose alone often could not. Of this, Flores writes:

Now, using poetry as a medium can help us back to a recognition of sensual realities. I don't mean to suggest that this couldn't be done in prose. I think it could. The point is that we have learned to think abstractly using prose genres; we could think sensually in prose, but we usually don't. Poets can think abstractly, and often do, but poetry has not yet learned to ignore the sensual. We retain in poetry a tradition of sensuality and an approval of it. What happens when we write poetry is that we are not inhibited from attending to sensual reality (1982, 18).

Since Flores wrote her “Field Poetry” a great deal more “sensual prose” and poetry have been written across many disciplines, anthropology included (see Abu-Lughod 1986; Behar 1996; Kisliuk 1997; Trask 1999b; Brady 2004; Pulu 2007; Wong 2008; Barker 2010; Maynard and Cahnmann-Taylor 2010). Kisliuk expresses how experiences in the field “can be like dreams or poems—overdetermined in pertinence to issues and ideas, but existing within a realm of intuition” (1997, 200). In my experience as in those of other ethnographic poets I discuss here, poetry provides this “something else,” this “something more” that is very much in sync with the intuition Kisliuk describes (1997). It can greatly enhance ethnographic description and analysis, as well as representations during and after fieldwork (Flores 1982; Maynard and Cahnmann-Taylor 2010). In her own beautiful prose, Ruth Behar describes what famed anthropologists/writers like Clifford Geertz and Zora Neale Hurston achieved in their writing: “The destination isn't what makes their writing sparkle. It's the way these authors ponder the question of how people think about belonging *someplace*. It's the detail and sensuality with which they evoke an elusive *beingthereness*. It's the degree of honesty and fearlessness they bring to their meditations on the purpose of their own journeys” (Behar 2009, 107-108). Although they didn't write poetry, Behar's description of anthropology as literature is compelling and very close to what I, and other creative ethnographers aim to accomplish in our reflexive writing. Brady calls it “artful-science” that makes room for the human, the sensual, intellectual, biological and cultural (Brady 2004, 623).

“Artful-science” is strikingly similar to what Sarah Pink calls “sensory ethnography.” This refers to “a process of doing ethnography that accounts for how this multisensoriality is integral to both the lives of people who participate in our research *and* how we ethnographers practice our craft” (Pink 2009: 1). Pink, a visual ethnographer (2007), is calling for an “anthropology of the senses...concerned with mainly smell, taste, touch or vision...[and] an understanding of the senses as interconnected and interrelated,” while grounded in “theoretical commitments to place, memory and imagination” (2009, 1-2). My poetic ethnography is “artful-science” that is sensual/sensory; it is experiential, critical and creative.

In poetry, the heart is foremost and the mind works to convey the essence of what the heart is feeling. In my poems about urohs and the women who sew, sell, wear and love them, I write my heart. I write my own love of urohs. I write the heart of the ethnographic moment, whether it be through setting the scene of Evenglynn sewing urohs late at night, describing my encounter with the B&W photo of the tattooed woman from Rohnkiti, or even when expressing my deep sadness through urohs as metaphor while visiting Nahnep, as she was dying in the Pohnpei Hospital. Like Flores, I find poetry sensually freeing. I can infuse the heart and mind into poetry in ways that I find more difficult to do in prose. Poetry conveys the “*beingthereness*” (Behar 2009) not by staging the ethnographic scene, but by showing, as Flores does in “The flowers of Cangas”:

*“Down the butcher’s alley, a woman’s
arms
are garlanded with bright and bloody
pig
and the deep red of ham.”* (1982, 19; italics in original)

Or as Kisliuk evokes in her poem “*To Ndanga and Back*”:

*“At midnight I wake to a mother’s
Heart crying mourning songs.
Later, sprawled on her daughter’s grave:
“Ame na wa na mawa, mawa na mwana wa mou.”
“I die of pitypain, pitypain for child mine.”*

Milk still drips.” (1997, 198; italics in original)

In their poetry, both Flores and Kisliuk capture the “flashes of insight,” the color and heartache, the fleeting moments in field/“homework” that sometimes cannot be illustrated with the same depth of intuition and feeling in ethnographic prose alone. They demonstrate how, “if we proceed with caution (and practise) we can use poetics—steeped in experience—to convey in writing what otherwise might never come across” (Kisliuk 1997, 197).

Ethnographic writing that includes poetry must be written carefully and with clarity and reflexivity to avoid romanticizing the cultures we write about. As a poet, I find that a fine line¹⁹ exists between illustrating the sensual/sensory in poetry and overdoing it, which can result in poems that *reek* of the romantic; this is something all poets must be attuned to in our craft. Sensuous poetic writing in traditional anthropology was considered distracting and not compatible with getting “down and dirty with the Natives,” however, overly romantic or even nostalgic poems about the ethnographic experience are also not the solution (Behar 2009, 107). Ethnographic poetry along with reflexive ethnography is intimate; it crosses and loosens boundaries, allows for feeling and vulnerability (Behar 1996) alongside critical analysis, and makes room for the experiential (Wong 2008).

Reflecting on the poems of two ethnographic poets, Miles Richardson and Anya Royce, Dell Hymes writes, “The poems help readers understand the emotional, psychic, spiritual, and transcendental aspects of the lived ethnographic experience—aspects that move us beyond the travel and the living into the experience of the lived” (2003, 440). My ethnographic poetry, along with my prose, strive then to best represent, in creative and critical ways, the materiality of urohs en Pohnpei. How these skirts “appliqué and embroider” the lives of Pohnpeian women at home and in ‘homes away from home’ (Clifford 1994) through various designs, pieces of fabric, spools of thread, the Janome sewing machine and skilled handiwork is revealed through urohs as material culture.

¹⁹ Kisliuk writes of a “thin line between romanticization on the one hand and irony on the other...particularly present regarding descriptions of African pygmies” or the BaAka with whom she worked (1997, 198).

Urohs as material culture

As contemporary indigenous female textiles and forms of dress, urohs en Pohnpei and their movements in and from the home island to migrant communities away are the focus of this sensual/sensory ethnographic study. In tracing the multiple meanings of urohs, and the ways lien Pohnpei articulate these on Guam, where there is a small migrant community of Pohnpeians, and in Pohnpei, I have borrowed from the work of anthropologists Arjun Appadurai (1986) and George Marcus (1998), on the “social life of things” and “following the thing.” This has allowed me to create a “poetry of things” to best analyze and interpret these skirts and how lien Pohnpei articulate their meanings differently in these two island locations. According to Marcus, this methodology involves “tracing the circulation through different contexts of a manifestly material object of study (at least as initially conceived), such as commodities, gifts, money, works of art, and intellectual property” (1998, 91). Appadurai and Marcus challenge traditional ethnographic approaches to representing ethnic peoples in the places we expect them to be by focusing on an “anthropology of things” and their movements, examining what things, whether they be textiles or hand grenades, can teach us about the people closest to them. After all, as Appadurai illustrates, “commodities, like persons, have social lives” (1986, 3). In the case of urohs en Pohnpei, my ethnography explores how these textiles are “*lived* garments” (Banerjee and Miller 2003, 1) that visually and vibrantly reflect the lives of the women closest to them.

The use of articulations theory from Cultural Studies has also provided me a means to move beyond fraught terms, such as authenticity and tradition,²⁰ in interpreting and representing contemporary urohs textiles and their circulation because these terms often confine the objects and cultures they are meant to explain. The language of articulation makes room for the complexities, intricacies and histories of cultural “things.” As James Clifford explains, “Articulations and disarticulations are constant processes in the making and remaking of cultures...this way of seeing things seems to

²⁰ Building on Wendt’s groundbreaking argument against colonial notions of authenticity in relation to Pacific cultures and societies (1983), followed much later by Mallon’s discussion “against tradition,” inspired by Wendt (2010), I purposefully distance myself from this colonial usage of what is “authentic” to argue that urohs en Pohnpei are indeed authentic because they are what lien Pohnpei make and wear today.

me to escape the notion of inauthenticity which comes with the idea of invented or reinvented cultures and identities” (2003, 44). In this thesis, I explore how Pohnpeian women articulate their identities through urohs and vice versa. If we think in terms of articulations, we are allowing the skirts and the identities of their wearers to shift and change, as all things and people do. Urohs are moving, changing color, shape and style, and the language of articulation gives them the freedom to do so without compromising their value and meaning to Pohnpeian women.

While urohs were not what Pohnpeian women made and wore in the 1800s when Europeans and Americans first came to our shores, they evolved from a creative legacy of women’s cloth and textile production, as described by Hambruch (1932), Riesenberg (1952), Bernart (1977), and Hanlon (1988), and from innovation by incorporating foreign cloth and new techniques, as well as ways of thinking and being (Küchler and Were 2005, xxiii), which I will discuss further in Chapter 3. According to Wendt, Pacific Islanders are responsible for making and, more importantly, creating, our own authenticity and we (along with those who write about us) shouldn’t look only to the cultural past for inspiration, but should also examine the present and look toward the future (1983). I also avoid using the term “traditional” when describing urohs and women’s other handiwork, such as koahl, dohr and likou meimei, in an effort to decolonize the literature about Pacific women’s textiles, past and present. Furthermore, I wish to point out that in pursuing a study that examines a contemporary Micronesian textile, my purpose is to appreciate the creative and aesthetic achievement revealed in these beautifully designed, machine appliquéd and embroidered skirts. How can we do so if the focus is on notions of inauthenticity where the textile is seen as too far removed from the “traditional” and, therefore, of lesser value than what is considered “real” or “pure.”

Leslie and Addo in their introduction to a special issue of *Pacific Arts* discuss the flexibility of hybridity in contemporary Pacific textiles through the term “pragmatic creativity” where they “argue that pragmatic creativity - as a socially sanctioned, culturally embedded process - allows us to recognize these hybrid textile products as authentic innovations” (2007, 14). I appreciate and agree with their premise that hybridity does not equal inauthenticity. I do think, however, that contemporary textiles

and clothing, such as urohs, are oftentimes viewed as less significant because they are considered “hybrids” (see Wendt 1999; Kamehiro 2007). My urohs thesis seeks to articulate the dynamic artistic heritage of urohs en Pohnpei through this ethnography of menginpehn lih and its active perpetuation through my own nting, poetry and prose.

In exploring the aesthetics of urohs en Pohnpei and the social relations they encode, one of the most useful ethnographies of clothing/dress was not one about Pacific material culture, but Indian, Banerjee’s and Miller’s *The Sari* (2003). In writing about this important Indian textile as a “*lived garment*,” that creates feeling, and constantly interacts with the wearer and the society in which she resides (2003: 1), the authors use a sensual language. The vibrant photographs and how they complement and enhance the ethnographic text also inspired me, as they serve to visually illustrate the social life of the sari (Appadurai 1986) in relation to modern India’s complex history, culture, and economy. The various chapters in their ethnographic account, ranging from “The Intimate Sari,” which looks at this dynamic textile in relation to its wearer, “Possession,” which focuses on the sari wardrobe as a mirror reflecting its owner, to “The Pleasure of What to Buy” about shopping for saris, helped to shape my thinking about the representation and positionality of urohs and the Pohnpeian women who wear them, as well as those who make, exchange, shop for and sell them (2003, 25-188).

In looking at the ways in which Pohnpeian women on Guam articulate their identities through the wearing and un-wearing of urohs, another Indian-focused work proved very useful. Sandhu’s paper (2007) explores the fluidity of clothing in representing the shifting identities of diasporic Indian women in New Zealand. The “sites of wearing” traditional Indian dress reveal how these migrant women continually negotiate their identities as Indians in a new cultural space where they want to “fit-in” (2007, 32, 37). Like these diasporic Indian women, migrant Pohnpeian women negotiate their “sites of wearing” urohs in wanting to “fit-in,” but, most importantly, in *not* wanting to be identified as women from the largest Micronesian community on Guam, Chuukese, in the context of the “Micronesian skirt,” which I discuss in detail in Chapter 5.

In tracing the social and cultural agency that Pohnpeian women demonstrate through their fine menginpehn in creating a highly valued and sought after authentic female

textile, I have drawn from other ethnographic and historical studies of Pacific material culture (Weiner and Schneider 1989; Rubinstein 1992; Kihleng 1996; Kihleng and Pacheco 2000; Bolton 2003; Colchester 2003; Kuchler and Were 2005; Addo, Leslie and Herda 2007; Lander 2011; Kuchler and Eimke 2010; Māhina-Tuai and Māhina 2011; Tamarapa 2011; E. Kihleng 2012; Cummings 2013; Addo 2013). In their discussion of clothing transformations across the Pacific that resulted from conversion, Kuchler and Were “treat these acts of creativity – the distinctive styles of cloth and clothing – as central agents in the process of change” (2005, xxiii). Māhina-Tuai and Māhina in their exhibition, *Nimamea’a – The fine arts of Tongan embroidery and crochet*, define *nimamea’a* as “‘fine-hands,’ which is a reflection of the delicate and meticulous nature of the hands as a means of production” (2011, 25) that refers to the crochet and embroidery work of Tongan women. These fine works of art are also considered part of Tongan women’s wealth and figure prominently in contemporary life-cycle ceremonies and church celebrations. Similar to Pohnpeian women, crochet and embroidery are also part of Tongan female clothing, specifically the “Tefisi Style” of dress that is worn on special cultural occasions (2011, 27). In her work on Tongan women and wealth in the diaspora, Addo states that commoner women “perform as agents of a modernity” in the circulation of their textile valuables across the globe to Tongan communities away (2013, 1-2).

This scholarship on Pacific material culture has also been instrumental in providing a wider Pacific Islands context in which to examine the material and social relations of *urohs en Pohnpei*. Although primarily focused on Melanesia and Polynesia,²¹ this work on the historical, cultural and artistic complexities of clothing and other contemporary indigenous textiles including gender, indigeneity, colonialism and Christianity, hybridity and authenticity, notions of the body, and skill, creativity and innovation, with their many threads and layers, greatly enriched my analysis. Most of the above-mentioned works celebrate the resilient, resourceful and novel ways Pacific peoples with their distinctive aesthetic sensibilities and hard work continue to produce our own

²¹ Karen Nero writes, “Most books on Pacific art [and material culture] continue to slight Micronesian arts, partly because the books are based on museum collections, which are limited” (1999, 262). Most of the books I read about Pacific material culture (not just in museum collections) did not include articles pertaining to Micronesia (see Colchester 2003; Kuchler and Were 2005).

indigenous forms of wealth that are often worn on the body as fashion to create meaning, strengthen identities, and make us look beautiful in our island communities and the diaspora.

As Leslie and Addo so aptly express with regard to hybrid textiles:

It is precisely because Pacific textiles are renewable – in their materiality, symbolism, and contexts – that they are durable in their sociality. Through a range of processes, some of which are discussed in this issue, the people who make, use, exchange, [wear] and admire them can continually imbue these textiles with social lives. In return, textiles wrap, enfold, and bind people and their memories together across time and space (Leslie and Addo 2007, 16).

Like most Pacific women's textiles, urohs thread, embroider and appliqué people and society together giving their female makers much power and authority. Like ngatu and siapo,²² qana and maraha,²³ Lamotrekese lavalava,²⁴ and Chuukese likoutang,²⁵ urohs are also "second skins" (Küchler and Were 2014) that imbue the wearer with a distinctly Pohnpeian female identity. This identity (or identities) is given voice throughout my thesis based on the oral histories conducted with lien Pohnpei as part of my larger ethnographic project.

Poetic Methodologies

Oral history

Once I chose urohs en Pohnpei as my thesis topic, I knew that lien Pohnpei's voices needed to speak throughout my research and writing. I wanted to hear lokaiahn Pohnpei (Pohnpeian language), to best convey how women feel about urohs and what these textiles mean to them, and to share their voices with the world. With the exception of Kihleng's ethnographic study of Saladak women (1996) and Elizabeth Keating's investigation of honorific language and the "power sharing" it requires within

²² Samoan tapa or barkcloth.

²³ Category that includes high-value exchange textiles"; a qana is "textile category that includes medium-value exchange textiles that can also be used as domestic furnishings" (Bolton 2003, 206).

²⁴ See Werle 2014.

²⁵ Chuukese muumuus with lace in the mid-section (personal communication, Nedine Songeni, 5 July 2014).

Pohnpeian society (1998), it is safe to say that women's voices have been peripheral and almost inaudible in the majority of the literature that exists on Pohnpei (see Riesenbergr 1968; Ehrlich 1978; Petersen 1992; Mauricio 1993; Hezel 1994; Hanlon 1998). It could be said that lien Pohnpei remain "voiceless" in this existing literature. Exclusive of my earlier academic and creative work,²⁶ there has yet to be scholarly literature written about Pohnpei that places women's voices at the forefront, while incorporating creative nting as an essential element in which their voices are articulated.

As previously mentioned, through my previous oral history research as a graduate and undergraduate student at the University of Hawai'i, I understand the value of people's voices and stories, as well as their preservation through audio or video recorded interviews. They reveal perspectives, insights, feelings, experiences and lives through time often in relation to larger social and cultural forces (particularly in terms of the life history interviews). Oral histories often function as storytelling on behalf of the interviewee with the interviewer as listener. In a recent article on "The Psychological Comforts of Storytelling," Cody Delistraty writes:

Stories can be a way for humans to feel that we have control over the world...stories can also inform people's emotional lives...Storytelling could be an evolutionary mechanism that helped keep our ancestors alive...[and lastly] perhaps the real reason that we tell stories again and again...is because humans want to be a part of a shared history (Delistraty 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/11/the-psychological-comforts-of-storytelling/381964/>).

In the case of the lien Pohnpei, who shared their "storied lives" with me, including their personal/familial/community/wehi (chiefdom) perspectives and experiences, as well as conversations about their skill and creativity, their voices became part of a larger textured and textual urohs narrative, which was co-created by me as the interviewer and by lih as the interviewees (Sheftel and Zembrzycki 2013). By recording and transcribing their voices in the Pohnpeian language, I am "giving them space within

²⁶ My MA Thesis in English, *En lih mwenginingin, the whispers of women* (UH Mānoa 2006), consists of poetry and prose with three Pohnpeian female voices. My BA Honors Thesis, *Saledek* (UH Mānoa 2003), was a mixed genre work of poetry, prose, press clippings, photos and fieldnotes that was partially based on oral history interviews I conducted in Honolulu and in Pohnpei in 2003. *My Urohs* (2008), my first collection of poetry, features poetry that gives voice to lien Pohnpei.

[my] research and writing...sharing authority and fostering collaboration” (2013, 7) to privilege their words and the telling of their lives as they are stitched together in urohs.

These oral history interviews²⁷ and narratives serve as the basis of my ethnographic study. The poem on the following page describes the invaluable voices of lien Pohnpei, invaluable to understanding their lived experiences and identities, as well as to revealing my relationship with them, which was based on mutual respect and oftentimes affection and love as well, one woman’s in particular. My first oral history interview in Pohnpei was on 28 September 2012 at Pohnpil, Saladak with Nahnep, Eliwiter Moses, who I introduced in Chapter 1. It was intended to be a “practice interview” as I just wanted to “get my feet wet” because I had an interview scheduled in a few days with a well-established urohs businesswoman. I was planning to conduct a life history interview with Nahnep over the course of my research, as she was like a grandmother to me and also my best friend. I had known Nahnep since I was seven years old when we first moved to and settled in Saladak, as she became my nohno’s closest companion and dearest friend, a friendship that lasted for over twenty years. Eliwi was also related to my great grandmother, Lihter Kihleng, my namesake, as they belonged to the same sou, Dipwenpahnmei (under the breadfruit tree clan). As a distant relative, she had known pahpa since he was a child. Nahnep, Wasahi and their son, Similak, were our Saladak family and part of our daily lives. Nahnep was the quintessential lien Pohnpei in that she was heavily involved in tiahk, as was expected of a woman of her high rank and status. She was also very active in Lien Alem, the Protestant women’s group. Eliwi was kadek (kind), confident and saledek (carefree), as are many people from Saladak. She was also known to be extremely charming, and had a gift for making everyone laugh.

²⁷ I interviewed a total of 65 women and one man in Pohnpei and Guam (33 women on Guam and 32 women and 1 man in Pohnpei). The oral history interviews were open-ended and semi-structured with some of them rather short (under an hour) and some quite long (up to 3 hours per interview). I also conducted several life history interviews and these were the longest, requiring several interview sessions to complete. I also collected a total of 119 anonymous surveys from young Pohnpeian women between the ages of 18-26 in Pohnpei and on Guam. These surveys allowed me to get a glimpse of young Pohnpeian women’s perceptions of urohs and the wearing of these skirts. I write about my survey findings in Chapter 5: Pahn Urohs O.

I first interviewed Nahnep in 2002 as part of my Senior Honors project, then in 2003, when she came to my graduation from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. She stayed with my parents and I for two months, a time in which I began to write poems about her. She became my muse and a key character in my creative writing MA thesis: *En Lih Mwenginingin: the whispers of women* (2006). For many reasons, I knew I wanted Nahnep to be a central figure in my PhD research. Although I'd interviewed her before, this time it felt serious. She was 80 years old; I was going to be in Pohnpei for several months, and I didn't know when I would be going back. Hers was the first of my interviews, as I thought I would space out my Nahnep interviews. We had also discussed going to do some interviews together. Given that she was Nahnep U, I was relying on her to introduce me to some other lih lapalap (high status women). The one interview, however, would be my last with Nahnep, as she passed away on 9 November 2012.

I tamtaman komwi

paiehte kita wia interview
pwa Nahnep
komw taman?
i kin wie roangoroang ngilomw en
nan ihmweie New Zealand
ke kin kourur
i pil kin kourur
pilen mesei kin kerkihdi
pwe likamwehte kita mihmihte
Pohnpil o...

I cherish your voice
coming through the MacBook
here with me
in my studio apartment
on the 11th floor
laughing that laugh
that now makes me cry
my laugh with yours
makes me cry too
I showed you the Hambruch
the urohs dundun
but I can't show you
the Rohnkiti woman

menlau seweseiie Nahnep



Figure 2.3. (clockwise) Nahnep and me at Pohnpil, Saladak, 1991; Nohno Li, my great grandmother, and me, Nampwo, Nan U, 1990; interview with Nahnep, 2002; final interview, 28 September 2012.

Nahnep and her voice are preserved in that interview like magic. When I listen to it I am taken to Pohnpil where time, sounds, her words and memories are stored. I write more about Nahnep in the context of her funeral in Chapter 4.

Oral history was a key methodology in my ethnographic practice (see Mintz 1996; Dunaway 1996; Sheftel and Zembrzycki 2013), and the two methodologies, oral history interviews and ethnographic field/homework, go well together. The first is about recording a planned questioning, which involves asking the “right” questions, and listening to what people say within an historical frame of reference, and the second requires observation, participation and even performance within a larger cultural

context; it's about what people do. According to oral historians Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2013, 4), ethnography moves beyond the interview space to examine the intersection between process and content. "Everything that happens within and outside of the conversations they [ethnographers] have with their informants is important." If I only listened to and interpreted what women told me about urohs, I would have missed the rest: the visual, the making, wearing and larger circulation of urohs. Research on "things" requires more than interviews, and ethnography provided the means to go beyond the oral. As we know, however, oral history interviews are especially important for research in indigenous societies like Pohnpei where knowledge is still primarily passed down orally and visually, as T. Teaiwa argues (2010a), and which was reaffirmed by the women I interviewed.

Feminist scholars have argued that oral history is the best method for listening to women's stories (Anderson and Jack 1991; Gluck 1996). In fact, it was feminist oral historians who took on the "questions about power, subjectivity and marginalization and the interviewer's often conflicted position as an academic, advocate, community member and friend" (Sheftel and Zembrzycki 2013, 7) in oral history research, and demonstrated the need for greater self-reflexivity. As a project focused on women about a textile produced and worn by women, I believed from the start that humanistic oral history interviews were one of the best ways to discover the complexity of urohs in the lives of women in Pohnpei both in the home island and away. Based on their research experience, Anderson and Jack write about how having an agenda when interviewing women can result in an unsuccessful oral history because women do not share fully. Oftentimes interviewers are only listening for what they want to hear, and fail to hear what their respondent is really sharing. Both authors express the necessity of analyzing completed interviews, and listening for what they may have missed during the actual interview (1991).

Since completing my research, I have found that careful analysis of my interviews has been critical, as much gets lost during the interview itself. I sometimes forgot about important details that women mentioned during the interviews because I was too focused on making sure I was prepared for my next question, or I felt nervous, preoccupied with wanting to make sure my interviewees were happy and not getting

tired. When replaying my interviews I found that I often asked the women “komw sou pwangadahr?”; “you must be getting tired?” The interviews could also be challenging because the women I interviewed were often caring for their children or grandchildren at the same time. During a few interviews there were interruptions from the children and I would have to stop the recorder at certain points and start again. This broke up the flow of the interviews and it was sometimes difficult to get the flow back. Because I was the one requesting their time, I couldn’t ask that they find babysitters as well, and this was Pohnpei where children are everywhere and one is rarely alone. Many of my interviews were conducted among several people other than just the interviewee in locations that ranged from offices to along the side of the road to restaurants and inside the family nahs (see Sheftel and Zembrzycki 2013 for an insightful discussion of the interview experience by several oral historians).

Feminist oral historians emphasize how openness and flexibility, as well as reflexivity are key to successful, meaningful oral histories. I went into each interview with an open mind, and the more women I interviewed, the more surprised I was by what I found, and sometimes, the women I expected to possess certain knowledge about women’s work or Pohnpei’s past claimed to not know such things. Although these women may have known more than they let on, the likelihood of this being the case is quite slim because the questions I was asking were not personal ones. They also didn’t involve the need to reveal precious forms of knowledge they wouldn’t want to share, as they were more historical questions. For instance, I expected the elderly women, especially those with grandmothers who had pelipel, to know more about the old nting, but they didn’t. I thought they might know about the process in which the women were tattooed or perhaps they would have known which women did the tattooing in their respective kousapw (communities), but they did not. They could only speculate as to the significance of this nting. I elaborate on what their interviews did reveal about Pohnpei’s pelipel in Chapter 3: flowers, hearts and mermaids. The opposite also occurred during my interviews; I did not expect certain women to possess the knowledge that they did, while others simply overwhelmed me with the incredibly large quantities of urohs they had in their possession! I discuss these secret urohs collectors in greater detail in Chapter 5: Pahn Urohs O. I found through my research experience that the mutual love of urohs was often an ideal start to forming relationships with the

women I interviewed and spent time with. Urohs are a textile that Pohnpei (and some non-Pohnpeian women as well) feel comfortable talking about. Most women were excited to koasoia these skirts, as they are familiar, and Pohnpeian. Urohs are, therefore, not intimidating. Some of the women I interviewed ended up revealing things about themselves through urohs that could be likened to disrobing.

Aboriginal Australian historian Lorina Barker (2010) turned her oral history interviews into free verse poetry. Barker explains, “This style is used for the purpose of re-creating in written form the emotion and movement of words as they are spoken and received in conversation, as well as to re-capture the imagery of the interview, and what took place: the interaction between interviewer and participant. Free verse poetry is also used to preserve the traditional practice of oral history storytelling and to create a text version that conveys participants’ lived experiences and history” (2010, 186). Although I do not transcribe all of my interviews in their entirety, I do transcribe portions of them and, like Barker, I wish to preserve the voices of my interviewees in these transcriptions. I experimented with one of my interview/koasoai sessions with Amoreen John and Berwihna Kihleng on Guam. Unlike Barker, whose interviews were in Aboriginal English, most of my interviews were in Pohnpeian, I am, therefore, also working with issues of translation. The free verse poem below is one such example. I include the transcription from which it was adapted after the poem.

Poem from koasoai with Amoreen & Berwy Pt. II

Soumwahukidah ahmw urohs ka: your urohs make me sick

*they are so nice!
I just keep wearing my old ones*

BK: wei eh???

they're still nice

BK: I sold most of mine

To who?

BK: Domomi, Kathy, Deio...

AJ: Em!

here's the pineapple one
I mean, wat²⁸(ch)ermelon

Woooo!

BK: I don't have a wat(ch)er.
that one's nice, the pink one.
see that one, is that a maram (moon)?

AJ: yes, but just the tail, just the tail

how many months are you Am?

AJ: wenou (six)

give it to me.

AJ: ale mah! (take it!)

I'm going to adopt it

AJ: eiii

so this is the maram? (taking pictures)

BK: it's the dipenmei maram (breadfruit moon-crescent)
BK: mine is the maram with the star above it

AJ: wait, I have a tehn mahrek (fern)
I have a mahi
it's dirty looking

BK: the grapes are nice

*what are these?
Raindrops? Tears?*

they laugh

AJ & BK: it's just the style

we eat Flamin' Hot Cheetos with Kool-Aid

²⁸ "T" is pronounced "ch" in Pohnpeian.

Partial transcription of koasoai with Berwy & Amoreen Pt. II

29 August 2012

Amoreen John's house in Yigo, Guam

EK: Soumwahukidah wen lel en ahmw urohs ka.
[I'm] getting sick from how nice your skirts are.
Ngehi pwe I kin pwurpwurehngete ahi urohs menda ma wereila.
Me I just keep wearing my skirts even if they're old.

BK: Wei eh???

Really???

EK: Pwe e mwamwahu te.
Because they're still nice

BK: Ke ese palilaud en ahi urohs I netikihla pwa Em.
You know most of my skirts I sold, Em.

EK: Ke netikiheng ihs?
Who did you sell them to?

BK: Domomi, Kathy, Deio...

AJ: Em, pweinaper o, wei watermelon.
Em, the pineapple, I mean, watermelon.

EK: Woooo

BK: Ngehi, sohte ahi water [watermelon].
Me, I don't have a water.

EK: Ngehi pil.
Me neither.

AJ: Quleen, ke taman? I alehsang ni eh sdohwahu.
Quleen, do you remember? I bought it from her store.

BK: Ahi o pil mihmihte me dol kohl o...kin kedekede oh a I kin likauih.
Mine is still there with the gold mix...it sits for awhile and then I wear it

EK: Udahn ah urohs ka kasoumwahu...
Her urohs are really making me sick...

BK: Lingan men. Me pink en. Men.
That one's pretty. The pink one. That one.
Kilang men, maram ieu men?
See that one, is that a moon?

AJ: Ehng apw ikiohte, ikiohte.

Yes but just the tail, just the tail.

EK: Ke sounpwung depe met e, Am?
How many months are you, Am?

AJ: Wenou.
Six.

EK: Ke nek kihdo nei.
Just give it to me.

AJ: Ale mah!
Take it!

EK: I pahn pwekasang.
I'll adopt it.

AJ: Eiiii!

EK: Eri maram me? (taking pictures)
So this is a moon?

BK: Maram me. Ke kilang maram me kin dipenmei o? Ahi o maram o apw usu o mih powe.
This is a moon. You see the moon that is a sliced breadfruit? Mine is the moon but with the star on top.

AJ: Awih pwe mie tehn mahrek.
Wait because I have a tehn mahrek (fern).

BK: Ke kolokolte ahmw me tehn mahrek o?
You still have your tehn mahrek?

AJ: Mie mahi.
I have a breadfruit.

BK: Ngehi mahi o me I kolokol.
Me, I still have my breadfruit.

AJ: E ininin kersamin lah.
Mine has become dirty looking.

BK: Lel grape e, e mih pah...
The grape is nice, underneath...

EK: Ei pwa...
Yes, really...

EK: A dah me? Pihl? Ketou me? Pilen mese?

And what is this? Water? Rain? Tears?

They laugh.

AJ & BK: Style ih.
It's the style.

EK: Ah me, ke alehda ia?
And this 1, where did you buy it?

AJ: Pohnpei, e iangohdo ahi sakau.
Pohnpei, it came with my sakau.

EK: Mehnia urohs nan urohs ka me ke ese ihs me dehkada?
Out of all of these skirts, which do you know who sewed it?

AJ: Sohte meh ieu
Not one.

EK: Ke esehte e kohsang mehnia wehi?
You only know what wehi they came from?

AJ: Kitti oh Madolenihmw, Wapar...

We eat Flamin' Hot Cheetos with Kool-Aid...yummm

I chose to transcribe this koasoai session with Amoreen and Berwy because of its interactive quality. As a pure transcription it is busy and distracting, but as a poem, or “poetic transcription”²⁹ (Glesne 1997) our koasoai comes alive without the back and forth of “she said, she said,” although I kept Amoreen and Berwy’s initials in the poem to clarify who was speaking. It is obvious from our koasoai and the poem created from it that we all know each other; Berwy is my aunt and Amoreen is Nahnep’s granddaughter, and we are all from U. We were, thus, at ease sharing and joking as we sifted through Amoreen’s extensive urohs collection (Berwy has a large collection too). I was also photographing Amoreen’s skirts that were hanging in her closet³⁰ which she had taken down for me. The poem condenses our conversation, and avoids the choppiness of straight transcription. It also creates a “space” for feeling as Glesne described, “When poetic transcription moves into the realm of poetry, readers also

²⁹ “The creation of poem like compositions from the words of interviewees” (Glesne 1997, 202).

³⁰ There were other urohs in plastic containers and in her laundry basket that needed washing.

enter into the feeling. A space opens and allows us all...to be connected in our feelings and reflections, however similar or different they may be” (1997, 218). Poems created from or influenced by interviews and koasoai allow me to combine poetry with lien Pohnpei’s voices, including my own, which I demonstrate above. I chose to include the transcription as well to reveal some of the process that went into creating the poem. Perhaps because I am the researcher, I also appreciate the transcription alongside the poem as it illuminates the poem, almost like footnotes with additional details about Amoreen, Berwy and me.

Unlike Barker, who discovered free verse poetry while searching for “alternative styles” to just pure transcription, I was writing poetry long before I began my thesis research (2010, 186). The poems in the thesis unfold along with my ethnographic experience much like an ethnographer’s fieldnotes. Like Aboriginal Australians and other indigenous peoples, storytelling and oral traditions remain the primary means of knowledge transmission in Pohnpei (Hanlon 1988; Mauricio 1992; Kihleng 1996). Therefore, poetry as a creative art form that is ultimately intended for oral performance (although poems are often written down first and perform another function on the page) continues as a form of storytelling for me that is closer to the indigenous.

One of the most creative Pacific PhD theses I’ve read is by anthropologist Teena Brown Pulu (2007), which explores her own New Zealand born Tongan³¹ family through “the social life and meaning of family stories” that she directs in the form of a three act play in which she is a the main actress (2007, 37). The visual layout of the “thesis script” is creative in that Pulu uses different fonts to distinguish between the analysis and ethnographic data from her “fieldwork conversations” (2007, 4). She assembles these “conversations” to read as poems, short stories and scripts. Her poems³² are similar to the poetry of Barker (2010) and Glesne (1997), also created from their oral history interviews, although they each have their own unique transcription-to-poem writing process. Pulu’s poems are in the voices of the family members she interviewed, and are

³¹ Pulu describes herself as “a Tongan woman with Māori and Samoan ancestry and a Tongan female anthropologist writing from the edge of Pacific Peoples in New Zealand” (2007, 37).

³² Her “fieldwork conversation” poems are different from Toni Flores’ “Field Poetry” (1982), which were not taken from oral history interviews.

therefore ethnographic in content, reflecting her field experience. While I am not turning my interviews with *lien Pohnpei* into poems, my poetry is similarly ethnographic with my poems reflecting back, enlightening and serving to ground my analysis.

Talanoa/Koasoai

As an indigenous Pacific Islander researcher, the talanoa approach to research proved valuable in helping me to articulate my research process and identify the ways in which it was different from traditional social science approaches and also uniquely Pacific and Pohnpeian. Talanoa, a Pacific way of communicating and relationship building, requires its practitioners to develop strong relationships with research participants in ways that are more Pacific-centered (Vaiotele 2006; Prescott 2008). It is based on a reciprocal and culturally appropriate relationship between the researcher and “researched.” The cultural link is what makes talanoa uniquely Pacific. As a Pohnpeian woman who works with *lien Pohnpei* the cultural connection was extremely important. I agree with Vaiotele when he writes “when Pacific peoples learn or share, much information is communicated through the senses, so it is vital that researchers understand the *laumalie* (essence, spirit, wairua) of concepts, notions, emotions or expressions in the Talanoa encounter” (2006, 32). Talanoa has several definitions, and the more “superficial” definition according to Vaiotele refers to talanoa as “a conversation, a talk, an exchange of ideas or thinking, whether formal or informal” but the term also “literally means talking about nothing in particular, and interacting without a rigid framework” (2006, 23). This definition is quite similar to what we call *koasoai* in Pohnpeian, which I discuss further in this section. I became even more aware of the importance of this Pacific methodology while in the field/at home. The interactions I was having with many of the women (and one man) I interviewed and their families, especially those with whom I spent more time with on repeat visits, went beyond the traditional definitions and boundaries of oral history and ethnography. We were establishing relationships, exchanging gifts, sharing food, forming a kind of kinship and strengthening already existing familial relationships and friendships that I am confident will last well beyond the PhD journey.

As an indigenous ethnographer, my stories intersect in various and intimate ways with Pohnpeian women, not to say that I always identified with other Pohnpei and their perspectives, but there is a link already in place because we are Pohnpeian. This can make the whole process of establishing relationships and relating to one another easier. In “What’s So Special About Women?: Women’s Oral History” Gluck (1996) describes the differences between insiders and outsiders when conducting oral history interviews. Through her interview experience she found that outsiders may actually have an easier time asking more sensitive questions or exploring certain kinds of experiences with interviewees who are of a different culture and ethnic group exactly because they are outside of the group. However, Gluck wrote that, “On the whole, though, my experience has been that cultural likeness can greatly promote trust and openness, whereas dissimilarity reinforces cultural and social distance” (1996, 221). Trust and openness often occur through establishing a cultural connection, which Prescott (2008) describes as existing in talanoa; he calls for research that is not only culturally appropriate, but meaningful because it is mutually beneficial. This in no way means that indigenous researchers have an easier time carrying out their work with their own communities. Oftentimes, it is even more challenging and demanding because of the attachments, commitments, tensions and obligations that indigenous researchers have to our communities (K. Teaiwa 2004; Smith 2012).

Renowned Maori researcher and author of *Decolonizing Methodologies*, now in its second edition, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, gives her thoughts on insider/outsider research as follows:

Indigenous research approaches problematize the insider model in different ways because there are multiple ways of being either an insider or an outsider in indigenous contexts. The critical issue with insider research is the constant need for reflexivity. At a general level insider researchers have to have ways of thinking critically about their processes, their relationships, and the quality and richness of their data and analysis. So too do outsiders, but the major difference is that insiders have to live with the consequences of their processes on a day-to-day basis for ever more, and so do their families and communities (2012, 138).

Reflexivity has been a key element in the way I carried out my ethnographic research and how I have analyzed, transcribed, interpreted, visually documented and written my interviews, fieldnotes, experiences, women’s voices and poetry in creating this thesis. While I can easily say I was engaged in talanoa while doing oral history interviews and

engaged in ethnographic “homework,” contextualizing my research process for myself as an indigenous Pohnpeian, and also for other Pohnpeians is crucial and necessitated koasoai. During the time spent with lien Pohnpei and their families, we were essentially getting to know each other, and for those with whom I was related or already knew, we were catching up. Se wie koaskoasoai. We were talking, having lengthy conversations, talanoa, or koasoai. Koasoai³³ is defined as “1. *vi.* to talk, to discuss, to tell a story. 2. *n.* talk, discussion, rumor, story, adage, parable” (1979, 44). Koasoai, according to Pohnpeian linguist, Robert Andreas, “came from soai, story. Koa – is only a prefix (causative)” (email correspondence, 13 November 2014).

If a person is telling a story we say “e soasoai,” but if a person is talking or conversing with someone we say “e koaskoasoai.” Both terms are a form of storytelling, although koasoai is the appropriate term to describe what I was doing with the women I interacted, interviewed and spent time with. Koasoai entails an interaction, an exchange of ideas, a dialogue or conversation whereas soai usually means that a person is engaged in storytelling. In the introduction to Hanlon’s history of the Island of Pohnpei, he described the ways in which we know ourselves, “Pohnpeians know their past through an extensive body of oral traditions that includes sacred stories (*poadoapoad*), legendary tales (*soaipoad*), songs (*koul*), chants (*ngihs*), prayers (*kapakap*), spells (*winahni*), and narrative accounts of more recent events (*soai*)” (1988, xvii). He does not mention koasoai here, as it does not constitute a form of knowledge; having koasoai is an everyday formal and informal activity. Given the chiefly hierarchy in Pohnpei,

³³ I am using the orthography of the *Ponapean-English Dictionary* (1979) in much of this thesis although I, like most Pohnpeians, tend to spell the way I speak. Therefore, there may be some words that I spell slightly different from the dictionary, as I could not look up every word in every sentence that I wrote. As Rehg and Sohl write, “Ponapean has traditionally employed a basically *phonemic* writing system...The way words are spelled, therefore, mirrors the way they are pronounced” (1979, xviii). The only standard orthography in existence is Rehg and Sohl’s 1979 text, which follows the northern dialect of Pohnpeian (*xix*). People from the southern part of the island, in Kitti, speak a distinct dialect from the rest of us. I did my best to transcribe according to how my interviewees spoke, therefore, when I transcribed interviews with women from Kitti, I spell the way they spoke.

different honorific forms of speech exist in the Pohnpeian language, therefore, koasoai depends on the context.³⁴

Although I am not proficient in meing, high/respect language, I tried to make use of the respectful terms that I knew to address women who were older than me. This included saying “komw” instead of “ke,” meaning “you.” For instance, I’d ask the women who I did not know well, whom were older than me, “Komw pereniki urohs en Pohnpei?” rather than the informal, “Ke pereniki urohs en Pohnpei?” or “Do you enjoy wearing urohs en Pohnpei?” When agreeing with these women, I’d also say “ehi” instead of the informal “ehng” or “yes.” It was not necessary that I use meing to address my interviewees,³⁵ especially given that I am ahpw kahs, however, they appreciated the effort.

According to Gluck, “open communication is crucial to establishing trust with an interviewee. Since we are asking a stranger to be self-revealing, we, in turn, must be willing to divulge information about ourselves” (1996, 223). Indeed. I was revealing a great deal about myself to my interviewees, although with most they were not strangers. I couldn’t seem to help myself, and realized the oral history interviews I was carrying out were “complex engagements” (Sheftel and Zembrzycki 2013, 15). Had I overstepped the researcher/informant boundary? At what point was I guilty of saying too much? I wasn’t quite sure, but believe I was doing what felt right in particular situations, at particular times and with particular women. My interviewees and I were engaged in a collaborative, knowledge sharing space, and like talanoa, this koasoai was not one way. I was compelled to share and give of myself to those women who were giving so much of themselves to me. This is the basis of humanistic oral history practice, which involves “interviews that acknowledge the humanity of the interviewer and the interviewee, aim to create a collaborative and just interview space and valorize the

³⁴ According to Andreas, “context and the speakers involved in koasoai determine the appropriate language registers to use...for example, when talking among friends, we use common registers. When the setting changes to a traditional gathering, the registers are different, either formal or honorific, if the Nahnmwarki is present or spoken with” (email correspondence, 13 November 2014).

³⁵ I’d say the only instance where the use of meing was necessary was when I interviewed Iso Nahnken en Kittu. Before our interview began I made a point to apologize to him and Nahnkeniei for not being able to speak proper meing.

relationships that grow out of these encounters” (Sheftel and Zembrzycki 2013, 7). One such collaborative interview was with Trish Billen, which I discuss next.

In reflexively analyzing the interviews I conducted I was learning much about myself, and how I think and feel about urohs in my own life in relation to what my interviewees were telling me. For example, when I interviewed Trish Billen, a Social Work major at the University of Guam, who was 27 at the time, I found we shared similar views about the wearing of urohs in Pohnpei and on Guam. Perhaps it was because we were around the same age and our fathers were classmates, so there was already a connection. I’m not quite sure, but my interview with Trish was one of my most satisfying.

At one point in the interview, Trish was describing how when she goes to Pohnpei now she prefers wearing pants whereas before she moved to Guam she always wore urohs. This brought on the following question: “In the Pohnpei context, ke ndah e mwahu me e pil wikihlah? do you think it’s good that it’s changed? At that moment, I used myself as an example to shed light on what I was asking Trish. I answered my own question, and then Trish followed up with her own perspective. I said:

Ahi pil pwurahla Pohnpei e likamw ngehi pwe aramas kin kilang ie irail wiahki me ngehi mehn wai eri I kin urohs en Pohnpei a re wiahki me ngehi pihs kohr pwe I urohs en Pohnpei. Apw ngehi I kin kohla Pohnpei pwehki sapwatail likamw I sohte kin katapaniki dahme I likauih. I kin ius te dahme kainsenamwahu, eri ma I men urohs I pahn urohs kohla wasa koaros nan Kolonia de dah. I sohte pil kin katapaniki aramas e, apw likamw ahi kasawih mehn Pohnpei met pali laud en mehn nan Kolonia mwo mah ke pahn kohla nan ihmwen mwenge ka de da de nan opihs ka, re rausis, eh? Ih me I kasawih nan mwehi et, mwein kaidehn mwehi et, mwein 2000s, starting in nan 2000 ape (15 February 2013).

When I went back to Pohnpei it’s like with me because people look at me and think I am a mehn wai therefore when I wear urohs en Pohnpei they think I am a Peace Corps because I am wearing urohs en Pohnpei. But me when I go to Pohnpei because it’s our land it’s like I don’t care what I wear. I use what feels good, so if I want to wear urohs I will wear urohs to go everywhere in Kolonia or wherever. I don’t really care about people, but it’s like what I noticed with Pohnpeians now, most people from Kolonia if they go to restaurants or what or to the offices, they wear pants yea? That’s what I noticed in this era, or maybe not this era, the era of the 2000s, starting in 2000 or so.

Trish was agreeing with me the entire time I was expressing my experience of urohs wearing in Pohnpei. After sharing, I asked her, “ke nda e mwahu nan ahmw madamadau de what’s your opinion?” “Do you think it’s good in your “thoughts” or what’s your

opinion? I discuss her answer to this question in Chapter 5: Pahn Urohs O. When I shared my experience and feelings toward wearing urohs in our home island, I knew that I was not following “traditional” oral history protocol³⁶ because by answering my own question it could be interpreted that I was “leading” Trish and trying to get her to see things my way. However, this was not the case because Trish and I were already seeing eye to eye. Being on the same urohs wavelength was why I felt the desire to share my thoughts as well. We were having koasoai about our “shared narratives” (Kisliuk 1997, 183) of urohs wearing, and this made my interview all the more rich and fulfilling for me as the interviewer, and I think for Trish as the interviewee. We were “co-creating” the interview experience (Sheftel and Zembrzycki 2013).

In concluding this discussion of the indigenously based research approach of talanoa and koasoai it is important to point out that much of the Pohnpeian indigenous and linguistic knowledge I rely upon in this thesis, comes from my own upbringing as a Pohnpeian (Narayan 1993; Smith 2012). For example in Chapter 5, I write about a particular urohs with a purple pahsu (clams) mwahi. Upon seeing this urohs I immediately recognized the mwahi design and, therefore, knew it was functioning as sexual metaphor, which was crucial information for a thorough analysis of this particular urohs. Most Pohnpeian knowledge cannot be found in dictionaries or in history or anthropology texts about Pohnpei. It is not recorded; it is lived. What I know as a Pohnpeian I learned from my elders: pahpa, my great grandmother, Nohnno Li (Lihter), Nahnep, Nohnno Emiko, as well as other family and friends who I grew up with and maintain relationships with. This is not to say that I have not learned and do not continue to gain insight from the scholarship on Pohnpei. I am extremely grateful to have this work to fall back on, cite when necessary and engage with. However, there is so much indigenous research that still needs to be done, a wealth of knowledge that still needs to be shared and preserved for future generations of mehn Pohnpei.

³⁶ See “How to Do Oral History, Third Edition” 2000 (no author).

Kilelehdi urohs wet

Throughout my ethnographic practice, visual documentation has been critical to representing, interpreting and contextualizing the highly visual textiles and forms of dress that are urohs, and the *lien Pohnpei* who embody and “body” them. Given their vibrant colors, neon threads, elaborate literal and metaphorical designs, and masterful *menginpeh*, urohs en Pohnpei need to be seen, as well as analyzed and written about. The multiple meanings urohs have for women and the knowledge they convey about their makers, wearers, collectors and sellers are further evoked through the ethnographic photographs I took and use in this thesis (Pink 2007). Privileging the visual nature of urohs and the creative nting they require also speaks to and further demonstrates the “visual roots” of Pacific literature (T. Teaiwa 2010a).

It is the visual, through my poetry, which is a continuation and perpetuation of earlier visual texts, and my photographs that I attempt to create a multisensorial (Pink 2009) experience of urohs that comes closest to the actual feeling of these textiles. My readers cannot reach out and touch an urohs or experience what it’s like to wear one, however, the combination of nting and *kilel* (photographs) creates a *sensation* in both the body and mind. In this urohs thesis, I *men aramas en kilelehdi*³⁷ urohs; I want people to recognize urohs. My visual archive is central to this recognition.

The *misihn en deidei* I discuss throughout this chapter—the critical and creative, the poetry and prose, the theory and method—has allowed me to create an urohs thesis that is indigenously framed, Pohnpei-centric and female centered. As a poet ethnographer, who reflexively studies and writes about the textured and textile art of urohs en Pohnpei, and how it is connected to a heritage of women’s nting that continues in the present with my scholarly and creative nting, I privilege the highly sensual and inherently visual roots of Pacific scholarship. This thesis continues a Pacific genealogy of the “oceanic imaginary” (see T. Teaiwa 2010a) that necessitates the artistic with the analytical through a vulnerable, experiential ethnography, the fabric, and a careful, considerate poetic response, the *mwahi*.

³⁷ *Kilel* translates as more than just “photograph” in Pohnpeian. It means “sign, mark, picture, camera, movie, motion picture” and *kilelehdi* is “to mark; to recognize; to take note of” (Rehg and Sohl 1979, 39).

My immersive ethnographic research was grounded in a sense of *beingthereness* (Behar 2009) not only as an indigenous ethnographer, but also, and perhaps more importantly, as a lien Pohnpei whose own life and identity are entangled with urohs. Intrinsically social, these skirts thread women together in Pohnpei and outward to Guam and other “homes” away from home, even New Zealand (Clifford 1994). I became attached to the women I engaged in koasoai with, the memories created, the voices I heard and recorded that travelled with me, and the places I “dwelled,” (Visweswaran 1994), which oftentimes felt like new homes or extensions of old ones. I knew from the start that my research was personal, although I didn’t realize the extent to which my own narrative would be interwoven with those of other lien Pohnpei.

Other Pacific women scholars and writers, who advocate for the senses (Brady 2004; Pink 2009) and sensuality in their work, helped to situate my own work as a poet writing reflexively about material culture within the interdisciplinarity of Pacific Studies. My poetic *menginpeh* comes with the artistic responsibility to not only perpetuate the *nting* of lien Pohnpei, but to convey more, to add depth and feeling. Poetry can be a critical bridge between the sensually experienced and the critical retelling, but to do it well, the poet ethnographer must avoid romanticizing, and in my case, as is the case with other indigenous researchers, avoid anthropologizing our own people.

An “anthropology of things” and the language of articulation have provided me the theoretical space to express and interpret the dynamic, innovative, *lived* garments (Banerjee and Miller 2003) that are urohs. The materiality of urohs as *dipwisou en lih* or women’s wealth is renewable and embodied in the social where the maker, the *sohn deidei*, seller (*lien pisines*), exchanger and wearer stitch together Pohnpeian society in significantly cultural and aesthetic ways. Again, it is what these textiles do that gives meaning and value.

Lastly, my research and writing are very much about giving voice to my fellow lien Pohnpei, as this is a project about them and the *dipwisou en lih* they embody and “body.” Koasoai along with oral history interviews, and their transcription, allowed the

women I interviewed to share their own narratives about the multilayered meanings this textile holds in their lives. As a visual “thing,” urohs are meant to be seen, displayed and worn on the body, and my photographs are integral to this. Menginpehn lih is a sensual, visual expression of who we were and what we are as lien Pohnpei. Evenglynn opened this chapter with her menginpeh as displayed through the urohs she sews; I now introduce the lien Rohnkiti whose image disturbs and enlightens the history of our writing. Kilelehdi me pwukat.

Chapter 3: Flowers, hearts and mermaids: the evolution and history of urohs

[Woman with arms and legs tattooed...1899]

she is somebody's grandmother
her photo posted on the Pohnpei HPO Facebook site
unsmiling and naked
she glares at me
eyebrows curved in attitude
as if she just said "ohsa!"
discomfort rages
petite frame
short hair
stark background
the nakedness of it all
I am trespassing
on to the colonial gaze

then you notice
mwahi
subtle patterns
making waves across her thighs
lighter than what I'd imagined
her pubic hair is darker
in this B&W photo
pelipel woven around her
thighs and buttocks like
a fine mat
delicate, soft
nting

perhaps my gaze 114 years later
is also colonial
I cannot read the nting
we no longer speak the same
visual language on skin
we met on a laptop
in Wellington, NZ

ihs kowe?
lien Rohnkiti



Figure 3.1. Lien Pohnpei from Rohnkiti, Kitti with pelipel. 1899-1900. Harry Clifford Fassett, photographer. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution (BAE GN 40121).

“Tattoos are inseparable from the person’s body, which in turn represents the Kalinga self... Tattoos as markings can also be seen as remembrances on the skin and a cutaneous ‘archive’—a repository of stored memories, remembrances and other information. Essentially, tattoos record the biography of the wearer.”

~Analyn “Ikin” Salvador-Amores (Malanes 2013)

What was she thinking? What were the circumstances surrounding her being photographed? Was she pressured to remove her clothing? How old was she? What was her name? These are the questions I asked and continue to ask myself after discovering this photograph taken by Harry Clifford Fassett in 1899 and posted on the Pohnpei Historic Preservation Office (HPO) Facebook page. Every time I look at the image I feel disturbed, haunted even. The young woman looks angry and obviously uncomfortable with the situation. Her hair is cut short, which could mean she was distressed for some reason or perhaps a male relative had cut it off.¹ Her short hair suggests the lien Rohnkiti was vulnerable to manipulation, possibly by the photographer and/or other men. The lien Rohnkiti probably didn't know what it meant to be photographed. Never in her wildest imagination would she have known that her photo, 114 years later, would have ended up on computers everywhere, her body exposed for all eyes to see. I stared at the image in awe finding it disturbingly magnificent. It felt wrong for it to be there on Facebook, yet, I was grateful, for selfish reasons, for my research, and as a curious Pohnpeian, to be able to actually see what these tattoos looked like on a lien Pohnpei of this time. Yet I still feel guilty for the excitement I felt at the expense of her exposure. Had I encroached where my gaze didn't belong? Was I participating in a colonial gaze? Perhaps I was because the photographs (there are actually two) are colonial; the perfect example of the white male gaze on the exotic, native female naked *other*. The second photo is a profile of the young woman's entire body that shows her pelipel across her buttocks and down the back of her legs. This profile photograph is quite beautiful; her expression more calm. I could have chosen to open this chapter with it, but prefer the challenge of the above photo. I almost like that she does not look passive; she looks feisty; like the kind of woman who could withstand the pain it took to receive her tattoos. It's the look of lih tohrohr. Ready for a fight. Komwad. Tough.

I wanted to know who was behind the lens, so I searched for Harry Clifford Fassett on Google and found out that he was 29 years of age at the time he took the photo as a member of the US Fish Commission Albatross, a steamer on which scientific expeditions were taken to various parts of the world (Landwehr, n.d.). He had taken many photos of

¹ Male relatives, especially older brothers in Pohnpei, have the authority to cut the hair of their younger sisters for misbehavior (Hanlon 1988, 79-80). I have personally witnessed this kind of situation.

Pacific Islanders on the expedition where he served as a captain's clerk, chart maker and photographer. The other islanders in his photos don't look so angry, but then they were not naked. The two photos of the lien Rohnkiti (Rohnkiti woman) were the only naked photos I saw from all the photos taken by Fassett I've seen online. Why is this the case? Fassett took several portraits of young (clothed) Pohnpeians, all from Rohnkiti. The women dressed in likoutei (cloth wraparounds or lavalava) and the men in their koahl (hibiscus and coconut fibre skirts). I assume they were taken on the same day; it's obvious the other photographs were taken in the same spot. I also wonder if they were alone when the photo was taken; the unnamed tattooed woman and Mr. Fassett. The American man fascinated by the native woman with her magnificent pelipel, desperate to capture it on his glass plate camera, which would have taken quite some time to set-up. Given the look on her face and the discomfort "written" all over her body, I don't think they were lovers. But, I don't know. Nobody knows the circumstances.

It's her nakedness I find most shocking given that I'd never seen a photo of a naked Pohnpeian. All of the old photos I've seen of Pohnpeians showed them wearing koahl, likoutei or Mother Hubbard dresses. I knew Pohnpeians were tattooed in the past, but hadn't come across historical photos that actually showed them. This makes obvious sense given that they were always dressed and the tattoos, women's in particular, were in inconspicuous, highly sensual parts of the body. Detailed drawings of Pohnpeian pelipel completed by artists who were part of Spanish and German expeditions (A. Cabeza Pereiro 1895; Hambruch 1908-1910) were the most realistic depictions I had seen (see Figure 3.2). While not shocking because they were drawings rather than photographs, these too required a male colonial gaze, one that was actually more invasive, particularly the Hambruch drawings, but permissible under the guise of "science." I had made copies of these drawings and took them to Pohnpei to show people. If I had a copy of the photo of the tattooed woman at the time I would have taken it with me too. Perhaps I could have found some of her descendants who may have recognized her and told me her name. I will bring her photo with me the next time I go, and perhaps take it to Iso Nahnken en Kitti, the second highest-ranking chief in Kitti chiefdom, whose interview I discuss in Chapter 4. He could help me find some of her descendants in Rohnkiti.

Later in this chapter I write about how pelipel functioned as a form of clothing. Not in the sense that Pohnpeians, as well as other Pacific Islanders, went around with just the tattoos on their skin as clothing. It was a different, more intimate form of “clothing” that became a part of the skin, a part of their being. As such, the tattooed body required clothing to protect these precious markings that conveyed the manaman of the wearer as well as maintained “social and spatial distance” (Küchler and Were 2014, xx). German anthropologist Kerstin Werle writes how the *teor* (lavalava) worn by women in Lamotrek Atoll in Yap, FSM “belong” with the tattoos they covered (2014, 73). “In the past, Lamotrek women were tattooed only in places covered by the lavalava (and some old women still carry these tattoos today)” (2014, 73). As can be seen in the image of the Rohnkiti woman, her tattoos go all the way down her legs, and are most pronounced around the thigh and pubic area. Perhaps like the Lamotrekese women, her *likoutei* belonged with the *nting* (writing) it concealed. It’s her expression that shows her feeling of exposure in having her pelipel revealed. It is highly likely she was forced to stand there, vulnerable. She was not an “open book;” no Pohnpeians of that time were or even are now. We pride ourselves on keeping things hidden.

I choose to reclaim this *lien Rohnkiti*. Like Samoan-Japanese artist Shigeyuki Kihara, “What I do is re-occupy that [colonial] gaze...I come from the point of view of the insider” (Kihara, as quoted in Tamaira 2010, 20). By placing her image at the opening of this chapter I situate her within the context of other *lien Pohnpei* and our histories, our creativity and our own interpretations of ourselves, similar to what Kihara does in her multimedia work (Tamaira 2010). Despite the problematic nature of the photograph, we are looking at a Pohnpeian woman whose image carries a piece of Pohnpei that no longer exists. It’s precious, an artifact of sorts, especially to Pohnpeians. In her article “Photography, Poetry, and the Dressed Bodies of Léopold Sédar Senghor” Leslie W. Rabine writes “Roland Barthes calls photography “this pure deictic language,” whose “very essence” is the undeniable past reality of its referent, “the this-has-been” (Barthes as quoted in Rabine 2013, 172). The *lien Rohnkiti* is preserved and her tattooed body is proof of *lien Pohnpei*’s pelipel; she is the “this-has-been.” There is no denying there is something incredible about gazing at a photograph that reflects back on what I am writing about. As a Pohnpeian woman writing about *lien Pohnpei* of the past and present, I am using her photo for academic purposes, but more importantly, to

perpetuate the legacy of doadoak en lih. Just as it was breathtaking (and shocking!) for me to view her image for the first time on Facebook, I think it's important for my readers to be able to see for themselves what a Pohnpeian woman's tattooed body looked like within the context of my research. I hope it will allow readers to visualize the threads that link her pelipel to the textile heritage of lien Pohnpei, including urohs, and my poetry. Her image enlightens and illuminates as muse for this chapter; I ask her to guide my menginpeh about menginpehn lien Pohnpei.

The tattooed lien Rohnkiti begins this genealogy of lien Pohnpei's menginpeh from skin to fabric to computer screen. In this chapter I provide a women-centered history of clothing in Pohnpei, starting with the earliest indigenous forms of "clothing" or body adornment/decoration (kapwat) on the island, tattooing, or pelipel in Pohnpeian. I begin here because tattoos can be read as visual texts (Teaiwa 2010a) on skin or even "cutaneous archives" (Malanes 2013), but more importantly, as was the case in Pohnpei, it was lih, women, who tattooed. Lih were kedin nting, "female masters of writing" or female tattoo specialists, with the manaman to "design" women (Werle 2014, 73) and men; to literally write their identities and histories on their bodies. They also made the most valuable loom woven textiles, such as dohr and exquisitely woven shell necklaces to decorate or kapwata the bodies of high status or soupeidi men, as signifiers of rank and authority. Lien Pohnpei's wealth was thus considered what anthropologist Annette Weiner refers to as "inalienable possessions" (Weiner 1992).

Likou meimei (breadfruit bark cloth) worn by women, as well as koahl worn by men, were also made by women. This creative menginpeh has continued into the present in various ways through doadoak en lih, the most obvious and important being sewing, which was introduced by Protestant missionaries and Catholic nuns in the 19th century, but associated with women's actual production of cloth throughout Pohnpei's past. Sewing is a newer form of nting that requires the same creativity, vision and menginpeh mwahu. Contemporary Tongan women also creatively innovate using store bought vylene instead of barkcloth to make ngatu pepa, which is considered a form of koloa ("thing of value;" treasure") and used in ritual events (Addo 2013, 200). In Pohnpei, both the nting of the past and present necessitate the skilled and "fine-hands" of women (see Māhina-Tuai and Māhina 2011 for a discussion of Tongan women's crochet

embroidery work). While past nting required the ihnentek² (“a small rake made of sharpened animal bones or thorns dipped in ink”) and the human body on which to write, contemporary nting through deidei (sewing) requires a sewing machine and imported fabric and thread. My own creative nting, poetry, is done on a MacBook Pro where my fingers type in response to women’s urohs nting, thus, creating a newer form of indigenous writing by a lien Pohnpei. My words form images in the mind. My thesis illustrates a continuity between women’s “textuality” quite similar to what Tahitian poet Flora Devatine does in her “chant-cum-essay” (Sharrad 2007, 134) *Tergiversations et Reveries de L’Ecriture Orale: Te Pahu a Hono’ura* (1998) as described by Paul Sharrad. According to Sharrad:

Flora Devatine continues a tradition of creative adaptation in her imagery, moving from hiapo [Tahitian tapa or barkcloth] to related textile forms, including the Islands quilt (in Tahiti, the ‘*tifaefae*’). The poet tapping at her keyboard is like her mother bent over her sewing machine...Words are cut and pasted like appliqué quilts, the writer and the sewer take on aspects of the ancient specialists in canoe-making, chanting, medicine (127)” (2007, 135-136).

Devatine writes:

*“Des mots appliqués
Des mots patchwork
Tout découpés
Des mots tahu’a
Des mots chirurgiens
Tout tifaefae.
Appliquéd words
Patchwork words
All cut out
From words of master craftsmen,
The words of surgeons,
All tifaefae.”* (quoted by Sharrad 2007, 136).

Like Devatine, I move between different forms of nting: pelipel, dohr, likou meimei, urohs and poetry, all of which are decorative, sensual-textual. They all began from mwahi, which is an invaluable form of kapwat. Today, urohs are vivid expressions of women’s continued menginpeh and have come to mean many things to lien Pohnpei: an authentic female textile and form of dress, the possession of which is a necessary part of women’s wealth; a distinctly Pohnpeian gift; prestige items that are a vital part of

² Ihnentek means “mother of thorn,” which reflects the power of women in Pohnpei and their important role in the art of tattooing on the island (Kihleng 1996, 61).

women's exchange in today's chiefly political system, income generators or commodities that function as economic lifelines for the women who make and sell them, and, significantly, as a marker of Pohnpeian female identity in Pohnpei and on Guam.

These defining and multiple meanings of urohs are explored later in the chapter through an oral history interview with Emiko Emilios, Nohno Emi, my paternal great aunt. She is the senior female of my deceased grandfather's large extended family, the nohnohn peneinei laud or limesekedil, and is thus invested with authority and accorded a great deal of respect. Nohno Emi's wardrobe of urohs and other dipwisou en lih serve as a mirror to her life and the social and material relations that define her identity as a lien Pohnpei.

Beginnings: kedin nting ("female masters of writing")

Discovering the photograph of the tattooed lien Rohnkiti inspired me to place her within the genealogy of my research and the women I interviewed. The lih laud I spoke with had all seen tattooed women when they were young, and now I had (though not in person). I was thrilled! Could she have been the grandmother of any of these women? I calculated. Nahnep U (Eliwiter Moses) was 80 (born in 1932) at the time of our interview (28 September 2012) and her mother would have been born in the early 1900s, with her maternal grandmother born in the late 19th century. The woman from Rohnkiti in the photograph looks about 18, and had she been tattooed around the age of 16, she would have been tattooed in 1897 had the photo in fact been taken in 1899. The German ethnographer Paul Hambruch claims that "Although they still practiced the custom in 1910, nothing more could be learned about tattooing ceremonies" (Hambruch translation 1983, Footnotes, 13 1, 2-1). By 1910, the practice of tattooing was dying out. The lien Rohnkiti could have been Eliwiter, Maria Salome, or Emiko's grandmother. She would have been part of the last generation of Pohnpeians that were tattooed. I wish I could speak to her. I want to see into her world. She stands there trapped, naked and tattooed in the black and white photo behind the white male gaze of the photographer, and I sit here tattoo-less wearing sweats staring at a computer 114 years later. But, in a sense, we are communicating here in my thesis. I want to tell her:

these words are ugly³

these words will stick on skin
duwehte nting en mehn mahsoko⁴
these words won't wash away
we have computers now
they'll last forever
sohte lingan en nting wet⁵
your writing was magnificent
textual-visual
sensual
permanent in a non-artificial way
"written" by women

that nting died with you
what we know of it
only exists in German and Spanish books
your photographs and perhaps a few others
we must keep typing these ugly words
and singing too
always clicking save

From the mwehin kawa ("period of building"⁶) until the late 19th century, Pohnpeian men and women were tattooed. Kedin nting tattooed young men and women at puberty, as a rite of passage before entering into marriage, and most men and women were tattooed (Hambruch 1936; Hanlon 1988; Kihleng 1996). Kihleng writes, "The elaborate tattoo designs identified one's lineage, recounted clan histories, and other historical events of the island. In addition, tattoos were aesthetically pleasing and, therefore, made Pohnpeian men and women more beautiful" (1996, 62). The lih laud I interviewed, who were 78 years of age and older, all had grandmothers who were tattooed (like the lien Rohnkiti), although their mothers were not. The eldest of the women, Maria Salome Amor, who was 91 years old living in Awak, U, told me that her father had been tattooed on his legs, but her mother was not (personal interview, 11 December 2012). All of these women claimed the practice had died out before they were born, and only lih laud still had tattoos when they were young (personal interviews, Ester Alex, Emiko Emilios and Eliwiter Moses 2012). When I asked them

³ Pohnpeians thought their nting superior to mehn wai's writing because it was permanent and didn't wash off in the rain (see Hanlon 2003).

⁴ Like the writing of the people of the past.

⁵ There's no beauty in this writing.

⁶ Hanlon 1988, 8.

whether they knew why these women were tattooed, several of them said “re kin akilihki” or “an act of a real woman,” meaning that it was how women showed they were women and exhibited their strength and fearlessness.

These elderly women also mentioned how it was quite common when they were young to see men and women who had lekelek, or deliberate cutting of their skin that caused scarring. Women’s lekelek were made by other women and sometimes men (Ester Alex and Emiko Emilios 2012). Men’s lekelek, which also referred to semi-castration, were often self-inflicted. Having lekelek, like pelipel, showed one’s strength and toughness, and demonstrated masculinity and femininity (Falgout 2009). Saul Riesenberg writes of the existence of kamadipw en kadepwedepw or “feast of bathing” that took place around the age of 16 for boys and girls after they had been tattooed and after boys had undergone lekelek (Riesenberg 1968; Hanlon 1988). Riesenberg describes the kamadipw en kadepwedepw as a feast given after “the 4-day period during which bathing was proscribed, following the tattooing done on both sexes and the semi castration practiced on adolescent boys” to celebrate their ability to withstand the pain of tattooing and thus their eligibility to marry (1968, 89).

Pohnpeian notions of personhood and beauty were thus intimately tied to bodily pain and the fortitude to withstand this pain, as demonstrated on the skin. A woman or man could only be a physically attractive, fully functioning adult member of Pohnpeian society if s/he could handle the pain of being tattooed, which was considered minor compared to the emotional pain one would face in life (see Wendt 1999). The pain associated with being tattooed, while excruciating, applied only to the exterior. It was a person’s interior (loale) that must always be protected (Falgout 2009). For lien Pohnpei, being tattooed prior to marriage meant that women were better prepared for the responsibilities of marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, child rearing and community life. This idea persists in the present day, but not in such obvious or painful ways. Lien Pohnpei today are still expected to demonstrate strength and live as lih tohrohr, “a woman alone” (Falgout 2009). Lih tohrohr and its male equivalent, ohl tohrohr, are engrained Pohnpeian notions of behavior and thought. A lih tohrohr is expected to be fearless and never show weakness. If a woman doubts herself or is faced with a challenge, she will be reminded to be a lih tohrohr, as is expected of her. The word lih

tohrohr is even “written” or sewn onto one of my favorite urohs, as I discuss in the next chapter.



Figure 3.2. *Tatuage De Mujer*, sketch of Pohnpeian woman's tattooed legs. A. Cabeza Pereiro, 1895.

We can understand pelipel as a form of permanent clothing or “second skin” for Pohnpeians, consisting of elaborate designs and patterns, or mwahi, as documented in ethnohistorical accounts of the Island, but the work of contemporary scholars from other parts of the Pacific can also shed useful light. In his seminal essay “Afterword: Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body” Albert Wendt expounds on Samoan tattooing or tatau:

In a deep psychological, mythological, symbolic way, tatauing is the act of printing or scripting a genealogical-spiritual-philosophical text on the blood, of testing it to see if it can bear the pain of being in a human body, of storying it, giving it human design, shape, form, and identity yet risking all that if the tatauing results in your bleeding to death or your contracting AIDS (1999, 409).

If we contemplate Wendt’s description further, essentially *lien Pohnpei wia ntingih nta* (were writing blood) in the literal and figurative sense into Pohnpeian bodies. *Kedin nting* had a serious job, one that could result in death. I can’t think of a more important

(and exhilarating!) task than writing the cosmologies and genealogies of the person being tattooed into her/his blood with beautiful mwahi to kapwata their bodies.

James F. O'Connell, the Irish beachcomber who spent roughly five years in Pohnpei in the late 1820s or early 30s, received a full body tattoo, married into the chiefly political system, and published a book on his island "adventures," edited from his verbal narration in 1836 (Hanlon 2003), provided a very insightful interpretation of what pelipel meant to Pohnpeians. He narrates:

Tattooing, spoken of in another connection as embalming the memory of the dead, is an art essential, in its symbolical language, to the preservation of the traditional usages of the natives...Singing is, like tattooing, an important method of perpetuating the history and fame of the island, ancient aristocracy, religion, and traditions (O'Connell, 1836, 161, 175-6).

O'Connell's insights on pelipel are quite evocative of Wendt's analysis of the Samoan tatau, over one hundred and fifty years later. Both Wendt and O'Connell link the art form to mortality and indigenous spirituality in a very visceral sense.

Pohnpeians inherited identities and genealogical connections mainly through women, as Pohnpeian society was, and remains, matrilineal where clan, community, family, and personal identity, as well as political status were determined through generations of mothers. For a society to necessitate these genealogies and histories be imprinted into the skin in a kind of re-insertion or re-writing of identity is not only quite intense, but speaks to the power held by the kedin nting. Pelipel served then as a permanent reminder to Pohnpeians of who they were, their purpose in life, their worldview, and the significance of women socially as mothers and materially as kedin nting.

Knowing this elaborate and important knowledge system no longer exists and cannot be recovered is painful for me as a Pohnpeian. As an indigenous researcher, what I can do is rediscover, interpret and reinterpret, critically analyze and stretch the boundaries of how we think about indigenous forms of knowledge in the Pacific, such as tattooing. As discussed in the previous chapter, Teresia Teaiwa argues that the origins of Pacific Literature are not only oral as is commonly assumed (2010a). She challenges readers to explore the likelihood that Pacific Islanders had more complex ways of "writing" and viewing their island universe.

Using T. Teaiwa's hypothesis, Pohnpeian pelipel, like the tatau of Samoa and tattoos in other islands of the Pacific, were evidence of a complex visual literature, one that Christianity and colonialism played a large part in destroying on many islands, including Pohnpei. In terms of my thesis, addressing the significance of pelipel as one of the early visual arts of Pohnpei, one that was intimately connected to the body and soaren mehn Pohnpei is critically important. The skin was sacred text for Pohnpeians of the past that was closely linked to their identities. These tattoos were what had to be worn first, written into the skin, before they were covered by women's likou meimei and later likoutei and men's koahl. In their Introduction to *The Art of Clothing: A Pacific Experience*, Susanne Küchler and Graeme Were write:

What is crucial to these new understandings of cloth and clothing is the concept of 'skin' and its pivotal role as idiom of personhood and identity. The functional association between skin and cloth in Pacific anthropology means that we can formulate bark cloth, body wrappings, clothing and so forth as 'second' skins, allowing us to question the conventional paradigm of a surface-depth model of personhood (2005, xx).

Without pelipel and kedin nting, Pohnpeians would have been without the protective covering of who they were. For Pohnpei, their tattoos covered and, more importantly, kapwatahda what was considered sacred: the genitals, buttocks and thighs. But, the visual for women also included the "second skins" of the cloth they produced and the textiles they made, which were also key aspects, material and otherwise, of their identities.

Ester Alex, like the other lih laud I spoke with during my research, didn't know why Pohnpei stopped tattooing. She recalled that most of the elderly women she saw as a child had pelipel, but "dih en lih o nek te nek"; "once those women were finished [they died] it finished" (23 November 2012). Those tattooed women died and took their art with them. I asked her to tell me what she'd heard about women's pelipel and she replied with, "Sehse, kapwat ieu, re kapwatiki, ak komwad ki. Mah dih en irail kau lih emen sohte wia re kepitiki pwe e masepwehk, tiahk en roatoroat" (23 November 2012). "I don't know, it was a decoration, they decorated themselves with it, acted tough with it. If one of their group of women didn't get it done then they made fun of them as scared, a custom of the unenlightened." Kapwat made and continue to make things

wearable. It's as if the skin became wearable once tattoos were "written" into it. The skin was ready for the world and no longer afraid, although it was still covered by clothing that had kapwat on it too (see Wendt 1999).

Just as tattoos and other visual arts, such as architecture and the double hulled or outrigger canoes, functioned (and often still function) as part of a greater visual literature for Pacific Islanders that demonstrated an intellectualism that went beyond the oral, clothing can be read as a continuation of the indigenous visual text. In the Pohnpei case, kedin nting stopped writing on skin, however, a visual lineage continued through women's relationship with cloth as a highly valued art form and marker of identity and personhood.

One form of writing for another

The woman illustrated in Figure 3.3 is wearing one of the earliest forms of cloth kapwat made by women, likou meimei. Luelen Bernart of Rehntu, Kitti who was born on 28 November 1866⁷ described Pohnpeians of the mwehin kawa as making their clothes from breadfruit bark (Bernart 1977; Hanlon 1988). Bernart writes:

They would cut down a length of breadfruit, a span long or more...remove the bad part of the skin...make a thing for pounding the breadfruit bark. They would take care lest it tear, and it would be spread apart and become broad...longer. These were the women's wrap-arounds and also their sheets at night. When they slept they were very good, soft and warm (1977, 16).

⁷ The circumstances around the publication of his manuscript, *The Book of Luelen*, are complicated and according to Hanlon, the text was never intended for publication (see Hanlon 1992).

His description sounds similar to the process involved in making barkcloth from the paper mulberry plant (known generally as tapa⁸) found throughout Polynesia and parts of Melanesia (see Petersen 2009). Bernart also describes ohl en Pohnpei (Pohnpeian men) of that time as wearing loincloths that he referred to as kijinmueinpalan⁹ which was made from banana fibre, the same material from which dohr were made (1977, 16, 25). During the mwehin Saudeleur or “the time of the Saudeleurs” when Pohnpei was controlled from Nan Madol,¹⁰ Bernart describes a change in dress for men who then wore koahl made from kelou (hibiscus fibre) and kimwer or mwatal (wild pandanus) (1977, 72, 58-59 in Annotations). A distinction between the clothes and accessories of chiefly men and that of commoners was also noted during this period of Pohnpei’s history and after (Riesenberg 1968). It is women who produced these high status valuables or “second skins” that instilled rank and manaman on their wearers.

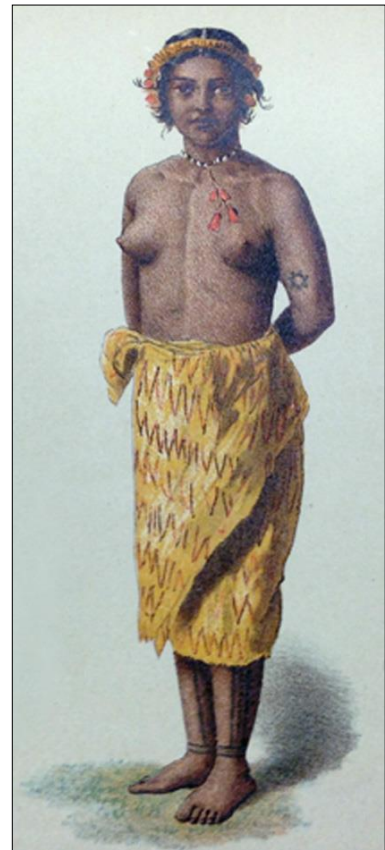


Figure 3.3. (Ponape) Mädchen, sketch of Pohnpeian “girl” wearing likou meimei and elinpwur. Franz Hershheim, 1883.

I surmise then that women’s historical association with cloth production and weaving, menginpehn lih made it possible for the Saudeleurs, Nahmwarkis, Nahnkens and other

⁸ Tapa is called ngatu in Tonga, siapo in Samoa and masi in Fiji where it is still produced (Addo 2013).

⁹ In the *Annotations to The Book of Luelen*, the authors explain that the word kijinmueinpalan was “analysed by one Ponapean as ‘little drying pattern’, referring to the drying in the sun of newly-dyed threads of different colours” (1977, 11). Bernart’s book was written in Pohnpeian using the early writing system introduced by the Protestant missionaries in the 1850s, which is quite different from today’s written Pohnpeian. I dissected the word kijinmueinpalan to analyze its meaning: kijin or kisin (small, tiny, little), muein or mwahi, palan or palang (to dry in the sun or hang outside). Therefore, it appears that mwahi or, in this case, “muein” was being used to describe some of the oldest textiles recorded in Pohnpei.

¹⁰ The mwehin Saudeleur lasted for approximately 500 years ending in the 1600s (Hanlon 1988). Nan Madol or “places in between” was the seat of Saudeleur rule. It is a basalt stone complex of 92 islets crosscut by waterways that sits on top of a reef; its ruins can be visited off the coast of Temwen, Madolenihmw (see Kihleng and Eperiam 1989).

soupeidi men to distinguish themselves from the rest given who they were. What does this tell us about the power and agency of lien Pohnpei? A partial answer to this question can be found in the term limesekedil, which was used to refer to the senior woman of a matrilineage or keinek “lih mesenih kedkedil kohwei” which translates as “the oldest or most senior female who weaves along the way” (Kihleng 1996, 260). In the past limesekedil wielded great power and respect and could pass down land to keinek members. They also possessed knowledge of their lineage’s history and genealogy that was imparted on chosen lineage mates. The limesekedil, along with the mesenih en keinek,¹¹ the senior male, oversaw the matrilineage. The term also demonstrates the immense value placed on women as “weavers” who clothed, decorated, nurtured and loved their children, the members of the keinek. In the case of chiefly matrilineages, the limesekedil wove together their members imbuing them with rank and status in the social sense as well as in the material one, given the significance of women’s cloth wealth.



Figure 3.4. Ohl en Pohnpei, most likely from Rohnkiti, wearing koahl and elaborate dohr while holding machete, 1899. Harry Clifford Fassett, photographer. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution (NAA INV 05042900).

¹¹ By “the mid-nineteenth century, the keinek was no longer functioning as a corporate group. The matrilineage did, however, maintain its significance as a descent segment vested with power and authority over its members, specifically in terms of political titles and important forms of knowledge” (Kihleng 1996, 97). Therefore, the mesenih en keinek’s role “diminished” whereas the limesekedil continued to play an important role.

Making such valuables, which constitute *dipwisou en lih*, to *kapwata* chiefly men was important work that required great skill and patience. This was noted by one of the first European traders to live and work in Pohnpei, Andrew Cheyne, who arrived on the island in 1842. He made some of the first observations of the work and status of *lien Pohnpei*:

Much respect and attention is awarded to the females at this island, and they are not made to do any work but what rightfully belongs to them. All the out door labour is chiefly performed by the men, whose employment consists in building houses and canoes, planting yams, fishing and bringing home the produce of their plantations, also planting Kava and cooking. The women seldom assist at any out door employment, except it may be fishing and weeding the ground, but employ their time chiefly in manufacturing head dresses, weaving belts, sewing mats, making baskets, taking care of the house and children &c. The work of both sexes is however very light, and much of their time is spent in pastimes, of which idleness forms the chief part (Cheyne 1971, 188).

As illustrated by Cheyne, the making of textiles and other forms of *kapwat* was, and continues to be, the domain of women and qualifies as “women’s wealth” in Pohnpei. As Heather Young Leslie and Ping-Ann Addo explain, “The shorthand qualifier ‘women’s wealth’ has referred to textiles of any kind: quilts, fine mats or paper” (2007, 18). I wish to add other valuables to this list. *Lien Pohnpei*’s distinct *menginpeh* was illustrated on skin, as well as other “texts” that served to clothe and decorate the body, and in the case of *soupeidi*¹² men, ensured their sacredness. The most precious textile that was loom woven up until the early 20th century was the *dohr*, “worn by only those of the highest social rank as insignias of their power and status. As such, like Hawaiian feather cloaks and Samoan fine mats, these belts were imbued with the sacred power (*manaman*) and identities of their owners” (Kihleng 1996, 60). The *dohr* and *lakiot* (more elaborate *dohr*) were extremely valuable and would have been considered “inalienable possessions” (Weiner 1992). Bernart notes that if a *lakiot* were to be sold “it would cost everything” (Bernart 1977, 16), and Riesenbergs claims one *lakiot* was worth the value of a canoe (Fischer, Riesenbergs and Whiting 1977, 11). Saul Riesenbergs and A.H. Gayton meticulously document and describe Pohnpeian *dohr* weaving in “Caroline Island Belt Weaving” (1952). After describing the “ornamental patterning in beads” the authors write:

¹² Chiefly men and women of the highest status are referred to as *soupeidi*, which literally means “to face down” because when they are seated in a *nahs* or feast house, they are seated above the commoners and look down at them.

When this manipulative achievement is added to the already complex warp-knotted patterning, it will be seen readily that the specialized textile art of Ponape is one of high virtuosity. There is little wonder that, having developed the skill necessary to produce such complex fabrics and arrived at a satisfactory formula for the handsome overlaid designs, there was little need aesthetically for the Ponapean weaver to experiment with other weaving methods (363).

Shell discs and the substituting or augmenting European beads are common enough sewn, strung, lashed, or glued to various types of objects including textiles, in the general Indonesian-Micronesian-Melanesian island area. But the Ponapean method of imbrication relates to their weaving method, brocade; the product seems wholly aboriginal in design and technique. Embellishment with either the glass beads or raveled wool are contact indicators only and imply nothing more than an addition of new and interesting materials in a manner already established in native practice (372).



Figure 3.5. Elaborate dohr gifted to Saul Riesenber by Oliver Nanpei, woven prior to 1870 (see Riesenber and Gayton 1952). (E397780-0) Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution.

Riesenber and Gayton provide evidence of the highly developed art of banana fibre weaving by Pohnpeian women who used imported blue cotton, red and yellow wool and glass beads to “play” with and be creative. In the 1800s Māori weavers also experimented with imported cloth, primarily wool and candlewick, in their whatu kākahu, finger weft-twining cloaks (Tamarapa 2011; Lander 2011). The weavers used wool in vibrant colors to embellish the Māori materials in their kākahu that included muka (“the silky fibre obtained from harakeke,” also known as flax), bird feathers, dog skin and hair (Tamarapa 2011, 11; Lander 2011). Lander writes, “Many of the cloaks in Te Papa’s collection bear testimony to a continuity of weaving knowledge that is dynamic and responsive to change, combining the threads of tradition and innovation in an entwined continuum from past to present” (2011, 62). The same can be said of the dohr examined by Riesenber and Gayton. The foreign materials used in the dohr and kākahu function as kapwat to enhance the indigenous fibres that the weavers had

become so adept at manipulating—using these new materials became trendy. Ever since Pacific Islanders made contact and traded with foreigners, interesting and innovative things have been done with foreign cloth to make it “ours” (see K uchler and Eimke 2010 for Cook Islands’ tivaivai). I wrote the following poem about my own evolution in thinking about visual literature in relation to different “texts:”

Mwahi

I used to think mwahi were just moles
freckles, marks on skin
we all had them in different colors, shapes
and sizes
until I grew up
heard women mutter “mwahi kapw”

moles grew into hibiscus, moons
inspired by nature, Disney, the body
globalization
forming images in the mind
becoming patterns drawn on paper
traced onto fabric
hands moving under Janome needle
tracing hearts and leaves
sewing mwahi out of thread
layered appliqu e
typed and cursive on paper
snip snip to reveal bright reds underneath
urohs unveiled

the legacy continues
of earlier menginpeh
geometrical mwahi carved into kili
with dye
mwahi sewn into banana fibre
on horizontal tension backstrap looms
shiny shell discs¹³ alongside
indigo-dyed cotton
yellow brocade
raveled red fringe of wool
with bead embellishment
putting their mark
their mwahi
for all to see.

¹³ Parts of the poem are inspired by Riesenbergs and Gaytons (1952) description of Pohnpeian dohr.

I had the privilege of handling a dohr from the Pacific Cultures Collection while working at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in 2011. It was the first dohr I had close contact with, as I had only seen a few in museums. Indeed these textiles are extremely fine, like linen. It is daunting to think of the process that went into making these delicate woven belts, a process no longer known to Pohnpeians. Certain Pohnpeian families still have dohr in their possession; although I am not sure how many still exist on the island. The Iso Nahnken and Nahnkeniei of Kitti mentioned having seen a dohr belonging to a family in Kitti. My mother saw one while doing her research that belonged to Masao Hadley, a renowned Pohnpeian historian, and it was wrapped in newspaper. I think it is safe to assume that most dohr still in existence are housed in museums around the world where they are well preserved; unfortunately, most Pohnpeians will never see them.¹⁴



Figure 3.6. Nohno and me with Te Papa's tol (left) from Kosrae and red dohr from Pohnpei, produced in the 1800s, 2010. Pacific Cultures, Te Papa Tongarewa.

Like the Tahitian poet Devatine, I seek to reclaim the indigenous creativity of the earliest forms of nting: pelipel, dohr and likou meimei, contextualizing these art forms within the larger visual landscape of Pohnpeian women's wealth, which continues in contemporary Pohnpei with urohs (and in the case of Tahiti with tifaefae), and other cloth items, such as appliquéd sheets and pillowcases. I breathe life back into the "forgotten" menginpehn lih through my poetry, thus, adding another layer of

¹⁴ Riesenbergs and Gayton's 1952 article was written based on the study of 24 "narrow fabrics" from the Caroline Islands in the collection of the Museum of Anthropology at the University of California and one dohr belonging to Riesenbergs himself, which he donated to the Smithsonian (see Figure 3.5); a quick online search showed that there are 15 Pohnpeian "belts" at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History in their Anthropology collections.

“textuality” through which “women’s wealth” can be read and appreciated. I say forgotten because most Pohnpeians today do not know what dohr are, and though many know that we used to be tattooed, very little is known about the practice. I would say that most contemporary Pohnpeians do not know that it was women who were kedin nting. When relating the larger purpose of Devatine’s work, Sharrad expounds, “This amounts to an indigenous cultural renaissance that broadens the definitions of Ma’ohi culture and presents it as an ongoing, complex and dynamic struggle including all types of textuality” (2007, 134). I believe I am engaged in something very similar here. I am re-presenting the tattooed lien Rohnkiti and recalling the manaman of women through their perpetuation of the indigenous visual literature and arts of Pohnpei.

Importantly, other menginpeh has not been forgotten, including, in addition to urohs, the making of certain kapwat, like mwaramwar¹⁵ (flower garlands), koahl and lehn Pohnpei (coconut oil). The illustration of the woman in Figure 3.3 shows that she is wearing an elinpwur¹⁶ mwaramwar, which is still made today. According to Riesenberg, “Chiefs and rich men formerly wore necklaces (*el en pwur*, or *el en pwul*) made of discoid beads of yellowish or pinkish oyster (*pwahke*) strung on banana fiber” (1968, 66). While these necklaces are no longer made, the aesthetically beautiful fresh, fragrant floral elinpwur we wear in present day Pohnpei, are cherished. These yellow, snake-like mwaramwar are often given as gifts of welcome and farewell¹⁷ and at celebratory occasions, such as graduations and feasting events. In Figure 3.7, Nahnkeniei is wearing an elinpwur she was given at a Catholic church celebration she and Iso Nahnken has just returned from in Wone. As in parts of Polynesia where “*leis* of boiled sweets, chocolate bars and money are increasingly being used instead of ‘traditional’ flower *leis*,” different styles of mwaramwar are being made in Pohnpei today ranging from flower, towel to edible mwaramwar made from pwuh or betel nut (Underhill-Sem 2001, 26). A fragrant flower mwaramwar is perishable whereas a towel mwaramwar is long lasting and multifunctional, used to wipe the sweat off your brow or to mwahiei (ritual weeping performed by women) over the deceased at a mehla.

¹⁵ Mwaramwar are also referred to as kapwat.

¹⁶ Pwuh or seirin Pohnpei, also known puakenikeni in Hawaiian (see Rehg and Sohl 1979).

¹⁷ Elinpwur are sold at the Pohnpei airport and it’s a common sight to see women gifting and wearing these mwaramwar there.



Figure 3.7. (clockwise) Various types of mwaramwar made from flowers, hibiscus fibre, fabric and pwuh at kamadipw en kousapw Saladak; Nahnkeniei Kitti wearing elinpwur, Enipein Pah; Judy S.P. Mauricio wearing elinpwur at Pohnpei International Airport; Women in matching likouli wearing elinpwur about to marekeiso visitors, welcoming for Council of Pacific Traditional Leaders Summit, Governor’s complex, Kolonia, 2012.

Making mwaramwar is a form of doadoak en lih, and an important part of ritually welcoming guests, particularly at kamadipw. Women also rub lehn Pohnpei or store-bought lotion on guests while they are seated in the nahs. Lehn Pohnpei is only produced by certain women today.¹⁸ Koahl, like urohs, continue to be produced by

¹⁸ During Kihleng’s research conducted from 1989-1991 there were four Saladak women who produced lehn Pohnpei (Kihleng 1996). During my research I saw women rubbing Victoria Secret lotion on guests at the kamadipw en kousapw, Saladak on 6 October 2012.

women, often close family members who live in close proximity to one another and weave together, although these fibrous skirts are no longer “the clothes of men” (see Ehrlich 1978). According to Kihleng, koahl are “highly valued economically as an income generating product that enables women to contribute to household resources and exchange events in the form of money, imported foodstuffs, and various material goods and necessities” (1996, 172). Koahl continue to be worn as “kapwat of the past” by Pohnpeians for cultural performances, such as kahlek (dances) and “staged” sakau ceremonies.¹⁹ Today, these textiles are sold in Kolonia and exported to Guam, Hawai‘i and the greater U.S. where they are worn by Polynesian dancers.

As K uchler and Were write:

Clothing has been one of the key visual markers of the advent of colonialism in the Pacific, and was seen by Europeans as one of the signs of the acceptance of civilization by the islanders. However, the way in which cloth and clothing was perceived and incorporated by islanders did not necessarily reflect these ideas, but involved the investment of existing indigenous preoccupations into new materials. Today, both imported and indigenous types of cloth and clothing are integral features of Pacific Island cultures and figure in exchange and religious practice; in fashion and in the decoration of domestic space; in public political activity; as well as in festivals, and the art and tourist market (2005, xxi).

Pohnpeians, like many other indigenous peoples, embraced new technologies, goods and ideas (Christianity in particular) that came from overseas, but this did not make us less Pohnpeian.²⁰ The earlier forms of nting that included tattooing and weaving dohr and other textiles eventually ceased, but nting continued in new forms with imported cloth. Women still laboured and used their creativity to innovate and make new dipwisou en lih, much of which was and still is intended to be worn on the body, like the missionary-inspired Mother Hubbard dress sewn and worn by women in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (see Figures 3.8 and 3.13). Pacific peoples, women in particular, learned how to sew from missionary women, and oftentimes used their bodies to secure

¹⁹ During my research I attended the “Mwoalen Wahu en Wein Pohnpei,” which functioned as a welcoming ceremony for the Council of Pacific Traditional Leaders Summit at the Pohnpei State Governor’s complex, 20 November 2012. There was a staged sakau ceremony that took place, and all of the male sakau servers wore koahl. Two kahlek (dance) performances also took place where both male and female dancers wore koahl.

²⁰ See Hanlon for a discussion of commoner Pohnpeian women’s embrace of Christianity to meet Pohnpeian needs (1988, 130-131).

foreign cloth from whalers and merchants (see Hanlon 1988). Hanlon acknowledges Pohnpeians' agency when he writes, "The decline of certain traditional skills did not constitute cultural disintegration or decline, but instead was the result of pragmatic conscious choices by the people of Pohnpei to make use of the more technologically superior goods of the West available only through commerce with the ships (Hanlon 1988, 85).

With the introduction of foreign goods and sewing techniques in the mid-1800s, a newer form of nting developed that required imported cloth, a needle and thread, and later on, a sewing machine.²¹ Material culture scholars have written extensively about how Pacific women indigenized foreign cloth into something distinctly Tongan, Hawaiian and Pohnpeian (see Kihleng 1996; Kamehiro 2007; Addo, Leslie and Herda 2007; Māhina-Tuai and Māhina 2011). The imported fabric sewn and worn in many parts of the Pacific Islands today is distinctly Pacific, from the Samoan puletasi to the Vanuatu aelan (island) dress to the urohs en Pohnpei (see Cummings 2013). Cloth and Christianity thus became "second skins" for Pohnpeians in the late 19th century through to the present.



Figure 3.8. Nahnmwarki Salomon and his family, Temwen, Madolenihmw. The Nahnmwarki (far left) is wearing pants, a long sleeved shirt and a hat, and the other man (far right) is wearing koahl and long sleeved shirt. The women are wearing Mother Hubbard dresses. Photos taken by Dr. H. Hallier, 1903-1904. Museum Volkenkunde, Netherlands.

²¹ According to Bernart, Henry Nanpei, one of the wealthiest Pohnpeians in the 19th century, was the first person to own a sewing machine in Pohnpei (1977, 125).

This new nting is deidei or sewing in the form of hand and machine embroidery, amimono or suwain, hand and machine appliqué, reverse appliqué and patchwork. The making of pilangkes me deiad (embroidered blankets), kidipen uluhl (pillowcases), appliquéd tehi (sheets) angkasi (handkerchiefs), likouli, likoutei and urohs all became “women’s wealth.” The missionaries taught lien Pohnpei how to deidei, deiad and make suwain, as well as how to nting their way using the alphabet. The poetry I write is a product of Western literacy and a primarily American education. Through writing poems about lien Pohnpei’s menginpeh, from past to present, I link our indigenous, visual nting with our adopted nting, thus creating an nting that is also innovative, creative and labour intensive (see Teaiwa 2010a). All of this “writing” is connected by women’s skillful hands and imaginative minds working with different texts to make something distinctly Pohnpeian and definitively female.

I opened this chapter with the photograph of the tattooed lien Rohnkiti who presides over my words as the visual embodiment of the menginpehn lih on which this thesis is based. In the next section, I present a case study of Nohnno Emiko to introduce lien Pohnpei’s intimate relationship to their cloth wealth. It is through my oral history interviews with Nohnno Emi that included her showing me a wide selection of textiles that I came to more clearly understand the significant role these dipwisou en lih play in women’s lives as “lived garments” of “feeling and social experience” (Banerjee and Miller 2003: 1, 4). As Banerjee and Miller illustrate in *The Sari* (2003), clothing comes alive when it is examined from outside the display case; when the urohs (or sari) interacts with the body, is interlaced with stories about the wearer/owner’s life, and lovingly folded and put away in a kohpwa for future use. Through my interviews with Nohnno Emi, as well as with Judy S. P. Mauricio, a 67 year old long time businesswoman and current President of the Lien Mercedes en Pohnpei,²² a history of dipwisou en lih and lien Pohnpei’s fashion from the mwehin Sapahn (Japanese period) to contemporary times began to sensually unfold.

²² Lien Mercedes en Pohnpei is the island-wide Catholic women’s organization.

Nohno Emiko, nohnohn peneinei laud or limesekedil

As was briefly discussed above, throughout Pohnpei's history, limesekedil played a vital role in perpetuating society materially and socially, particularly so for those of the highest rank and status. In contemporary Pohnpei, limesekedil function more as nohnohn peneinei, the mother, or senior female, of the family, and not necessarily the entire keinek or matrilineage. There are still, however, limesekedil of chiefly matrilineages who wield significant control over their keinek members, and at times publicly so (Kihleng 1996). In this section, I introduce Nohno Emiko, who serves as my extended family's limesekedil or nohnohn peneinei laud, and who thus rules our peneinei and weaves us together with her limpoak (love), guidance and knowledge.



Figure 3.9. Nohno Emi with her "Iel tih" kidipen uluhl.

Nohno Emi

never idle
her short quick steps an almost shuffle
always asking everyone who stops by
*ke mwengeier?*²³
mpwokos and adorable
she spends her time in
her home full of grandchildren
who prefer sleeping next to her
watching Korean dramas
reading her pwuhk sarawi

when she was little
and the moon was ripe
she and the other Nan U children
kin kamadipw ni wap o
drank uhpw and sang songs
udahn kaperen she says of those days
at 14 she cooked and cleaned
for two Japanese policemen
in wartime she worked making leh
at Nanpailong
(where we lived many years later)
she and the other girls would run and hide behind
the paip in Kurumw during air raids

she loved going to church
sewing a new likouli
to debut every Sunday
I heard from other women
that she was quite stylish
in her likou tala

her first husband was Soulikirei
one day after church
neighborhood children saw him
heading for the mountains
with another young woman
Nohno Emi told him to leave
her second husband, Bernard
was a sailor, coming and going,
turns out he had a Kosraean wife and 2 kids
when Nohno Emi was pregnant
with their fourth child
she decided to move on
found another Kosraean man to marry

²³ *Have you eaten?*

Nonaia, the drinker
and part-time singer
he'd sing his way on the boat to Nan U
pregnant again, she told him to leave too
in the meantime she kept on working
cleaning houses, cooking, sewing
going to church, pidpidek seli with lien alem

Nohno Emi couldn't stand the Ngetikese, Prens
but wound up marrying him in church
he left his Mwoakillese wife for her
Nohno Emi and the woman became friends
she taught her how to make pihlohlo
Prens and Nohno Emi had 6 children
although he was "udahn mwersuwed!"
she vowed to stay
not wanting to ruin her reputation
all of her six siblings are dead
her friends keep dying too
Nahnep then Ester
Nohno Emi, nohnohn peneinei
our limesekedil
the thing she wants the most
a sewing machine

Nohno Emiko, or Nohno Emi as she is referred to by her many grandchildren and great grandchildren, lives in the Ohmine section of Kolonia on land belonging to her late husband, Prens Emilios. She has eleven children, and her second eldest daughter, Maurihna, built her a new house, which was just over a year old when I visited. She lives in the small and immaculately clean house with three of her sons, two daughters-in-law and many grandchildren. There are always children coming and going because everyone loves to be around Nohno Emi. I chose to write at length about Nohno Emi because she is the eldest member of my family; she was 82 years old when I interviewed her, and given that my paternal grandparents passed away many years ago, I am quite close to her. I also knew I would learn a great deal from her because she, like many other women of her time, has had a lifelong relationship with cloth, and dipwisou en lih are instrumental to her identity as a lien Pohnpei. I conducted a lengthy oral history interview with her over a three-day period (10-12 October, 2012). Nohno Emi has sewn for most of her life having learned from her elder sister, Orpa, who attended Tanaka Mission School during the Japanese era where she learned how to sew.

Nohno Emiko, like many elderly lien Pohnpei, has what Pohnpeians refer to as a kohpwa of textiles that she has acquired over many years. Kohpwa are wooden trunks, but now are often large plastic containers too. She keeps her precious textiles safe in her bedroom saving them for when she gets sick and needs to be cared for. She doesn't want her children to have to worry about or be burdened with her needs. On the second day of our interview after she had shown me a selection of her dipwisou en lih, I asked her "Ia kesempwalpen dipwisoupwuka oang lien Pohnpei de oang komwi?" or "What is the importance of these items for Pohnpeian women or for you?" She replied:

Oang ie ei kesempwaliki pwehki dipwisou en lih, anahnepen dipwisou en lih en mie rehmw. Ma mie soahng pwukan eri wehwehki me kowe lih. A mah sohte, ehri kowe lih mwahl emen. Likamw ih kesempwal en soangen dipwisou kan en mie eh (13 October 2012).

For me it's important because these are women's things, it's necessary to have these women's things. If you have these items then it means you are a woman. If you don't, then you are a worthless woman. It seems that this is why it's important to have these things.

As Nohno Emi expressed, possessing, not necessarily making, textiles, such as urohs, likouli, kidipen uluhl and tehi, help to define women as lien Pohnpei. In our interview Nohno Emi told me that she did not make any of the textiles she showed me, although she used to sew. She purchased most of these "women's things" or they were given to her when she visited different places in Pohnpei and other islands as a lien alem.²⁴ It is having these different forms of cloth wealth that allow women to engage in the exchange and circulation systems that make them lih. Without such items, lien Pohnpei are unable to fully participate in Pohnpeian society, specifically tiahk en Pohnpei. Women who don't participate because they lack "women's things" are not respected, as they are seen as not fulfilling their duties as lih. In contemporary Pohnpei, Nohno Emi's definition of womanhood as being based on possessing this cloth wealth remains very relevant for most women, although less so for younger ones. Her explanation of the importance of such cloth items is valuable, because it demonstrates that Pohnpeian women's long association with cloth has persisted into the present. Like the women described in early accounts of the island, who devoted much of their time to tattooing,

²⁴ Lien Alem or "women of Friday" is an island-wide Protestant women's group wherein members visit different mwomwohdiso (congregations) throughout Pohnpei and even go to other Micronesian islands.

making textiles and producing clothing, work that enhanced their status as lih, lien Pohnpei today continue to express their significant roles as women through making, possessing and gifting cloth.

Nohno Emi took out a selection of urohs, likouli and kidipen uluhl to show me, and I photographed all of these items. They represent only a small part of her textile collection that she stores and conceals in her several kohpwa, large vacuum seal type bags and wooden dresser.²⁵ The list below was her selection.

1 pilangkes me deiad (embroidered blanket)

urohs

- 2 plain white suwain (or amimono)
- 2 half suwain, urohs rohs
- 2 polka dot urohs rohs
- 1 purple urohs rohs
- 7 white urohs rohs with colorful flowers
- 14 total
(20 more where they came from!)

likouli (dresses)

- 2 likouli pwetepwet, mehn sarawi
(for church)

kidipen uluhl (pillowcases)

- 6 Kosraean (from her pidek en Lien Alem)
- 6 crocheted
- 2 deiad
- 1 appliqué
(another 20 where these came from)

tehi (sheet)

- 1 tehi with appliqué flowers & mermaid



Figure 3.10. Nohno Emi's kohpwa of dipwisou en lih, Ohmine, 2012.

²⁵ I counted 3 large plastic containers and 3-4 large vacuum seal bags. I suspect there were more under her bed.



Figure 3.11. Nohno Emi and some of her urohs.

Banerjee and Miller illustrate the significance of examining women’s wardrobes as mirrors of their lives and personal taste (2003). In the case of Nohno Emi, her wardrobe reflects her lifelong dedication to her faith as a Protestant woman and member of Lien Alem. Her likouli and most of her urohs were white in keeping with the color worn by Protestant women to church celebrations and events. The urohs were primarily amimono and would have been worn as slips under her likouli, which is described by Judy S. P. Mauricio below. She only showed me two likouli, mentioning that those were

the only dresses she had left given that she no longer attended church. Nohno Emi, like Nahnep and Esther Alex, was an active member of Lien Alem since she was a young woman, and, thus, being a lien alem was an important part of her identity. According to Kihleng, “The primary value of lih en alem lies in creating and maintaining solidarities between women, both common and chiefly, outside of the realm of the family and lineage where women have always had strong networks of support” (1996, 363).

Lien Alem forms a large island-wide network of women who support one another, and their respective congregations or mwomwohdiso, through fundraising activities, church celebrations and community involvement that elevate their presence and status within greater Pohnpeian society (Kihleng 1996). Most of Nohno Emi’s kidipen uluhl were gifts she received as a lien alem during pidek en roangamwahu or “spreading the good news” visits that took her all over Pohnpei and to other islands in Micronesia. She had six kidipen uluhl from trips she had taken to Kosrae as a lien alem. When lien alem from other mwomwohdiso would visit her Kolonia mwomwohdiso, Nohno Emi and her fellow lien alem would need to provide gifts of welcome to their visitors. These gifts were comprised of a wide range of goods, including dipwisou en lih, towels, imported and Pohnpeian food items, and more, all of which were presented in plastic basins of different sizes and colors to the visiting lien alem according to their rank and status within the Protestant church and oftentimes within the chiefly hierarchy. Nohno Emi’s wardrobe is a reflection of the centrality of her Protestant faith, one tied closely to her identity as a lien Pohnpei.

Likoutei & deiad

Nohno Emi, Nahnep, Ester, and the other lih laud I interviewed all told me that when they were growing up during the mwehin Sapahn, women wore likoutei and likouli. There was no komi (elastic) then, so women’s clothing was pirapir pene, tied together, with pieces of fabric (Emiko Emilios, 10 October 2012). Women also wore simihs (chemise) under their dresses (Ester Alex, 23 November 2012; Bascom 1965). I interviewed a 65-year-old Pingelapese woman, Mercy Solomon, in Mangilao, Guam who still had an urohs amimono that was tied at the top with fabric. Her mother gave it to her in 1998 before she passed away after wearing it for many years. Mercy herself then

wore it for a long time under her likou en sarawi (church clothes), and has now passed it on to her daughter, who lives on Guam. The urohs travelled from Pingelap, where it was sewn, to Pohnpei and then to Guam circulating from mother to daughter to granddaughter (29 August 2012). None of the other women I interviewed still had any clothing that tied at the waist in a similar way. Once komi was brought into Pohnpei women embraced it, as sewing urohs with komi was much easier than wearing likoutei that could slip and come undone. When I asked the 83-year-old Ester Alex whether she preferred urohs or likoutei she told me, “Urohs. Likamw e sohte kapwang. Kohdihtehieu. Likoutei o pwe alialu kohwei ma e mwerehdi a I pil kihda nda me” (23 November 2012). She preferred, “Urohs. It’s like it’s not tiresome. It goes straight down. With the likoutei I’ll be walking along and if it falls I have to pull it up like this.”



Figure 3.12. (clockwise) Mercy’s urohs amimono that ties at the waist; Mercy and her urohs suwain worn under her urohs rohs; close-up of amimono, 2012.

During the Japanese period women enjoyed embroidering cloth items, even their likoutei. When I asked her what was fashionable for women during this time, Nohno Emi demonstrated the popularity of deiad (embroidery):

Ansou o likamw dipwisou me deiad e...ih sidail en ansou o...pwe likoutei ape a aramas pil dehk...aramas kak likoutei riau, ehu loale...ke pahn ale kihla me ke deiadihdau powe...sohte sisipando ansouo (10 October 2012).

At that time things that were embroidered...that was the fashion of that time...because likoutei and things people would sew...people would wear two likoutei, one inside...you would wear the embroidered one on top...there were no bras back then.

Another great aunt of mine, Sisiko Kihleng, called this style of wearing two likoutei at once, likoutei posoke or layered lavalava (personal interview, 17 August 2012). Women used to wear their likoutei under their likouli prior to the creation of urohs suwain or amimono. The likoutei with kapwat (deiad) were worn on the outside of plain likoutei, and worn when women had somewhere special to go. Unfortunately, none of the women I interviewed had any old likoutei in their possession.

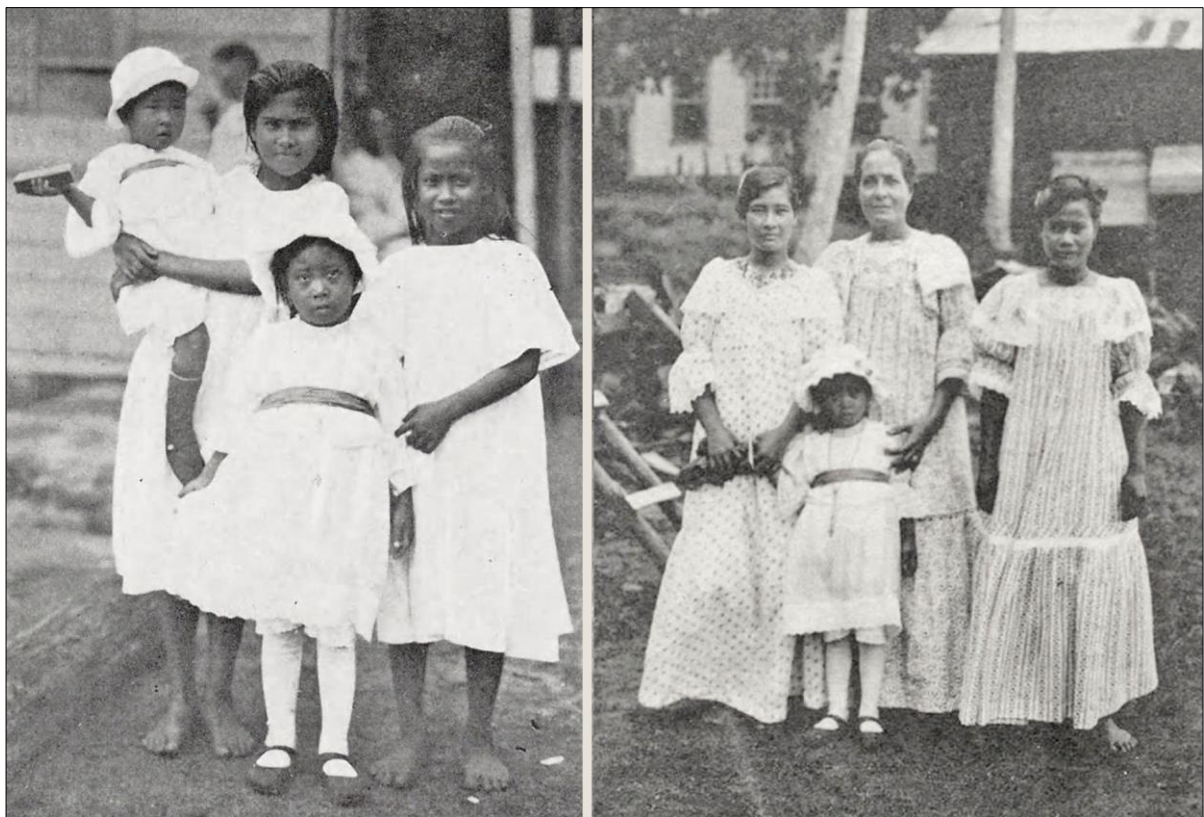


Figure 3.13. Serihn Pohnpei wearing dresses. Nan'yocho, 1932. Lien Pohnpei wearing Mother Hubbard dresses. Nan'yo Kyokai Nan'yo Gunto Shibu, 1920.

Embroidered Nting

Certain forms of women's wealth featured nting that women embroidered onto fabric, as was the case with Nohno Emi's pilangkes me deiad and several of her old kidipen uluhl. Later, I will also discuss urohs with words and sayings machine sewn into the fabric. Nohno Emi's pilangkes me deiad is one of the most interesting cloth items I saw during my research; it was made for her second eldest daughter, Maurihna. I'd never heard of or seen these blankets prior to my interview with Nohno Emi.²⁶ Her former neighbor, Modoko Willy, who is now deceased, embroidered it. According to Nohno Emi, all new mothers had these blankets which they used to swaddle their infants when they were taken to be baptized in church (13 October 2012). The nting on one side of the baby blanket reads "teñgeteñ ni om lolobuot," meaning "sticking to your faithfulness" and on the other side, "kadakadaur ideidawen," meaning "remembering to obey."²⁷ The nting on the baby blanket represents how women embraced, and continue to embrace, Christianity in Pohnpei. These Christian expressions are considered appropriate for a baby blanket, serving as a form of silasil (protection) for the baby. Pilangkes me deiad are no longer made, and lien Pohnpei today tend to purchase store bought blankets for their infants.



Figure 3.14. Nohno Emi's pilangkes me deiad, front and back.

²⁶ Kihleng does not mention pilangkes me deiad in her dissertation (1996) and I have not seen the blankets mentioned in any other Pohnpei literature.

²⁷ See Rehg and Sohl for literal definitions of kadaur and idawehn (1979, 16, 30). My father, Simion Kihleng, also helped me define these older, religious terms (Skype interview, 17 June 2013).



Figure 3.15. (clockwise) Nohno Emi's "Ih Riahla" and "lel tih" kidipen uluhl; mermaid tehi.

The embroidered nting on Nohno Emi's baby blanket is quite different from that found on the two kidipen uluhl. Both kidipen uluhl have mostly satin stitch hand embroidery. The first kidipen uluhl features the face of a woman with blue hair, wearing a mwaramwar, who has two prominent gold teeth and is surrounded by two large, red hibiscus flowers. It has the words "lel tih" sewn into the pillowcase at the top in maroon thread. Lel tih is a slang phrase that literally means to "hit bone" and refers to something looking nice and good, in this case, "lel tih" can refer to the overall look of the woman sewn onto the pillowcase with her many accessories (see Rehg and Sohl 1979). The second pillowcase features a mermaid that also has blue hair and a blue and white tail. The mermaid also has gold teeth, a red flower in her hair, a necklace, earrings, watch, ring and long red fingernails. Who knew such glamorous mermaids existed! The writing at the top of this kidipen uluhl in red and blue thread makes the mermaid even

more intriguing. It reads “Ih Riahla” or “I’m cursed.” The nting on the pilangkes me deiad and the two pillowcases reflect very different sentiments of lien Pohnpei.

It is not surprising that women sewed Christian expressions on to cloth given that the American Protestant missionaries and Spanish Catholic nuns taught women how to write and sew. They stitched bible verses and Christian ideals onto their pillowcases, sheets and baby blankets, as well as Pohnpeian expressions and personal thoughts. By embroidering images of elaborately adorned women and mermaids, and the flora and fauna of Pohnpei, as well as writing in Pohnpeian, lien Pohnpei effectively appropriated and indigenized foreign cloth (see Leota-Ete, Kihara and Raymond 2002; Colchester 2003; Küchler and Were 2005 for discussions of missionaries, clothing and indigenous appropriation in other parts of the Pacific).



Figure 3.16. (by row) A sampling of Nohnno Emi’s varied kidipen uluhl: 2 machine appliquéd, 2 hand drawn and 2 hand-crocheted.

Urohs: loale kohla liki (inside goes outside)

Since the earliest forms of menginpehn lih, beginning with pelipel, Pohnpeian women have added kapwat to make their skin, bodies and cloth presentable, wearable and Pohnpeian. As Judy S. P. Mauricio so clearly expressed in our interview with regard to the first urohs en Pohnpei, “Ansou kapwat kohieng e wiahla mehn kapwat”; “once decorations were added it became the fashion” (10 October 2012). One of the most stylish forms of kapwat was the urohs amimono or suwain, slips that featured a bottom tier that was crocheted with colorful mwahi designs and patterns that were worn under likouli. Today, it is mostly women over 50 who wear urohs amimono under their likouli and even under urohs (see Figure 3.19). Lih laud still make urohs amimono, and these slips have become prized possessions because they are harder to come by and are no longer ‘the fashion’ with younger contemporary lien Pohnpei. Amimono means knitting in Japanese, but in this context, it is actually crochet, and women began this style of needlework following Japanese rule of the island from 1914-45 (Emiko Emilios, 10 October 2012). Urohs amimono were referred to as likou tala or “dollar [as in U.S. dollar] clothes” inferring that such clothes cost money and were only worn by women who could afford them²⁸ and urohs en loale, “urohs for inside” meaning they were worn inside or under dresses (Judy S. P. Mauricio, 10 October 2012; email correspondence, Antonia Panuelo, 11 June 2014).

Judy S.P. Mauricio explains how urohs suwain were extremely fashionable:

Udahn men kapwat, mih pahn likou en sarawi...Mah lih emen mih nan likou tala, lih paiamwahu men mwo. Ipwerek. Ansou o mehn U me I kin kilang soangen Emiko ape (10 October 2012).

It's truly a form of adornment/a fashion statement, [worn] underneath church clothes...A woman who wore likou tala was a wealthy woman. Fancy. At that time those from U I used to see were Emiko and them.

Nohnno Emiko expressed to me the need to possess textiles in order to be a real lien Pohnpei, and Judy confirmed the need to display these textiles, to be kapwatapwat (decorated, ornamented) for others to see. Women wore their wealth to be admired by and to compete with other lih in order to express their personal identities. Being

²⁸ Likou tala were made with material that was lightweight and thin, and refers to a time when that material cost \$1.00 per yard, which was considered expensive.

fashionable at that time by wearing likouli with urohs amimono underneath meant that a woman was well to do or capable of presenting herself in the latest fashion. While Nohno Emi was not well to do, she did work hard to provide for her family and to insure she had the materials needed to sew the clothes she wanted to wear. Ester Alex of Saladak, who I mentioned earlier, also expressed the significance of wearing as well as possessing amimono when she told me:

Rahn sarawi I sohte kak urohs mwei likou nan ei likou en sarawi, urohs amimono. Lel rahnwet ei amimono mihmi nan kohpwa pwe rahn sarawi me I mwahuki likauih (23 November 2012).

On Sundays I cannot wear patchwork urohs inside my church clothes, [I wear] urohs amimono. Up until today my amimono are in my trunk because on Sundays it's what I like to wear.

For older lien Pohnpei, wearing urohs amimono underneath their likouli is truly wearing their best, their Sunday best.



Figure 3.17. Nohno Emi's likou en sarawi; her granddaughter, Emily, modeling an old urohs amimono that belonged to Nohno Emi's daughter Maurihna; urohs rohs with a bottom tier of suwain.



Figure 3.18. Urohs suwain; urohs suwain close-up; folded urohs amimono.

Judy also carefully explained the way in which urohs amimono were worn during the time she was growing up, in the 1950s and 60s, and its eventual evolution into the urohs we wear today. She states:

en mehn Pohnpei e urohs, urohs me pwerpwerdihsang nan likou, udahn sidail ieu, suwain o pahn pwerpwerdihsang pwe ih me re kin ndah likou tala e, likou menipinip. Urohs o pahn mih loale ah e pil pahn ekis sikdihlahsang urohs o pwe amimonoh ko pahn wia sansal seli. Karehda ih likou en kapwat en lien Pohnpei nan ei mwehi oh. Emen me wie soang ko kapwatapwat, mie ah likou ape. Urohs me pahn pwerdi soahng e me sohte suwain a re kin nda urohs en lien Pingilap. Ehri kohla a urohs en lien Pingelap o mihla liki, aramas kakehr wie doadoangki seli, likou en mihmi nihmw kamwkamwakel seli. Kohla kohla oh mwuri a tepda kapwat kohieng. Ansou kapwat kohieng e wiahla mehn kapwat (10 October 2012).

Pohnpeians' urohs, the urohs that hangs down inside their clothes, it's a fashion statement, the suwain hangs down because it's what they call likou tala, lightweight clothing. The urohs is inside and it sits down low so the amimono shows. So that was fashionable to Pohnpeian women during my time. A person who was [dressed] like that was stylish; she had clothing [nice things]. An urohs that appeared like this [referring to her own skirt], without suwain, they would call a Pingelapese urohs²⁹. It ended up that the Pingelapese women's urohs³⁰ was worn on the outside, people could wear it around while working, clothing for staying home and cleaning around. It continued on and eventually decorations were applied. Once the decorations were applied it became fashionable.

²⁹ Early in my research I was told that Pingelapese women from Pingelap atoll which is part of Pohnpei State were the first women to make and wear urohs in Pohnpei (Sisiko Kihleng, 17 August 2012), however, I later learned that lien Pingelap were the first to wear a certain kind of urohs, as described by Judy S. P. Mauricio.

³⁰ Historically, indigenous Pohnpeians have looked down on outer-islanders, particularly Pingelapese, and according to several of my interviewees, Pohnpeians made fun of their style of dress at the time (Judy S. P. Mauricio; Emiko Emilios).

As Judy illustrated, the urohs amimono would be worn in such a way as to allow for the beautiful crochet to show beneath the likouli's hemline. Some urohs amimono had the typical crocheted bottom tier in addition to appliqué designs in the main body of the skirt. At some point, sohn deidei experimented and made the first urohs rohs with mwahi and other floral designs without the suwain bottom. Or perhaps it was as Judy described, urohs en lien Pingelap or plain urohs started being decorated with flowers and other designs as kapwat reflecting Pohnpei's flora and fauna. Whatever the process, the early urohs rohs (urohs with flower appliqué) made with simple appliqué started being worn alone (no longer under dresses) outside the house for others' to see and admire. Women often wore early urohs rohs on the outside of their likouli. During my research I was unable to pinpoint an exact year for when the first urohs rohs debuted. It seems, however, that these urohs zigzag, sewn with a zigzag stitch made by sewing machines, started becoming more popular when new sewing machines arrived in Pohnpei at Leo Etscheit's store in the 1960s (Judy S. P. Mauricio, 10 October 2012). Unlike urohs amimono, urohs rohs were less labour intensive, and reflected a new style no longer focused on what was worn underneath dresses, but rather, what was worn on the outside for all to see.



Figure 3.19. (clockwise) Urohs suwain peeking out from under a likouli and urohs rohs worn under likouli, Nahnep's mehla, Saladak, 2012; urohs dereht worn under likouli, Kolonia, 2012.

A woman's resourcefulness was something that came up frequently in my interviews as a marker of identity for *lien Pohnpei, lih tohrohr*. Judy described how the women of her time displayed their resourcefulness through dress. When I returned to *Nohno Emi's* interview, I realized she was expressing to me her own resourcefulness through her sense of fashion and sewing skills. When I asked her about women's fashion during her time she replied:

Sohte, sidail en likou, sidail en deidei likou. Kak rahn sarawi koaros I pahn anahne ien dehkada ei likou kapw. [EK: Eh!] Ehng! [EK: doadoak laud ieu men] Doadoak laud. Likamw rahn sarawi koaros I pahn anahne ien likou kapw kohla nan ihmw sarawio. Pwe ih wasa likamw aramas kin sisiaipene ie, nan ihmw sarawi (10 October 2012).

Nothing, styles of clothing, styles of sewing clothing. Every Sunday I needed to sew a new dress. [EK: really!] Yes! [EK: that's a lot of work] Lots of work. It's like every Sunday I needed to wear new clothing to go to the church. Because that's where it seemed people were competing with each other, there in the church.

Here, *Nohno Emi* spoke to a kind of social pressure that compelled her to sew a new dress to debut in church every Sunday in an effort to compete with the other young Protestant women of U. I wish I could have seen her wardrobe during those days, also a reflection of her faith like it is now, but I suspect it was also more reflective of her identity as a woman in a hierarchical society built on competition, a competition that permeates almost every aspect of *Pohnpeian* life. Unlike now, most of the clothes in her wardrobe back then would have been clothes she sewed herself. The mirror would have been quite different. She needed to look her best when attending church to "out dress" the other young women, and I presume to also attract the attention of the young men. *Nohno Emi* talked about another young woman from *Saladak*, *Maria Edgar*, who she was always competing with. Their families also competed to be the most clean in U. Cleanliness was something she mentioned on several occasions in our interviews, an indication of Japanese influences during and after *mwehin Sapahn* (10 October 2012).

likou tala

likou menipinip
tala, though, is a dollar
a green American dollar
likou en loale
these undergarments
were thin

like tala
valuable like tala
kasalehda lih paiamwahu
Lih ipwerek
Lih kapwatapwat
Lih mehleh
Lih tohrohr
covered in tala

In addition to her own clothes, her kidipen uluhl, tehi and old baby blankets, Nohno Emi also kept some of her second eldest daughter, Mauri's, urohs amimono from when she was young. She has given one of these to her little granddaughter, Francesca. Nohno Emi often gives away her urohs to family members, especially if they ask. After I completed an inventory of her dipwisou, she told me to choose an urohs for myself. I chose an elaborate urohs amimono with bright orange birds in the knitting and purple birds in the appliqué. By gifting her urohs to her daughters and granddaughters, as well as other female family members, including her niece, she 'sews' her memory, a memory associated intimately with cloth. When I look at the urohs she gave me I am reminded of her kindness, the dipwisou en lih she keeps and treasures, the stories she shared with me about her life, stories that connect people and places, as well as time, embroidered into a larger tapestry of mehn Pohnpei.



Figure 3.20. Francesca wearing urohs amimono; Flomina wearing an urohs rohs from Nohno Emi; urohs suwain gifted to me, 2012.

urohs categories

Through my ethnographic research I've determined six different categories of urohs. They include: urohs rohs, urohs en mwei likou, urohs popous, urohs dereht, urohs suwain and urohs ik sirang. I discuss, textually and visually, these categories, and some of the styles within each, to demonstrate how menginpehn lih is innovative, creative and sensual in response to shifting urohs aesthetics, issues of affordability and wearability.

Urohs rohs ("flower skirt") are the "original" and most common urohs. They always feature a prominent floral mwahi that is on the front of the skirt, and can also be on the back. If the mwahi is on both sides, it is more expensive as it requires more work to make. The earliest sewn urohs rohs were hand and machine appliquéd, and the contemporary ones are primarily reverse appliquéd and/or machine embroidered. Urohs rohs are considered by lih to be the quintessential urohs en Pohnpei.



Figure 3.21. Women wearing the classic urohs rohs, Saladak, 1989-91. K. Kihleng, photographer.



Figure 3.22. (clockwise) Contemporary urohs rohs for sale at Pohnpei Fish Mart, Dededo, Guam, 2012; Sisirihne Peter modeling an urohs rohs she made, Enipein Pah, 2012; Karly Tom wearing an urohs rohs in front of a display of urohs rohs next to her store, Pehleng, 2012; Arleen Hadley wearing an urohs rohs and showing me her urohs rohs that is almost identical, Mangilao, Guam, 2013.

A popular style of urohs in Pohnpei today is the urohs popous. These are urohs with different fabric pieces sewn together in panels, running diagonally. Urohs popous are more affordable than urohs rohs, and are frequently worn by teenagers and young women who can't afford to purchase the more expensive skirts. They also come in wonderful color combinations with the different panels designed alongside one another for an aesthetically pleasing effect. Urohs popous are exciting in this regard, as sohn deidei become quite creative as far as the fabrics used, the machine embroidery that decorates each panel, as well as the iki of the skirt. Some of the iki also feature the reverse appliqué technique.



Figure 3.23. (clockwise) Lien Pohnpei wearing urohs popous in purple and red, Nett; Coleen and Hermina Alten, employees of Joy Hotel, wearing urohs popous, Kolonia; an urohs popous (right) for sale, Linda Carl's store, Kolonia; a newly completed urohs popous and its maker, Snowland, Kitty, 2012.

Urohs mwei likou (patchwork urohs or literally “pieces of material urohs”) are made with sohn deidei’s scraps of leftover fabric. Women tend to wear these skirts around the house and more on an everyday basis in their communities. Urohs mwei likou are considered a casual form of dress. Some urohs mwei likou can be quite pretty depending on the combination of fabrics used. They are also lightweight and more comfortable than urohs dereht, which can be quite heavy with all of the machine embroidery. These urohs are also the least expensive category of urohs en Pohnpei.



Figure 3.24. (clockwise) Urohs mwei likou for sale at Ester Carl’s store, Kolonia; women wearing urohs mwei likou (right) and urohs popous (left), kamadipw en kousapw, Saladak; Saladak women wearing urohs mwei likou; urohs mwei likou for sale at Middar, Pehleng, 2012.

Urohs dereht (“thread skirts”) are urohs that feature elaborate machine embroidered thread designs that cover portions of the skirt or even the entire urohs. The more thread used, the more intricate the design and, thus, the more costly the skirt. Urohs dereht also feature reverse appliquéd or machine embroidered mwahi on the front of the skirt, and at times also the back. These designs include faces, real and imaginary animals, such as unicorns and dragons, mermaids and flowers, as well as sayings and ngarangar (coconut shell for drinking sakau). These are some of the latest styles of urohs.



Figure 3.25. (clockwise) A sea of urohs dereht, Food Mart, Kolonia; Anna Ladore, waitress at The Village hotel, wearing an urohs dereht; Kiomy Albert holds an urohs dereht, Amcres Gas Station, Kolonia; urohs dereht being folded by shopkeeper, Linda Carl’s store, 2012.

Urohs suwain/amimono are urohs that were popular in the 1950s-90s, and were often worn as slips under likouli. Urohs suwain is the generic term for crocheted urohs, which can also include urohs that have imported, store bought lace at the iki of the skirt. Urohs amimono are the intricately designed and colorful hand crocheted skirts that today are only made and worn by elderly lien Pohnpei (see below and Figures 3.17-3.20). These urohs have become heirlooms and keepsakes of families, and are often passed down from nohno kahlap (grandmother) to mother (nohno) to daughter.



Figure 3.26. Urohs suwain/amimono gifted to my nohno, Kimberlee Kihleng, in the early 1990s.

Urohs ik sirang (“urohs with a tail that flares out”) is an urohs with two tiers and the bottom tier slightly flares out. The fabric at the iki is usually made of a floral synthetic material and the larger, upper tier of the skirt often features a reverse appliquéd mwahi on the front that matches the floral print material in the iki. The mwahi may also feature embroidery. These skirts are more affordable, depending on the amount of thread that is used and how elaborate the mwahi is (see Figure 3.27).

Through the above discussion of urohs categories and styles, I provide insight into the highly visual and textual landscape of lien Pohnpei’s cloth wealth and a distinctive form of female dress. This contemporary landscape has been shaped by and continues the genealogy of *menginpehn lih* that began with *kedin nting* and their artistic and cultural practice of *pelipel*, which is revealed in the image of the tattooed lien Rohnkiti that opens this chapter. Through this practice, women literally and figuratively “wrote” the histories and identities of *mehn Pohnpei* into their blood and onto their skin. The visual and creative for women also included the “second skins” of cloth and its production, which were also essential to their identities. The most precious textile loom-woven by women up until the early 1900s was the *dohr* worn by men of the highest rank and status and imbued with their *manaman*. With the introduction of foreign materials and ideas, lien Pohnpei innovated using new skills and technologies to create another form of *nting*, *deidei* or sewing. They first made *likoutei* and Mother Hubbard dresses and then went on to crochet and practice hand and machine embroidery, *appliqué*, reverse *appliqué* and patchwork to produce a wide array of cloth valuables from embroidered baby blankets and *appliquéd* sheets and pillowcases to dresses, *suwain* and urohs. All of this handiwork connects lien Pohnpei to an important heritage of *doadoak en lih*, which I re-present as a Pohnpeian women researcher through my own *nting*, my prose and poetry, adding another layer of textuality and sensuality through which women’s wealth can be appreciated and celebrated.

In the following chapter, I focus on what urohs do and, thus, mean to Pohnpeian women and the ways in which they shape and are shaped by our identities in contemporary Pohnpei. Six special urohs are discussed in detail, with one ethnographic case study, to reveal the complex and multilayered articulations of what it means to be *mehn Pohnpei* today in relation to gender, hierarchy, *tiahk*, sexuality, humour and notions of the body.



Figure 3.27. (clockwise) Alwihne Eperiam wearing an urohs ik sirang with the words “ke deh toai” (“don’t hate” or “don’t be jealous”) sewn on it, PWAC Variety Show, PICS Gym; Fatima Saimon wearing an urohs ik sirang, Diadi, Kitti; 2 urohs ik sirang (left & right) for sale at A-One Fabric, Kolonia; 3 urohs ik sirang, 2012.

Chapter 4: Elinpwur, ngarangar, pahsu and dundun: contemporary urohs

Urohs and Meaning

wearing beauty

at the Maori & Pacific Textiles Symposium

I wore my urohs on both days
a new urohs en mwei likou
and my favorite pink and black urohs
gifts from Sipw
each quite different from the other
only two lien wai wore their textiles
a long tailored blouse
a long tailored skirt

I was disappointed
expecting to walk through Te Papa
intoxicated by vivid colors
making me feel warm
reminding me of passion
even when it's cold outside

participants can't quite place my unusual skirts
most likely never worn in Aotearoa
certainly never worn over tights
they look at me curious, strange
these colors are too bright amongst all the gray
I'm not sure they like them
oh well

women in the bathroom, many of them artists, keep asking
"did you make it?"
"No I didn't; I'll be talking about these skirts later though"
"No, I just wear them"
"No, I feel guilty cause people keep asking"
"No, I wish I did!" (but I don't really)

"does it mean anything?"
"it's an urohs" I say
"made by women in Pohnpei, where I'm from"
I don't have time to explain
nor the desire really
you want me to say:
I make them
my grandmother taught me
her mother taught her
it represents my genealogy

directly linking me to my ancestors
mana
blood
dirt
sweat

I could say all these things
partial truths
but that's not what *wearing* is about
this beauty is untranslatable
go read Alice Walker's "Everyday Use"

Throughout the years various people have asked me if the designs on urohs have meaning. When I tell them that they don't, they look disappointed. It seems the assumption is that if the mwahi and patterns on the urohs meant something then the urohs would be even more valuable. It would be so much more than just a skirt. It is the same with names. I have had many people ask me what my name means. I tell them I am named after my paternal great grandmother, Lihter. Many lien Pohnpei have lihter at the end of their names, and my parents chose Emeli, after my maternal great grandmother's maiden name, Emile (she was French), and added it to Lihter, making Emelihter. Lih means woman and I suspect this has something to do with the female name, Lihter, but as far as my name being translated to mean "ocean" or "wind" or "fragrant flower" like other 'exotic' names, it does not. Again, there is the look of disappointment. They are hoping for a certain kind of essentialist meaning. People don't tend to ask why Pohnpeian women make urohs or what purpose they serve, which reveals meaning. It's always, "but what do they mean?"

Lissant Bolton describes how throughout her fieldwork researching Vanuatu women's textiles, she continually searched for meaning. She explains:

For most of the Ambae project I determinedly sought meanings for textiles. I asked for stories of their origins, I asked about the meanings of the designs plaited into and stenciled onto them, I tried to elicit accounts of their significance. Eventually I realized that to the extent that such "meanings" exist, they are associated primarily with "small" textiles...Over and over again, the answers I was given were names—the names of in-weave patterns, the names of stencil designs, the names of textiles types (2003, 128).

She was looking for stories, oral histories that gave meaning (and her initial notion of it) to the many kinds of textiles made by the women of Ambae. I assume she was

disappointed not to find what she was looking for, however she had an epiphany of sorts as revealed when she writes “What is important about these objects is not what they mean, but what they do” (2003, 129).

This is an example where I believe I benefit from being a Pohnpeian researcher of urohs in that I knew not to expect to find the kind of “meanings” in urohs that Bolton and others are often searching for. I choose to engage in an “ethnographic refusal” about the “meaning” of urohs, as well as my name to “enunciate repeatedly to ourselves and to outsiders that “this is who we are, this is who you are” (Simpson 2007, 73). This, of course, is not to say that urohs do not have meaning. Their meaning, as Bolton discovered in terms of Vanuatu textiles, lies in their many uses and functions and the ways in which the urohs embody female identity, creativity and ways of knowing.

Urohs kesempwal

As a lien Pohnpei, with an ethnographic genealogy of studying women’s exchange practices in Pohnpei, I’ve known since a young age that urohs were kesempwal, “important, valuable” (Rehg and Sohl 1979, 37). Urohs are an extension of who we are as Pohnpeian women; they make us feel Pohnpeian. Even lien Pohnpei who do not wear urohs identify urohs as something distinctly Pohnpeian. Urohs are dynamic, as they constantly change as mwahi kapw are continually drawn and sewn. In order to write a thesis about urohs, I had to understand why these skirts were valuable to women. I set out to cast a wide net that would represent a variety of lien Pohnpei (and one man, Iso Nahnken en Kitti), as well as other Micronesian women who were either fond of wearing urohs or do business with urohs. Asking them whether urohs were kesempwal and why would provide more substantial answers than if I asked women to explain what urohs “meant” to them. I also asked if urohs made them feel Pohnpeian. Their answers only reinforced my own feelings and thoughts about urohs en Pohnpei, and reassured me that this research topic was worthwhile. The following are some of my interviewees’ responses to the questions: “komw/ke kesempwaliki urohs en Pohnpei? Pwehda/Ia karehpe?”; “Do you value urohs en Pohnpei? Why/What are your reasons?” as well as the question “Ia kesempwelpen urohs en Pohnpei oang lien Pohnpei?”; “What

is the importance of urohs en Pohnpei for lien Pohnpei?" I asked most of my interviewees both questions and they provided various answers as follows:

Ih nempe ehu en. Ei kesempwaliki urohs en Pohnpei pwe I sohte kin iang urohs ih urohs en wai ka. Karehda I pil kin nantiheng pein dehkada ahi. Ih wen ei kesempwaliki. Pil ehu e wia ieng ie keseu oang wasa me doh. I pahn kilangehte emen likauih pahn ese me urohs en Pohnpei, sansal, urohs en Pohnpei.

It's the number one. Urohs en Pohnpei are important to me because I don't wear American/Western skirts. Therefore, I also make an effort to sew my own. That's how much I value [urohs]. In addition, it's a way for me to observe what's in the distance. I will see someone wearing and know it's an urohs en Pohnpei; it's obvious, urohs en Pohnpei.

~Karmen Tadius of Takaiiu, Pali Ais, Nett, 12 December 2012, 77 years old, sews and sells urohs and is an active member of the women's group Lien Pohnpei Tikpeieng.

Ehu peidek mwahu men. Pwe kitail mehn Pohnpei udahn pein ahtail e, pein ahtail likou me kitail pereniki, udahn kitail kesempwaliki. Karehda kerenioang mehn Pohnpei pwon udahn urohs me re keiiu kesempwaliki. Re sohte kesempwaliki rausis. Mwumwu ansou, ma I pahn kohla sarawi ape soang ka, udahn ansou koaros kohla ni kamadipw de soang ka udahn urohs o me kesempwal.

That's a good question. Because for us Pohnpeians, it's really ours'; it's our clothing that we enjoy, we really value. Therefore, almost all Pohnpeians really value urohs above all; they don't value pants. Mwumwu sometimes, if I go to church and such, all the time when going to kamadipw and so forth it's the urohs that's important.

~Linda Carl of Pohnrakied, Kolonia, 16 October 2012, 61 years old, businesswoman/store owner.

Oh yea...I always think of it as a talent that women have here in Pohnpei. It always amazes me the way the designs change through the years. My family, my Mom, they're into sewing so every time I see [them] they keep changing their designs. I always think of it as a talent, but I guess most of these women they just sew without thinking you know that they have that talent. Every design is different; it's really unique. You cannot get one design that's the same as the other one; it's always each one's own design. It's really interesting. For me, I always think it's something that these women should be proud of...I really think it's an art form in itself.

~Janet Panuelo of Dolonier, Nett, 27 November 2012, 48 years old, Administrator for the Office of Social Affairs, Pohnpei State Government.

Ehi I iang kesempwaliki urohs en Pohnpei pwe e pil wia soaren lien Pohnpei. Duwehte kapwatih lien Pohnpei kan, kalingana eri e kesempwal oang ioa pwe ngehi lien Pohnpei.

Yes I also value urohs en Pohnpei because it defines Pohnpeian womanhood. The same as it decorates lien Pohnpei, makes them look beautiful so it's important to me because I'm a Pohnpeian woman.

~Fatima Saimon of Diadi, Kitti, 21 November 2012, 45 years old, active member of Pohnpei Women's Advisory Council (PWAC)

Ehng. Ni mehleh o mahs I sohte kin wiahki urohs en Pohnpei mehkot. I laudila ngoai mihla nan pwukoa, wewehki I tepda doadoak, oari especially mehleh ahi doadoak oang pwihn en lih, ih ahi tepda kesempwaliki urohs...I guess mwoain as I matured a I moadowoahda the importance of urohs en Pohnpei e, I iang kesempwalkihda.

Yes, to tell the truth before I did not consider urohs en Pohnpei anything special. I grew up and started having responsibility, meaning I started working, well especially with my work for the women's groups, that's when I started valuing urohs...I guess maybe as I matured, and I realized the importance of urohs en Pohnpei, I also valued it.

~Lululeen Santos of Daini, Kolonia, 19 October 2012, 32 years old, Women's Interest Coordinator, Pohnpei State Social Affairs Office.

Ehng. Wadki mwein sangehte mahs ih atail likou en mwo urohs. Pwon te lien Pohnpei kin iuius.

Yes. It's like maybe since a long time ago that's our clothing, urohs. All lien Pohnpei are using it.

~Erica Reyes of Pohn Dolen Liwi, Nett, 14 October 2012, 21 years old, works in retail at Neime & Co.

All six of these Pohnpeian women ranging from 77 to 21 years of age, professionals and working women, mothers, and active women's group members, appreciate and value urohs primarily because these skirts are lien Pohnpei's clothing. These dipwisou en lih are significant for what they represent to women, which is a form of clothing that is distinctively our own. Yet, each of the women's answers was unique like the urohs themselves, as Janet Panuelo pointed out. She was one of the few women who expressed the dynamic nature of the skirts as they continually change in style and design. She sees urohs as works of art because of the creativity involved in their making. Fatima Saimon mentioned that urohs not only define Pohnpeian womanhood, but they make us beautiful.

What urohs do

In *Unfolding the Moon*, Lissant Bolton writes about Vanuatu women's textiles. She writes, "What is important about these objects is not what they mean, but what they do" (2003, 129). I return to Bolton's words here to reiterate that it is the "social life" of urohs as "lived garments" (Banerjee and Miller 2003, 1) that give these textiles meaning (Appadurai 1986). In many ways urohs represent the modern lien Pohnpei whose identity is much more flexible than that of her ancestors with the permanent nting of pelipel. Urohs are a "second skin" that are an important part of being a Pohnpeian woman, but this skin can also be shed, and another one can take its place (Küchler and Were 2014, xx). The skirts also evolved out of a desire for convenience, as the elastic waist makes for an item of clothing that is easily slipped on and off, but does not come easily undone like the likoutei. Women have the option to wear urohs en Pohnpei when and where they please perhaps with the exception of mehla and certain kamadipw where urohs are expected to be worn. At distinctly Pohnpeian events, such as these, where Pohnpeian modes of behaviour are expected, women "put on" a Pohnpeian identity as expressions of wahu (respect) and solidarity with other lien Pohnpei. Urohs epitomize wahu in that they are long and cover what Pohnpeians and most Pacific Islanders consider sexual parts of the female body from the waist to the knees, the parts of the body previously covered by nting, tattoos. They are appropriate wear for such occasions when women are surrounded by male relatives, especially those with whom they have a pel (taboo) relationship.¹ The skirts are also extremely festive and celebratory, made with all kinds of fabric that feature striking mwahi in all colors of the rainbow. Women in flower covered urohs carrying mwaramwar, sehu² (sugarcane), and plastic basins full of dipwisou en lih blend into the feasting atmosphere of seated men pounding sakau, giant

¹ Pel or "taboo, refers to the ritual avoidance and sexual separation that surrounds the relationship between a woman and her brother and certain other male relatives" (Kihleng 1996, 432). The rules surrounding the maintenance of pel relationships are much less stringent now than when my pahpa was growing up. Most young Pohnpeians today do not know what the word pel means, let alone how to observe proper avoidance behaviour (see personal interviews, Sisiko Kihleng and Emiko Emilios).

² Sehu is the sakau of Pohnpeian women and functions as a ceremonial gift (see Kihleng 1996).

yams hanging from the rafters of the nahs, smoke billowing from the uhmw, sweat glistening on marekeiso³ arms and chests.



Figure 4.1. Women with their dipwisou en lih: kiam (coconut leaf baskets) full of local produce and mwaramwar preparing to enter the nahs at a kamadipw en kousapw in Kurumw, Saladak, U, 6 October 2012.

Many lien Pohnpei save their nicest urohs to wear to mehla and kamadipw where they will be seen and admired by many. These events are “sites of wearing” for women living in the home island; in Chapter 5 I write about “sites of wearing” urohs for migrant lien Pohnpei living on Guam (see Sandhu 2007, 36). Some women even order special urohs to debut at particular kamadipw. When I asked Judy Kostka, a 43-year-old well known

³ “To anoint” in meing (honorific language) (Kihleng 1996, 180).

urohs collector⁴ from Awak, U, “ansou da me komw kin oahte ahmw urohs? Or, when do you order your urohs?” She told me the following:

Ansou me mie nei sent...oh ansou me kamadipw pahn wiawi. Lien Pohnpei pwon, ansou me kamadipw de kapoakon udahn koaros kin oaht urohs. Oh ma mie mwahi kapw...Mehlel ansoun kamadipw en kousapw udahn I kin ale. Ma I ese me se pahn kamadipw I pahn oahte ei urohs...Mwo I sehse ekei lih, ngehi, I pahn oahtehda ahi urohs kapw kohdo likauih pak ehu ngehi nikidala. I kin pwilikihdi, kanaidi, oh karehda mie pak me I kihda ngehi pilehu likauih aramas kin lemeleme me e kapw...Karehda ahi urohs kak sounpahr limau ape e mihmihte eri kapw te (2 December 2012).

When I have money...and when there is going to be a kamadipw. All Pohnpeian women, when there is a kamadipw or get-together everyone orders urohs. And if there is a new mwahi...Really it's when there's a kamadipw en kousapw (feast) that I have to get [an urohs]. If I know that we're going to have a kamadipw I will order an urohs...I'm not sure about other women, me, I order a new urohs, and I come and wear it once and then put it away. I put it down, cherish it, and therefore, there are times when I take it out and wear it again and people think it's new...therefore my urohs can be five years old or so and it's there still like new.

Kamadipw en kousapw are honour feasts that are held annually for the soumas en kousapw (section chief) in a wehi (chiefdom). These festive occasions have been taking place for centuries in Pohnpei since the establishment of the Nahnmwarki-Nahnken chiefly system of government beginning in the 1600s. As expressed by Judy Kostka “all lien Pohnpei” (I'd say many lien Pohnpei, although perhaps in her kousapw, all women) order new urohs to wear to kamadipw en kousapw. Women wish to look their best among their own, as well as show people from other kousapw who participate in the feasting event that their kousapw not only has the most and largest agricultural goods, with the best entertainment and most welcoming atmosphere, but that their women also have the best taste in urohs. Women “authenticate” urohs by wearing them on these very Pohnpeian occasions (Wendt 1983). Such events are where tiahk is displayed through kousapw members paying tribute to the soumas usually in the form of kehp (yams), sakau and pwihk (pigs) for men, and sehu and dipwisou en lih for women, which often consists of a variety of imported goods, such as rice, sugar, laundry soap, t-shirts, “Hawaiian” towels⁵ and more, as well as other cloth wealth, including urohs. Female members of the kousapw also make mwaramwar and marekeiso participants.

⁴ Several women I interviewed mentioned Judy's name saying that she had many nice urohs (see personal interviews, Quleen Kustin, Enolynn and Younerine Thomas).

⁵ Towels with “Hawaiian” motifs and images, most likely made in China.



Figure 4.2. The view inside the nahs: the woman seated (left) is cutting sehu that several women brought in; the other women are walking up to the front carrying their tribute of kepenok nohk (coconut palm brooms); the men at the front of the photo are preparing sakau and the man seated to the right is “eating” sakau.

Growing up in Pohnpei, I have attended quite a few mehla, mostly that of family members, however, I haven't attended many as an adult. While doing my research I attended the mehla of Eliwi or Nahnep U, who I introduced in Chapter 2, as a high status woman who was a distant relative and dear friend of my nohno. She was also like a grandmother to me, as well as a close friend and confidant. Hundreds of people attended the funeral from throughout Pohnpei given her high status as the wife of Wasahi U. According to Kihleng, “Ceremonies of death in contemporary Pohnpeian society are the most significant, complex, and ritualized of all formal exchange events, and serve as the quintessential representation of Pohnpeian custom or *tiahk* as presently thought and lived” (1996, 250). Given the significance of mehla, elaborate events that last for four days and nights, women wear their most stunning urohs, again as symbols of wahu, but also to compete with other women and to stand out among the crowd. Each day of Nahnep's funeral, with the exception of the fourth day, the rahn en kamwakel (day of

cleaning), was a parade of elaborate urohs. On the first day when family members came to pay their respects, visit Nahnep's body and prepare for the days ahead, women wore more casual urohs, such as urohs popous. On the second day, the mwurilik (burial feast), when most people attended, including the deceased's peneinei laud, lapalap (high ranking individuals), as well as friends and community members, and the third day, the rahn en songmaterek (the day to test one's luck) when attendees brought fish, women wore their most elaborate urohs. Given that death is often unexpected, women obviously don't order urohs for mehla, however, they will wear their finest urohs that they've been saving for such life cycle events. Someone like Judy would wear one of her skirts that she's worn only once that is still "like new" (2 December 2012).

I carefully chose what urohs to wear for each day of Nahnep's mehla. On the first evening, I wore a black urohs rohs with blue reverse appliqué flowers that my friend Sipwoli had given to Nahnep, and Nahnep's grandson Berni had given to me while she was in the hospital. I wore it to feel close to her as I sat next to her body covered in gold glittery white sheets with a white rohs mwaramwar on her head, surrounded by fake



Figure 4.3. Urohs worn at Nahnep's mehla, Pohnpil, Saladak, 9-12 November 2012.

flowers. I couldn't see what she was wearing underneath the sheet. On day two, the mwurilik, I wore one of my favorite new urohs that Sipwoli had bought me recently. It was also black with a new machine embroidered mwahi with a big red heart at the center surrounded by big red hibiscus flowers and green leaves. The iki of the skirt also featured hibiscus flowers and leaves. I wore this particular urohs because it had a mwahi kapw, and I knew that no one else would have an urohs with that style of embroidered red hibiscus. I also chose it because it wasn't too flashy, and reflected my somber mood. For the third day, I chose an elaborate urohs posohke (layered urohs) with reverse appliqué

red hearts and flowers throughout and green thread. This urohs tends to lighten my mood, and was a gift from Nahnep's granddaughter Amoreen who lives on Guam.



Figure 4.4. More urohs worn at Nahnep's mehla.

mehla urohs

day 1: urohs rohs tontoal me wahn rohs mei
 black urohs with blue reverse appliqué flowers
 black and blue Pohnpil
 black and blue Wasahi
 part of me died with you

ke likauih
 I likauih
 ketemen pen komwi
 lien U
 it caresses my legs as it did yours
 but I cannot smell you on it
 Sipw gave it to you
 Berni gave it to me
 while you were in hospital
 with the photo albums from Hawai'i

black and blue me

day 2: mwahi kapw urohs dereht me wahn rohs weitah tah nan moangioang
with the bright red hibiscus
neon green leaves
a gift from Sipw
understated yet noticeable
unique
a red heart beats

day 3: urohs posohke
with layers of hearts and flowers
from Nahnep's granddaughter on Guam
it poofs out slightly
princess-like
an attempt to lift my spirits
my aunt spills her suhp en Kusai on it
I want to cry

Day 4: I manokelahr
rahn en kamwakel
I waited for my pig
and took it to Nohno Emi

Early on in my research Nahnep had invited me to accompany her to a mehla. I declined attending with her, and I can't quite remember why. I think I just wasn't ready to go to a funeral given that I was just beginning my research. I assumed there would be other mehla that I could attend while in Pohnpei. I also knew that I would need to attend at least one funeral for research purposes. I didn't think Nahnep's mehla would end up being the mehla I attended, but it felt as if she wanted me to be there. Nahnep played such a significant role in shaping my knowledge of what it means to be a lien Pohnpei, extending to my own experience of urohs. She lives on in my thesis through the lived experience of her mehla, and the urohs I wore along with the urohs all the women wore to pay their respects and remember her. As an elderly, chiefly woman, Nahnep would have understood the importance of sehu as the sakau of lien Pohnpei, which I describe next.

Urohs as sehu of contemporary lien Pohnpei

Sehu is considered to be the sakau (kava) of women (see Kihleng 1996). As mentioned above, sakau is a male prestige crop of ritual, spiritual and historical significance to Pohnpeians, and today it is also an extremely profitable cash crop. Sakau and sehu complement each other in origin (according to certain oral histories), ritual use and consumption. Kihleng writes “sugarcane was known as the kava (sakau) of women, meaning it was one kind of “drink” (pilen uhmw) or offering that could accompany dog (and later, pigs), yams, and breadfruit to make an uhmw (“stone oven” for chiefly prestation) for a feast” (1996, 62). There are numerous accounts⁶ of the origins of sakau and sehu and how they are connected. All of these speak as well to the central role played by women in the beginnings of these two highly significant agricultural products. Kihleng recorded one of the versions I am most familiar with in 1990 as part of an interview with a highly regarded historian from Saladak, U. This podoapoad tells of a woman being sent by the Pohnpeian god Luhk en Leng to Kosrae to retrieve some of the sakau he scattered there while he was pounding it in heaven because there was no sakau left in Pohnpei. The woman smuggled the sakau back to Luhk in her vagina, which is why Pohnpeians believe sakau en Pohnpei has a distinct smell and sakau from Kosrae does not. This account, and other existing variations, is a fascinating, visceral oral history that demonstrates the value of lien Pohnpei and the high regard Pohnpeians have for women’s bodies. The missionary Albert Sturges, one of the first American missionaries to arrive in Pohnpei in 1852 wrote “Kava is here what the cross is to the Christian; it fell from heaven and is the only means of obtaining a hearing here” (as quoted in Hanlon 1988, 114). If Sturges could equate kava with a Christian cross, then for it to have been smuggled back to Pohnpei in a woman’s vagina and then eaten,

⁶ According to Fischer, Riesenbergs and Whiting, there are nine different accounts of the origins of sakau, and they are quite similar with minor variations (1977). A common narrative involves a man from Saladak, Wideningar, and the Pohnpeian god, Luhk en Leng, going on a journey together. Wideningar gifts the skin from his heel to a woman who he tells to bury it and it grew into a plant. Pohnpeians later observed how rats would eat from the roots of the plant and become intoxicated, and they thus tried it themselves. Observing this, the gods wanted some too, so they took a piece of the sakau plant and pounded it in heaven. A piece fell back down to Saladak where it grew and multiplied (Riesenbergs 1968, 102; Bernart 1977, 63-64).

reveals that female bodies were and in many ways still are sacred territory to Pohnpeians.

During Kihleng's ethnographic research, she recorded another oral history about a variety of sehu called seukala, wherein a bunch of seukala grew from a particular tattoo instrument or ihnentek that was hidden by a tattoo specialist after she and her sister were discovered by their brother while they were tattooing, which was considered taboo (1996, 62-63). This poadopoad is rooted in the women-centered art of pelipel or rting and the female crop, seukala, which grew out of it. What these different oral histories reveal is the significance of sakau and sehu in Pohnpeian culture, and how their origins are closely tied to gender, women's power and efficacy and notions of the female body.



Figure 4.5. Sehu and urohs gifts for Easter celebration, Doloiso, Saladak, 1990-91, K. Kihleng, photographer.

When sakau is consumed, sehu is eaten for its sweetness, although today it is drunk (or more appropriately, eaten)⁷ with a variety of imported and other Pohnpeian food and drink. Sehu of different varieties continue to be used alongside sakau in many

⁷ Pohnpeians say “I pahn kohla kang sakau”; “I am going to go eat sakau.” We do not say “I pahn kohla nim sakau”; “I am going to go drink sakau.” Although technically a liquid, Pohnpeians consider sakau to be something that is eaten not drunk.

ceremonial and ritual activities. Seukala is taken and offered at ceremonies that include tomw, when asking for forgiveness, aluhmwur, when going to retrieve a family member who has been the guest of a high status person, and luhk, when inviting chiefs to attend certain events, and on the third day of mehla known as rahn en songmaterek. Seun nta (“blood sehu,” which has a beautiful dark red color) is taken by a man’s family when going to pek pwopwoud, to ask for marriage (Kihleng 1996, 159-160). Importantly, sakau is also used in these ceremonial events.



Figure 4.6. A woman wearing an urohs stands while giving a speech, next to men pounding sakau at Nahnep’s mehla.

I want to pose a new idea based on these oral histories and my own ethnographic research that seeks to situate urohs within a contemporary Pohnpeian female context. It is my belief that urohs have in many ways come to replace sehu as the sakau of lien Pohnpei given that just as sehu often functions alongside sakau ceremonially and historically, urohs function with sakau in contexts that are both income generating and cultural. Urohs are sent by airfreight alongside sakau to Guam and to other destinations where migrant Pohnpeians reside, they are raffled off and given as prizes at fundraisers where sakau is prepared and consumed, urohs are worn at kamadipw, mehla and marked (sakau “bars”), and at other events where people drink sakau. Sehu is no longer as ceremonially significant as it once was, and it is no longer grown or eaten in the quantities of the past (Kihleng 1996). This has much to do with Pohnpei’s colonial relationship with the U.S. and its cash driven economy (Bascom 1965; Kihleng 1996; Hanlon 1998). In the Pohnpei of today, it is more convenient to buy a soda to drink with

sakau than to cut down a stalk of sehu and then cut it up to eat. It could be argued that sehu's loss of status is a reflection of women's loss of power, and although this might be partially true, this thesis seeks to demonstrate the many ways that urohs empower lien Pohnpei today.

Urohs function as a kind of middle ground between what is Pohnpeian (sehu/sakau/ feasts/chiefs), female, income generating and empowering. These skirts do so in many ways: as textiles with roots in pre-contact doadoak en lih, but that are also contemporary and made with imported fabric and sewn on modern sewing machines; as a respectful form of cultural dress that



Figure 4.7. Women carrying sehu to the front of the nahs, kamadipw en kousapw, Saladak.

is worn to Pohnpeian events, but also elsewhere; as a means for many women to make money; as a calculated gift that tiahk necessitates, but also as an expression of friendship and love; as a means to express one's femininity, beauty and "Pohnpeianness;" and finally, as the perpetuation of lien Pohnpei's nting on fabric, skin and paper. Urohs may not have the ceremonial value that sehu does, but they are the only authentic Pohnpeian form of dress worn today (Wendt 1983; Addo, Leslie and Herda 2007). Urohs negotiate what it means to be a Pohnpeian woman in the 21st century in ways that sehu cannot. Sehu and its ceremonial functions are becoming part of Pohnpei's past whereas sakau has exploded in production and consumption. Not only does it maintain its ceremonial importance, but as a cash crop sakau is having a negative impact on Pohnpei's natural environment (Conservation Society of Pohnpei website 2012), as well as on Pohnpeian society.

Neitik mwohni⁸

I kin kang sakau
ngehi kapoapo pwong koaros
wereisang kang sehu

dir ahi urohs
mwahi kapw tohr
I kin urohs kohla ni kamadipw
kohla ni mehla
kohla ni party

I kin kang sakau
ngehi kapoapo pwong koaros
wereisang kang sehu

Give birth to money

I eat sakau
and have kapoapo⁹ every night
I haven't eaten sehu in awhile

I have many urohs
all new mwahi
I wear them to feasts
to funerals
to parties

I eat sakau
and have kapoapo every night
I haven't eaten sehu in awhile

Urohs as daily wear

In Pohnpei urohs are not only worn at kamadipw and mehla; for many women, like Judy Kostka and Alipherta Benjamin, they are daily wear. During our interview, I asked Judy whether urohs are kesempwal to her and she responded by telling me that they are because it's what she wears. As she explains:

Mwein ihte ansou me I kohla sarawi me I sohte likauih urohs en Pohnpei; I likauihda likouli. A ei kohla doadoak urohs en Pohnpei, mihmi me urohs en Pohnpei, kohla ni kamadipw urohs en Pohnpei, ni mehla. Pali laud eh (2 December 2012).

⁸ To "give birth to money"; a term used to describe people with a lot of money; often, these people have government jobs or own businesses.

⁹ To drink an alcoholic beverage after drinking sakau. Many Pohnpeians "eat" sakau and then drink a beer.

Probably the only time is when I go to church that I don't wear urohs en Pohnpei; I wear likouli. But when I go to work urohs en Pohnpei, staying here [at home] urohs en Pohnpei, go to kamadipw urohs en Pohnpei, to mehla. Most of the time.

Urohs truly are "second skins" to these women because the skirts are a part of them every day. And because urohs are their daily wear, they have large collections to choose from. They are selective about what urohs to wear each day so as to avoid repeat wear, and they rarely wear their nicest, saving them for special occasions. Alipherta or Alpery, as most people call her, had an incredible collection of old urohs. When Julie Nimea, a library technician at the College of Micronesia (COM) National Campus, learned of my research topic she told me that I had to interview her colleague, Alpery. I went to look for her in the library, and upon finding her I realized I knew Alpery, something that happens often in Pohnpei. Alpery is married to a man from Saladak and her eldest daughter and I were elementary school classmates. I told her about my project and asked if I could interview her. She agreed and told me that she would bring her kapang (suitcase) from their house in Saladak down to Kolonia, where she and her family were currently staying. I thanked her and then kept wondering what urohs were in her kapang. Wow, was I in for a surprise! During our interview, I asked Alpery how many urohs she thought she owned, and her response was the following:

[kouruhr] I sohte men ndahda..udahn e tohtoh apw I pil kin kisakiskihla. Ekei mihmihte pwehki mie me I wie doadoangki, eri mehn mahs kau, ma re sohla popular a I kihdi oh kin mwurin sounpar de sounpwung depe a I kihda ehu ngehi likauih. Ekei kin kilang a likamw re kin pwuriamweiki "ehi ke kolokol te!"... mwein aramas pahn sohte kak kamehlele (29 November 2012).

[laughs] I don't want to say...it's really a lot, but I also give them away. Some are still there [at her house in Saladak] because there are ones that I am still using, so the old ones if they are no longer popular, I leave them and after years or so many months I pick one up and wear it. Some see [the skirt] and it's like they are surprised "you still have it!" ...maybe no one will believe [how many she has].

Alpery had so many urohs that she didn't think anyone would believe her! I photographed 46 old urohs from her kapang, and she claimed to still have urohs at home. She only brought her old ones for me to see, choosing to leave her newer skirts at home. Unfortunately, I didn't have the opportunity to view that collection, however, it was really the old mwahi that I wanted to look at and photograph. I had already seen my share of urohs with mwahi kapw. Looking through her collection was like travelling back in time,

and remembering all of the different mwahi that have come and gone, and the lives of the women who made and wore them. The poem that follows describes some of Alpery's precious urohs.



Figure 4.8. (clockwise) Alpery with her urohs suitcase, Ohmine, Kolonia, 2012; siapo-looking mwahi; maru with diamond mwahi; cat mwahi; pumpkin mwahi; pineapple mwahi.

Urohs kapang

serpent like mwahi
or elimoang?¹⁰
like my old blue one
bright pink with the diagonal mwahi
up the side of the skirt
black butterflies along iki
urohs with lace iki
hibiscus with lace scalloped iki
urohs “cocktail” with pleated iki
the ever popular malek (chicken)
orange pumpkin on a bed of anthuriums
orange cat perched on purple anthuriums
green and purple striped pineapple
elegant mermaid with long black hair
nohno to the 2012 mermaids
purple hearts with stars in the middle
red, purple, pink, blue glitter hibiscus
siapo-looking pink pwomaria¹¹ on black
white kandehla, yellow flame
and let’s not forget
the purple urohs with the maru¹² mwahi
carefully sewn on top of a diamond

Many of the skirts Alpery had in her kapang were urohs rohs classics, such as the malek, the pumpkin, the pineapple, the mermaid and the kandehla. She also had a range of different urohs styles that were popular throughout the years, which included skirts with store-bought lace at the iki, flowers going diagonally up the left side of the main part of the skirt that matched the fabric in the bottom tier, which were popular in 2006,¹³ skirts that incorporate mass produced “Hawaiian” print fabric, sequined fabric and more. Her collection represented urohs that were popular from the early 1990s up through the mid-2000s, spanning about 15 years. Certain old mwahi are still popular today, although they have been altered and updated to reflect women’s taste in 2012. These include the mermaid, versions of which were also found on Nohno Emiko’s old kidipen uluhl and her tehi. There are many different styles of mermaid mwahi today, which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 6. The serehd (the Pohnpei Lory, a parrot species) has also persisted

¹⁰ Mangrove crab.

¹¹ Plumeria or frangipani.

¹² Marijuana.

¹³ I had several urohs with the same design that I was given when I visited Pohnpei in 2006.

throughout the years. Nohnno Emi had one of the oldest versions of the serehd on a white urohs rohs featuring two blue serehd with pink bougainvillea-looking flowers and an iki of anthuriums (see Figure 3.11). A popular contemporary mwahi also features two serehd, and another, a serehd and a del en sakau (or ngarangar; coconut shell for sakau) underneath. Urohs rohs with flower mwahi continue to be popular, as the original urohs style that was discussed in Chapter 3, and are found in large quantities in all of the urohs shops in both Pohnpei and Guam. Sohn deidei continue to update and improve old mwahi using different materials and sewing techniques as seen in the serehd urohs below. And, last but not least, there is the kandehla mwahi that Iso Nahnken adapted into the urohs dundun that I write about later in this chapter.



Figure 4.9. An old appliqué urohs serehd, 1990, K. Kihleng, photographer; dereht urohs serehd that belongs to K. Kihleng, 2014.

Urohs, as dipwisou en lih that represent “soaren lih,” (personal interview, Fatima Saimon) have always incorporated “things Pohnpeian” into their designs, as illustrated in the following section. The first urohs rohs with the simple machine appliqué were mostly agricultural in theme reflecting the flora and fauna of the island as seen in Nohnno Emi and Alpery’s collections. Today’s urohs feature similar themes, but sohn deidei have taken urohs to a whole other level with a more developed menginpeh, creating much more elaborate mwahi, experimenting with new materials and technologically advanced

sewing machines.¹⁴ Urohs are no longer only symbols of female identity, but textile articulations of tiahk en Pohnpei, as well as a fashionable means to express Pohnpeian humour and scandalous thoughts and behaviour. I will now discuss several urohs that I find particularly interesting and special.

six special urohs

There are many incredible urohs en Pohnpei; an entire thesis could be devoted to an analysis of the hundreds of mwahi alone. Here I wish to describe and discuss six skirts that I have chosen as especially noteworthy and unique. I have an urohs that was given to me by my friend Sipwoli in 2007. It is dark green polyester with a fairly simple mwahi that



Figure 4.10. Lih tohrohr urohs.

has two flowers with stems and a kind of vine motif. What makes this urohs unusual is the nting, the two words sewn on it in light green thread that read “Lih Tohrohr.” As I described earlier in Chapter 3, lih tohrohr is an engrained notion of behavior that girls are taught from a young age and expected to demonstrate as lien Pohnpei (see Kihleng 1996; Falgout 2009). A lih tohrohr is strong and capable of facing anything, especially her fears. It’s a unique urohs in that I’ve never seen another with these words, and it’s fascinating that the sohn deidei chose to write (or sew) this important expression that holds such powerful meaning onto the skirt. I do not know who sewed it, but I wondered what she was thinking just as I was curious as to why “Ih Riahla” (“I’m cursed”) was sewn onto Nohno Emi’s kidipen uluhl. As a representation of soaren lih, this particular skirt is telling those who see (or read) it that lien Pohnpei are lih tohrohr, and it can also be read that the wearer (or maker) is a lih tohrohr. When I wear urohs I know that I am putting on a Pohnpeian identity or skin, however, when I slip on this particular skirt, I am also adding an extra layer of meaning because of the nting on it. I am declaring myself to be lih tohrohr. As I discuss in Chapter 3, in the past

¹⁴ The most popular sewing machine in Pohnpei today is the Janome, a Japanese machine that is \$299.95 at Ray & Dors in Kolonia.

women had nting on their skin and this made them lih tohrohr. Women like the tattooed lien Rohnkiti wore their identities as a permanent “first skin.” Urohs as “second skins” represent a more fluid Pohnpeian female identity, yet the words “Lih Tohrohr” add another layer of distinctiveness. When I wear it I almost feel as if there is a kind of pressure to fulfill the “lih tohrohr” identity, but I also like that the urohs is a reminder of what it means to be a lien Pohnpei in the 21st century. Sometimes it means just wearing an urohs. I put it on and ask myself “what am I afraid of?”

A popular mwahi found on urohs today is the del en sakau or ngaranger (coconut shell for sakau drinking), which is often accompanied by the nting “sakau en Pohnpei” sewn into the fabric of the skirt. There are many different styles of this particular mwahi (see Figure 4.11). Sakau is a ceremonial drink found not only in Pohnpei, but in other islands throughout the Pacific as well. Pohnpei is, however, the only Micronesian island where sakau is planted, grown and consumed today. As previously mentioned, in contemporary Pohnpei sakau not only continues to be a male prestige crop, but is also the most important cash crop. In the last fifteen years or so sakau has become quite commercialized on the island, and there are markeds located throughout Pohnpei (and in migrant communities, such as on Guam). With the increase in sakau consumption, it is not surprising that urohs with the del en sakau motif have become popular as expressions of Pohnpeian identity. Women also consume sakau, therefore, a del en sakau mwahi on an urohs can reveal that the wearer is an avid sakau drinker (or eater), she likes the design, or perhaps she just wants to show her pride in being from Pohnpei.¹⁵ It can be read that women are claiming sakau as more than a crop that “belongs” to men. It is a symbol of Pohnpeian identity, so when the ngaranger is sewn and worn on an urohs, sakau also becomes associated with women. Women take ownership of sakau by sewing, selling, buying, wearing and gifting these urohs with ngaranger mwahi.

¹⁵ I’ve seen Chuukese women wearing urohs with the del en sakau mwahi on Guam.



Figure 4.11. (clockwise) A woman dancing in an urohs with a rahn sakau, elinpwur and ngarangar mwahi at the 3rd FSM National Women's Conference, PICS gym, Pohnpei, 2014, Karnim Judah, photographer; Berwy's elinpwur urohs with the nting "Mesehte Sohte Ewe"; "Eyes Without Mouth" (meaning "see, but don't talk"), Dededo, Guam, 2015; an urohs with elinpwur, ngarangar, writing and more.

The urohs I would like to discuss features a del en sakau as part of the mwahi, but also has some other distinctive motifs. It is one of the latest styles with an elaborate mwahi consisting of an elinpwur mwaramwar, a pair of hands squeezing sakau from kelou (hibiscus fibre) into a ngarangar that has the word "Sakau" on it. The ngarangar is surrounded by the nting "Pohnpei met" and "Dahme Apwal," and the elinpwur is surrounded by large, purple hibiscus flowers (see Figure 4.11). "Pohnpei met" or "this is Pohnpei" is the motto of the Pohnpei State Government (see <http://www.pohnpeimet.fm>), and "dahme apwal" or "what's difficult" is a common

Pohnpeian expression that in a sense means the opposite. When someone says “dahme apwal” they are saying “nothing is difficult” or “all’s well.” The overall concept of this mwahi seems to be that with tiahk en Pohnpei, i.e. sakau production and consumption and the wearing of mwaramwar and urohs because “Pohnpei met,” everything will work out. The urohs is like a kamadipw in itself. It was also a gift from Sipwoli, who brought it to Guam from Pohnpei on one of her trips. I had heard about the elinpwur mwahi,¹⁶ but hadn’t actually seen one, but this particular urohs takes it to another level with the other motifs that accompany the yellow mwaramwar. In Chapter 3, I wrote about the elinpwur mwaramwar made by women, which is a cherished form of kapwat for mehn Pohnpei. In keeping with urohs as a fabric on which “things Pohnpeian” are displayed, I suppose an elinpwur mwahi was inevitable. Urohs are a form of kapwat as are elinpwur and, therefore, an urohs with an elinpwur mwahi is a kind of kapwat on kapwat. It is a statement of what many women value in contemporary Pohnpei. Aesthetically, this urohs is quite “busy,” and it isn’t typically the type of urohs I would choose for myself. I appreciate the urohs as a gift given by a dear friend though, and am in awe of the elaborate overall design and the effort that went into its making. I have yet to wear it.

Another mwahi kapw was the result of a competition to create a wehi (turtle) inspired urohs sponsored by the Conservation Society of Pohnpei (CSP), “the premier conservation organization in the Federated States of Micronesia,” (see <http://www.serehd.org/>) and Micronesia Challenge, a commitment on behalf of Micronesian island nations to “preserve the natural resources that are crucial to the survival of Pacific traditions, cultures and livelihoods” (see <http://themicronesiachallenge.blogspot.com/>). The competition was announced at Pohnpei’s International Women’s Day 2013 and took place during Micronesia Cultural Day on 31 March 2013 with the intention of creating greater awareness about this endangered species and to promote the work of CSP (email correspondence, Lululeen Santos, 16 October 2014 and 11 March 2013). Unfortunately, I was not in Pohnpei during this time and, therefore, do not know the details as far as who won the competition. It sparked a wehi mwahi frenzy, however, and this style has become extremely popular

¹⁶ Kiomy Albert had told me about an elinpwur urohs that was part of the larger selection of skirts that were brought to Guam for the Guam Micronesia Island Fair in April 2014 (email correspondence, 23 April 2014). By the time I went to the fair on the second day, it was gone, purchased by a Chuukese woman.

today in Pohnpei and the diaspora. It was a first for Pohnpei to have organizations such as these recognize the creative textile art of *lien Pohnpei* in a way that also promotes conservation work.¹⁷ In my opinion, the *wehi mwahi* is one of the best-designed and aesthetically pleasing new motifs to have been sewn in recent years. It also has a significant meaning in Pohnpei's history and for Pohnpeians, as the island is turtle shaped and chiefdoms are referred to as *wehi* or "turtle states."



Figure 4.12. Two different *wehi urohs* with breadfruit, 1 of which features a *ngarangar* in the *mwahi*, for sale at the Guam Micronesia Island Fair, Guam, 2014.

Other *mwahi* that I find intriguing are playful and use a combination of *nting* and motifs to create sexual innuendo that engage with the viewer in a humorous way. Throughout the years, I've seen several sexually explicit *urohs*, and I can still recall a particularly memorable one that had the words "e katik?" or "is it bitter?" sewn on top of a *ngarangar* strategically placed at the front and center of the *urohs*. I cannot remember who was wearing the *urohs* or in what context the woman was wearing it, but I clearly remember the *mwahi*. It made me smile. When I interviewed Amoreen John, I was delighted to find that she had a skirt that was almost the same, except her's read "Ehi, Katik" meaning "Yes, it's bitter" with the same motif of the *sakau* cup surrounded by flowers. I believe the two *urohs* were made by the same *sohn deidei*, although I do not know who she is, and neither did Amoreen. The seamstress obviously had a sense of

¹⁷ This year the competition was to create a *poake/pako* (shark) themed *urohs* (email correspondence, Lululeen Santos, 16 October 2014).

humour, and was using the ngaranger as sexual metaphor. Sakau can taste bitter when it's especially strong, and the del en sakau and its placement on the skirt insinuates that a woman's vagina very well may be too, and both can be eaten (see discussion above). The sohn deidei may or may not have been aware of this poadopoad, however, she is obviously aware of the connection between sakau, women's bodies and sexuality, and chose to play with this. It is extremely flirtatious and fun. It takes a certain kind of woman to wear an urohs like this. I know I couldn't.

E katik?

ehi, katik
 guarantee, ke pahh sakaula ma ke kang¹⁸
 wen kehla¹⁹
 it'll have you drunk for days
 and coming back for more

There are two other urohs that I want to discuss that are also sexually explicit to a degree that is quite rare even for Pohnpei.

While working as a Curator for Pacific

Cultures at Te Papa Tongarewa in 2011, I acquired an urohs from a friend in Pohnpei for the Pacific Textile Collection with a purple pahsu (clam) mwahi designed on it (see Figure 4.14). While I had asked her to send me different styles of urohs, I never expected her to send an urohs pahsu. Pohnpeians say that there are two kinds of clams: pahsuhn nan sed and pahsuhn nan sapw: the clams of the ocean and the clams of the land; the latter refer to women's vaginas. I had never come across a pahsu mwahi before, and like the urohs dundun, which I will expand on next, it is not obvious upon first glance. However, anyone who paid attention would quickly figure out that the mwahi was indeed that of a pahsu. In this case I was told who the maker was, a woman from Kitti, but I do not know any further details as to what inspired her to sew this particular urohs. Thinking back, I should have tried to interview this sohn deidei while I was in Pohnpei doing my research. Like Iso Nahnken en Kitti's urohs and the urohs "katik," I assume that the skirt was meant to be humorous and engaging. Humour is a



Figure 4.13. The "Ehi, Katik" mwahi.

¹⁸ You will get drunk on sakau if you eat it.

¹⁹ It's that strong.

daily part of life in Pohnpei, and people love to laugh, joke and tease. Most people, except perhaps those who claim to be pwoson (religious), would laugh and appreciate such an imaginative textile.



Figure 4.14. Urohs pahsu, Pacific Cultures, Te Papa Tongarewa.

Iso Nahnken and his special urohs

The last urohs I want to present and analyze is the most sexually explicit, and also one of the most fascinating in terms of the mwahi itself, but more so because of the story that surrounds the making of the skirt and its now mysterious whereabouts, but also the maker himself. Here I will provide a case study of Iso Nahnken, the second highest ranking chief in wehin Kitti, and his outrageous urohs to convey the significance of these textiles in relation to gender and hierarchy within Pohnpeian society. It is a detailed ethnographic account that conveys the significance of urohs and the identities and hierarchies they represent through the maker, who by his very status as soupeidi embodies manaman. This particular skirt made by Iso Nahnken serves as a symbol of masculinity, sexuality and subversion.

Early in my research, a woman I interviewed on Guam told me that Iso Nahnken en Kitti sewed urohs. I was surprised to find out that a man, let alone a high chief, sewed urohs en Pohnpei, and was glad to have learned about him prior to travelling home to begin my research. Urohs represent a female domain in Pohnpei, and it is quite rare for men²⁰ to sew these skirts. Most people outside of those from Kitti were unaware that Iso sewed urohs, but were intrigued once they found out. The women I spoke with were even more shocked to find out that he had sewn a very unique, scandalous mwahi on a skirt, which I discuss here.

Upon hearing about the high chief who sews urohs, I knew that I would have to interview Iso (short for Iso Nahnken) when I was in Pohnpei. Given his high status, I would need to be taken to his residence by someone he knew, preferably someone also of high status, who would introduce me to him and serve as a kind of go between. Nahnep as the wife of Wasahi U, the second highest-ranking chief in U just below the Nahnmwarki was an option, although taking another soupeidi, one who was of even higher status than Iso, would complicate things. Pigs would be killed. Sakau would be pounded. While I was extremely excited to learn of the existence of an Iso Nahnken who sewed, I was already feeling anxious about the process of trying to meet him. Hanlon defines the role of the Iso Nahnken as such: “the nahnken served as the prime minister or “talking chief” who took care of the day-to-day affairs of government for his chiefdom and who also served as a go-between for the people in their dealings with the nahnmwarki” (1988, 269). The Nahnmwarki or paramount chief is revered as much too sacred and full of manaman to deal directly with the people. In fact, a special honorific language is used to address him and him alone. At least I could talk to Iso, even if I cannot speak proper meing,²¹ and as a “talking chief” he’d hopefully have a lot to share with regard to urohs. I went home and told my parents about Iso, and pahpa mentioned that he had attended Pohnpei Island Central School (PICS), Pohnpei’s main high school, with him. He was a year ahead of pahpa. I was relieved. There was a connection in place and I knew that this would make things so much easier. Pahpa came to Pohnpei with me

²⁰ While conducting my research I was told of four men, all from Kitti who sew urohs. I met two of these men, Iso Nahnken and a young man named Leonard Hainrick (pictured in Figure 6.7).

²¹ “High language, respect forms of speech” (Rehg and Sohl 1979, 57).

to help me kick start my research, and most importantly, to take me to meet Iso Nahnken. We knew he lived in Enipein, the southernmost part of the island.

On October 2, 2012, pahpa and I drove down to Enipein from Kolonia, about a two-hour drive, to meet and explain my project and formally ask permission to interview Iso. He and his wife, Nahnkeniei, had gone to a Catholic Church celebration in Wone, and weren't home. We spoke with Sisirihne, one of Iso's daughters, who also sews. I wound up interviewing her and afterwards, Iso and Nahnkeniei returned. Pahpa and I then explained what I was doing in Pohnpei and asked if we could return in two days' time so I could interview Iso. They were receptive. We stayed for a little while talking and establishing relationships.

Before we left, Nahnkeniei began to talk about a particular urohs that was ordered by a senator from Kitti that had a unique mwahi on it that Iso drew himself and sewed into an urohs. The senator paid \$100 USD for it. I was extremely curious and Nahnkeniei excitedly brought it out of her room to show us. The mwahi was that of a dundun or penis growing out of a red flower. It was outrageous even in the Pohnpei context, however, nothing really surprises me when I am in Pohnpei. The craziest things sometimes seem to happen in small, humid islands, and the wildest urohs get made. As far as I knew, this was the first and only urohs dundun. Only someone with a high profile, like a senator, could order such an urohs from Iso. And perhaps only a soupeidi like Iso could sew penises onto an urohs and then actually show the skirt to other people (S. Kihleng, personal communication, 2012-2014). This urohs is transgressive and so is the maker. Because he is Iso Nahnken he can break gender norms and sew urohs, and because he is Iso he can sew a penis onto a skirt.

Men who become Nahnken or "favored one" (Hanlon 1988, 24) have always held a special place within Pohnpeian society since the time of Nahlepenien, Isohkelekel's²² son, who was the first Nahnken and later became the first Nahnmwarki of U. Riesenberg explains, "Traditionally, they may violate all sorts of standards of behavior to which

²² Isohkelekel, the son of Nahn Sapwe, a Pohnpeian god and Lipahnmei, a Kosraean woman, and his 333 warriors sailed to Pohnpei and overthrew the Saudeleur dynasty that ruled over Nan Madol thus establishing the Nahnmwarki system that exists to this day (see Riesenberg 1968; Hanlon 1988).

others must conform. A Royal Child [Nahnken] can often be recognized by his loud talking and his free demeanor...the Nahnken, who is considered to be the eldest son of the Nahnmwarki, can take familiarities with his ascribed father that are permitted to no one else" (1968, 50). Their privileged position and soupeidi status meant that they could do as they pleased and no one could say a word. In a sense, they were born to break social norms and be transgressive and subversive. Various sayings apply to soupeidi that express their unique stature. "See but don't say...the chiefs" (Kilang seupwa...soupeidi), meaning essentially for a commoner, "No matter what you see or know about the chiefs, keep your mouth shut." Another saying is "sakanakan soupeidi" or "wickedness of the chiefs," which is explained to mean that regardless of how reprehensible a chief's actions may be his high position excuses him" (Riesenberg 1968, 50). These historical descriptions of the transgressive behaviors of the highest-ranking chiefs became more real when I conducted an oral history interview with Karmen Tadius, an elderly woman who sews urohs. She used the same phrase, "sakanakan soupeidi," to describe how she was forced to marry a former Nahnmwarki who mistreated her (12 December 2012).

Iso has freedoms that the average Pohnpeian man does not. Soupeidi do not need nor are they expected to care about what other Pohnpeians think; they are free to go about doing as they please. People may not approve of a soupeidi's actions or like the urohs dundun but that is beside the point. And because he is Iso, people will outwardly praise him for creating such an urohs even if they don't particularly like it. Pahpa and I laughed when we saw the urohs; we laughed out of pure shock, slight embarrassment and delight. There is something incredible about it! It was somewhat surreal to sit there with pahpa at the tehnpas (the chief's house) in an unfamiliar chiefdom and then be shown this sexually explicit skirt. And we praised it! "Eii, songen lel!": "Wow, how nice!" I said. Pahpa nodded, smiled, and I can't quite remember what he said. There was no other option really, but to praise, although we genuinely appreciated the creativity and uniqueness of the skirt. Let's face it, this urohs is one of a kind. I asked to take a picture, and Nahnkeniei held it up, and the urohs dundun was captured (see Figure 4.15), becoming a "this-has-been" (Rabine 2013, 172). What made this urohs especially interesting, slightly subtle and creative was that Iso drew on the old mwahi design of the candle inside a flower. At first glance one might mistake it for the kandehla mwahi,

but upon second glance, one will realize that there is no flame, and the skirt is in fact covered in dundun.



Figure 4.15. The urohs dundun made by Iso Nahnken, Ninleng, Enipein Pah, Kitti, 2012; the urohs kandehla that belongs to Alpery.

The words “Hawaiian Air” were sewn into the urohs at the top. When I asked Iso and Nahnkeniei about this, they told me that several senators from Pohnpei had gone to Hawai‘i to meet with representatives from Hawaiian Airlines. Apparently negotiations fell through and the urohs was ordered to send to a woman who worked for the airline upon their return. I wasn’t told what kind of message the senator intended to send by mailing such an urohs to the woman. Although the urohs was obviously never sent, as it was still in Iso and Nahnkeniei’s possession, I hoped that I would be able to find out more about the urohs dundun before I left Pohnpei. Nahnkeniei gifted me with her elinpwur mwaramwar and an urohs. The urohs was plain black with orange flowers and a green thread zigzag border at the iki. I gave her two Victoria’s Secret lotions. Pahpa and I left the tehnpas and I was high on urohs. We would return in two days’ time.

Afterwards, pahpa and I drove north to U chiefdom and visited Wasahi and Nahnep U. We told them that we had just come from visiting Iso, and I showed Nahnep the picture

of the urohs dundun. Nahnep, as my confidant, my muse and my “grandmother” was the first person I wanted to tell about Iso’s special urohs. I wrote this poem after showing her the skirt.

urohs dundun

Pahpa and I leave Enipein
drive through Madolenihmw
the wehi with the most potholes
parts of the road become narrow
one lane roads overgrown
with thick vegetation
making wehin Madolenihmw
feel like it’s the largest
all the way to Saladak
I show Nahnep the picture
Nahnkeniei holding it up
a prize, one of a kind mwahi
made by Iso Nahnken en Kitt

Nahnep smiles
she likes it, of course
if it were hers
she’d hang it in her house
for pure admiration purposes
whisper pwong mwahu to it
she’d never wear it
it’s much too precious
pwe mour
mour, she says

Two days later on 4 October 2012, I followed pahpa into the nahs carrying the smaller plastic basin full of freshly fried Namiki donuts and bread. Pahpa carried the large basin that contained various kinds of soda on ice. We placed the basins in front of Iso Nahnken greeting him and Nahnkeniei formally. Then we were told to sit down. So there pahpa and I were, sitting in the tehnpas yet again with Iso, Nahnkeniei and some of their family members. In Pohnpei, I always feel like I do a lot of sitting, a lot of waiting. It can be disrespectful to walk in front of high-ranking people and elders, so we sit and sit and sit some more. Nahnkeniei drank a soda and ate some bread. Iso smoked his Doral cigarettes. Some of the younger members of the household were cooking in the wonuhmw (outside cookhouse). We chatted and I showed Iso and Nahnkeniei the old German photos I had of Pohnpeians. They both examined these closely making some

comments about various photos. Then Nahnkeniei told everyone to get out of the nahs because we were going to do some doadoak, some work. It was just me, Nahnkeniei and Iso left in the nahs. Pahpa was wandering around outside, and I was nervous.



Figure 4.16. Nahnkeniei, Iso Nahnken and me.

And the interview began as the rain poured down on Enipein. One of the first questions I asked Iso was whether he thought urohs are kesempwal and why. He replied:

Keiiu e wia kesempwal oang lien Pohnpei rahnwet pwe ih me re likauih, re pil wiahki arail mehn ipweroak, oh kesiluh urohs en Pohnpei pil wia ehu el en kapai oang mehn Pohnpei (4 October 2012).

Firstly it's important for lien Pohnpei today because it's what they wear; they also use it to make themselves look beautiful, and thirdly, urohs en Pohnpei provide a path towards good fortune for Pohnpeians.

Obviously Iso values urohs. He sews them. Iso wore off-white khaki shorts and no shirt. Looking at the photos now I really do look like a pihs kohr seated there in the nahs next to Iso and Nahnkeniei holding my papers with my glasses and flushed face. Iso was 60 years of age at the time of our interview, and has ten children; the three youngest are adopted. I learned from his daughter Sisirihne that his first wife, his children's biological mother, passed away several years ago. The current Nahnkeniei is his deceased wife's sister whom he chose at her mehla. At times, soupeidi are pressured to choose a wife soon after the deceased spouse's passing. He chose his wife's sister, which is not

surprising as men in the past often married their wife's sisters and vice versa in the event of a spouse's death (see Riesenberg 1968). Soupeidi are expected to marry.



Figure 4.17. Iso Nahnken and his Caboodles sewing kit.



Figure 4.18. Iso and Nahnkeniei sewing.

Iso Nahnken, whose given name is Olter Peter, is the son of the former Nahnmwarki of Kitti, Benito Peter. He is a member of the Dipwenpehpeh sou who are descendants of stingrays. Iso never had a doadoak en wai, a western, “for pay” job; he works the land and sews. I tried to ask him about how he felt about being a man who sews, but he didn't really answer the question. He did tell me that he knew of two other Kitti men who also sew urohs. He learned to sew by taking home arts at PICS taught by a Filipina.

It was uncommon for boys to take home arts at PICS according to pahpa, in fact, he never heard of a male student taking home arts. Most male students took mechanics, carpentry or agriculture. Again, as soupeidi and the son of the Nahnmwarki of Kitti, Iso could take home arts. No one would say anything.

Iso said he started sewing and then selling urohs “wereila,” a long time ago, when they were still \$10 USD then \$15 and now \$100 (the urohs dundun). Nahnkeniei made comments here and there as she boiled mwahng, wet land taro, then squeezed coconut milk over it. My mouth watered. I asked about the words “Hawaiian Air” being written on the urohs and Iso said that he didn’t know exactly why they ordered those words to be on the skirt. It was all quite intriguing. I told Iso that I showed Nahnep U the picture of the urohs dundun and how much she loved it, so much so that she’d like to hang it in her house to admire. This gave him and Nahnkeniei much pleasure. Soupeidi value the thoughts and opinions of other soupeidi, and for Nahnep U, who held the second highest-ranking female title or mwarepein, second to Likend, to praise Iso’s special urohs was a great compliment.

Iso Nahnken likened Nahnep’s desire to display the urohs rather than wear it to a Japanese man who visited him and placed an order for an urohs to take with him back to Japan. As Iso recalled the man was very impressed with his sewing skills. Iso presumed that he must have a wife to take it to, but the man said he did not, and he wished to display it in his home as a souvenir. Iso described sewing an urohs with a mwahi that featured a serehd on top of a del en sakau, two important symbols of Pohnpei, which the Japanese man was quite pleased with. This urohs along with the urohs dundun are urohs not made for “everyday use” (Alice Walker 1973). They are highly prized, as Iso Nahnken makes them and they feature one-of-a-kind mwahi. In the case of the urohs dundun, perhaps the only woman who could get away with wearing it would be Nahnkeniei.

To conclude our interview, I asked him to tell me the story of Enipein and the lih eni. I was curious to hear the poadopoad (sacred story) of this place from the Iso Nahnken who resided there, and he told me a summarized version of the story as Nahnkeniei

instructed him to. Enipein, which translates to mean, “ghost lady,”²³ was founded by a ghost who married the Nahmwarki of long ago, and became Likend, which according to Iso explained why there is no Likend in Kitti, only Nahnalek.²⁴ Iso told me that there was an overgrown path that led out towards the ocean where there was a rock, and this was where Likend could be found. It is where she appeared. This poadoapoad like many others about places in Pohnpei reveals the centrality of women. Here we had a high chief who sews urohs, a distinctly female form of dress, in a kousapw founded by a female ghost who became the most high-ranking woman and remains so. Before the interview ended, Iso offered to demonstrate his sewing for me. I told him I would very much like that.



Figure 4.19. Iso sewing.

After the interview I handed Iso a bright pink Samoan lavalava that my friend Karita Avia gave me and asked him if he could sew it into an urohs. Iso sat cross-legged the entire time, took the pink material and held it up, examined its size and then folded it nice and neat in front of him. Then he opened up his Caboodles make-up case/sewing kit. It held all of his sewing equipment; each compartment had different things from scissors to light bulbs for his sewing machine. He was a very organized man; this was the first and only sewing kit I’d come across throughout my research. Several of Iso’s

²³ Eni means ghost and pein means woman (email correspondence, Lululeen Santos, 16 October 2014).

²⁴ Nahnalek is the highest female title in Kitti, as well as in Nett.

daughters sew as well, and perhaps the Caboodles case belonged to all of them. He then began cutting the material, already having figured out how he'd like the urohs to look with the designs displayed in a particular manner. The entire time his cigarettes, lighter, Khao Shong instant coffee and machete were next to him.



Figure 4.20. Iso takes a smoke break while Nahnkeniei sews.

Iso's Kenmore machine, which sat on two pieces of wood, was semi-functional with part of the base not attached properly. Pahpa stood in front of the machine trying to figure it out, and then one of Iso's sons assisted and finally it worked. He began to sew the iki of the skirt. He then switched machines because that one kept giving him problems. Once he finished with the iki, he sewed it to the larger body of the skirt. Nahnkeniei took over and Iso took a smoke break. Once the iki was finished, she sewed in the komi (elastic waist band). Afterwards she cut off the lose bits and pieces, and we had an urohs. Iso Nahnken and Nahnkeniei en Kitti sewed what may very well be the first urohs created from a lavalava from Samoa.²⁵ And it was beautiful! I put it on.

²⁵ There are urohs that have been sewn with "Polynesian" fabric, but this kind of fabric comes from factories in China, not directly from the islands.

I wore my new pink urohs, and pahpa and I were served lunch: fried fish, mwahng piaia (taro with coconut milk) and kehp (yam). It was delicious; the kind of food one envisions high chiefs eating regularly except with freshly killed pork added to the menu. The young members of the household took the food away and soapy water was brought over for us to wash our hands. It was quite fun visiting soupeidi, although regular visits would get quite costly. We were full and content; pahpa gave them some money and we thanked Iso Nahnken and Nahnkeniei. We headed back through Madolenihmw again towards U as night fell. We brought our leftovers to Wasahi and Nahnep.



Figure 4.21. My “Samoan” urohs.

full moon²⁶

tehnipas are familiar to me
 a place to eat pork
 and feel loved
 pahpa and I eat mwahmw pirain
 mwahng piaia
 kehp at this tehnipas
 surrounded by large, happy sakau
 no one dare steal Iso’s sakau

he is a quiet man
 loves his ten children,
 Doral sika, Khao Shong instant coffee
 Loves Urohs but
 I wouldn’t want to make him angry

this high chief sews
 since his home arts days
 at PICS
 Nahnkeniei says he is a natural
 finding inspiration in a curtain
 from A-One Fabric

²⁶ During our interview Iso Nahnken’s daughter Sisirihne told me that their place is known as Full Moon (2 October 2012), but I later learned that this is the name of their sakau marked. The name of their peliensapw is Ninleng in kousapw Enipein Pah.

he sees
he draws
he sews
made the wahn rohs limeisek riau
the 52 flowers skirt
and the serehd on the del en sakau too
now hanging on a wall somewhere in Japan
as for the urohs dundun
we don't know where it is...

why a dundun?

Iso is the embodiment of where tiahk meets urohs. He is also a transgressive figure who oversteps gender norms in Pohnpei by sewing Pohnpeian skirts. Like him, his urohs dundun pushes boundaries, yet by his very birthright, he is expected to behave accordingly by not following the rules. In many ways the urohs dundun is a representation of his special status as Iso Nahnken, and the sanctioned behavior of such “royal children” or serihso, the children of the Nahnmwarki (Riesenberg 1968, 50). The senator who ordered the urohs from him would have known that he was the perfect person to sew such a skirt. It actually elevates his status by making him more renowned. Rather than emasculating him, sewing urohs, particularly the urohs dundun, enhances his masculinity. This urohs is literally a statement of manhood or “mour” (life), according to Nahnep, and because a man sewed it, it is even manlier. Through sewing urohs, Iso is demonstrating that men can also sew these magnificent textiles, and by creating this unique mwahi, he is putting his own stamp on urohs en Pohnpei. Iso is one of only a few men who sews skirts in all of Pohnpei, therefore, rather than view him as appropriating a form of doadoak en lih, because of who he is, Iso is in fact adding prestige to the art form. Sewing urohs also provides him with supplemental income to help his family. I asked pahpa what he thought of Iso sewing such an urohs and he said that he found it comical. He thought it was meant as a joke.

For whatever reason, the urohs dundun was never sent to the woman in Hawai'i. The last I heard of the mysterious urohs dundun was that it was given to a senator from Guam during the Association of Pacific Island Legislatures (APIL) annual meeting that took place in Pohnpei in December 2012. Apparently a senator from Pohnpei²⁷ (I'm

²⁷ I chose not to name names here as my source asked me to keep the senators' identities private.

assuming the same senator who ordered the urohs) gave it to the Guam senator who was instructed to view the urohs in private. I do not know the circumstances/reasons why the urohs dundun was given to her. I do know that she was quite offended and an apology was made. People ought to be careful who they give urohs with penises to. The whereabouts of the urohs dundun today is not known. I am just so happy to have seen and taken a picture of it.

Urohs as kisakis

The urohs dundun is an important example of the expanse of the social life of urohs as prestige items that are gifted. It was ordered by a Pohnpeian senator, made by an Iso Nahnken, almost sent to Hawai'i, and then was gifted to another senator...and who knows where it ended up! Every employee of the Pohnpei State Legislature was required to provide an urohs, all of which were given as gifts to the off-island participants at the APIL meeting. Most of these visitors were VIPs, senators and other elected officials from as far away as American Samoa, who left Pohnpei with an urohs or two or three that the women may or may not wear, that the men may gift to their wives or girlfriends, that may be put in a drawer or closet where they place all their souvenirs, but all of them will remember Pohnpei through these female textiles. Ping-Ann Addo writes "Giving and reciprocating material things gives people the power to create bonds that they constitute and consider essential to society. In other words, gift exchange becomes a way of producing a culturally valued and connected self" (2013, 22). In Pohnpei, urohs are one of the most, if not *the* most, kesempwal gift a woman can give and one of the most gifted "things."²⁸ Through the gifting and exchange of urohs women form bonds and connections with each other that often last a lifetime. Gifting urohs also demonstrates a woman's Pohnpeian-ness and is done best when it is spontaneous and unexpected. A "good" Pohnpeian woman is expected to be inherently kadek (Falgout

²⁸ I offer a brief discussion here on the gifting of urohs given its importance in the social relations of Pohnpeian women at home and in the diaspora. Kihleng (1996) writes extensively about Pohnpeian women's exchange practices, and an entire thesis could actually be written about urohs as kisakis. There are key theoretical works on gift exchange (Mauss 1990, Strathern 1990, Graeber 2001) that I, therefore, do not address in the thesis, but plan to engage with in the context of urohs and gifting in future publications.

1984), and this kindness or kadek lamalam (kind heartedness) is often displayed through the giving of urohs en Pohnpei.

Here Judy S.P. Mauricio illustrates the significance of urohs as a gift of value for lien Pohnpei:

E wiahla ehu kasalepen mehn Pohnpei, urohs. Pahn kilang lah te wasah kis me likin Pohnpei a I eshier me re sang Pohnpei....Oh e pil wiahla mehn kisakis. Urohs wialahr dipwisou ieu me mehn Pohnpei kesempwaliki pwe kitail kin pilada dipwisou ieu me kitail kesempwaliki ah kitail kisakiski. Pwehki kitail lih kitail sohte kak kisakis ki keh, pwihk, sakau pwe ohl, pwe me toutou...a lihaka e wialahr me ih me keiiu mwahu urohs pwe e marahra...E wialahr mehn gift sang Pohnpei...Kasalepen en mehn Pohnpei kisakis urohs. Dipwisou kesempwal mwo pwe kitail wie doadoangki rahn koaros, likilikauih rahn koaros. Sewese mehleh kiht lih aka (10 October 2012).

It's become one way to show who's Pohnpeian, urohs. [I] look over to a place outside of Pohnpei and I already know they are from Pohnpei...And it has become a gift. Urohs have become an item that Pohnpeians value because we select things that we find important and we gift them. Because we are women we cannot gift yams, pigs, sakau because men, [and] because these are heavy...so for women it's become that the urohs is best because it's light...it's become a gift from Pohnpei...It shows what Pohnpeian gifts are, urohs. It's an important gift because we use it every day, wear it every day. It really helps us women.

At Nahnep U's mehla, I complemented Kedinmadau en Saladak's²⁹ urohs. It was black with red and green thread in the sele (hot pepper) design; it was simple yet striking. The next day at the mehla, she handed me the skirt. I was surprised by such an act of kindness, especially given that I didn't know this new Kedinmadau well. I was touched. However, I was not surprised in the sense that to do so was very Pohnpeian and reflected her stature in the Saladak community, particularly so since I was a visitor, and my parents and I were former residents of Saladak, mourning the loss of one of Saladak's high status women, who I was also extremely close to.

The gifting of urohs is an act of kindness, although it can also be strategic. It is also a form of calculated generosity. Kiomy Albert illustrates this form of generosity quite well in describing gifts given to earn the favour of chiefly women:

Ehu me I kilang ni mwohmw, duwehte pwihn ieu ni kamadipw eh, ma irail pahn kin men Likend o de ar lih soumas o en kesempwal kin irail, a re kin oate urohs kaselel,

²⁹ The wife of the soumas en kousapw, Sau Saladak, Erlin Alex. The Soumas is essentially the chief of the kousapw, and his wife also has an important community role as Kedinmadau.

wahla, kiheng lih o eh u arail kisakis en arail kamadipw o, eri lapalap kau, Likend o de mwo udahn kin pwungki, ih eh u me I kilang. Wehwehki ma pwihn ieu, pwihn limau, pwihn me kihda urohs kaselel kau, kilang pwe ih pwihn o me Likend, lih soumas o kin wie keskesempwaliki (1 October 2012).

One thing I've noticed in action, for instance, if a group is at a kamadipw, if they want the Likend or their lih soumas³⁰ to cherish them, then they order beautiful urohs, take it, give the woman one of their gifts during their kamadipw, so the high status individuals, Likend or whomever will really favour [them]. That's one thing I've noticed. Therefore, if there is a group, five groups, the group that gave the beautiful urohs, you'll see that it's that group that the Likend, the lih soumas, will keep caring about.

Here Kiomy expresses how lien Pohnpei's love of urohs plays out in the chiefly hierarchy, and the ways that women gift these precious textiles in an effort to earn the favour of chiefly women through legitimizing their rank and status (Kihleng 1996, 240). Gifting this form of female wealth in contemporary Pohnpei empowers women through the social and political bonds it creates between commoner women and lih lapalap. These skirts can take women places and open doors.

Urohs also strengthen ties between women and families through marriage. Lululeen Santos described to me how once she was married, she started to have more urohs because her husband's relatives often gifted her with skirts (19 October 2012). Urohs were a way that her husband's family, now her family, showed their affection for her as his new wife. Many women I interviewed spoke of gifting urohs to their family members, particularly their mothers and mothers-in-law. I was struck by the honest way Fatima Saimon expressed her desire to gift urohs en Pohnpei:

Ngohi mwein I kin kalahda de dah, mwo I kin peren kihda aramas [se kouruhr] ah I kin kiskisoaki urohs. Re kin kohdo memweit rehi a I kin kiskisoa kin irail...Mie ahi urohs me kapw I apwtehn likoukihda, okay likoukihte nek kiskisoa kihla en ai pwoud o nohno soang ko. Menda ma ahi urohs o tala limeisoak pwehki e kaselel ahi urohs o okay kisakis kihla (21 November 2012).

Me, perhaps I show off or something, it's like people make me happy [we laugh] and I gift urohs. They come to visit me and I gift it to them...I have urohs that are new that I just put on, okay, [I] wear it and give it away to my mother-in-law like that. It doesn't matter if my urohs is fifty dollars because it's beautiful, okay, [I] give it away."

³⁰ The soumas en kousapw's wife.

The excitement in gifting urohs to visitors and family, as Fatima described, is something I have seen many times in Pohnpei, and it is part of being a lien Pohnpei, as I explain above. As Fatima expressed, it shouldn't matter that the skirt was expensive. In fact, if it was, all the better because it's about the expression of limpoak (love) that counts.

During my nearly eight months of research I was given more than 30 urohs. On Guam, two women I interviewed, who also happen to have the largest urohs collections of all the women I interviewed on the island, gave me urohs. In Pohnpei, I was given approximately 28 urohs. Sipwoli who obviously loves selecting and gifting skirts to her friends and family, gifted ten of these to me. Six or seven skirts were gifts from other women I interviewed, and the remaining ten or so were given to me by friends and family. Lien Pohnpei are fond of giving urohs to visitors, especially those who visit their homes for the first time. Gifted urohs serve to reinforce the memory of the time spent together and represent the bond that was created during the visit. Additionally, urohs make wonderful gifts to those who live away because, as Judy S. P. Mauricio mentioned, they are lightweight and easy to take from place to place. I gave most of the women I interviewed bottles of Victoria Secret lotion, as lien Pohnpei love these. If I didn't give them lotion, I brought them food, and, in several cases, I gave women food and lotion. As a visitor to their homes, it was culturally appropriate for me to give them a gift and quite often the gift was reciprocated.



Figure 4.22. Urohs gifted to me by Fatima Saimon, Diadi, Kittu, 2012.



Figure 4.23. (clockwise) I'm wearing an urohs posohke given to me by Amoreen on Guam and later worn to Nahnep's mehla, with my aunt Yumileen Kihleng, U; An urohs in progress that was later gifted to me by Karmen Tadius, Pali Ais, Nett; urohs purchased by Sipwoli to send to her sister in Hawai'i and her friend in California, 2012.

This chapter revealed that we express our identities as *lien Pohnpei* through the wearing and gifting of *urohs*. It is what we do with our treasured skirts that creates meaning and makes *urohs kesempwal*. *Pohnpeian* women wear *urohs* to different places and functions, although most wear skirts to *kamadipw en kousapw* and *mehla*. Other women, like Judy and Alpery, wear *urohs* on a daily basis and collect these textiles, putting their special skirts to the side for future occasions to avoid repeat use. They wear *urohs* to be noticed at *Pohnpeian* celebrations, to stand out in the crowd; their skirts are extensions of themselves much like some of the migrant women on Guam who I write about in the next chapter.

I have portrayed my own ethnographic and personal experience of mourning Nahnep to explore the significance of *mehla* in *tiahk en Pohnpei* and the wearing of *urohs* at these life cycle events. I also proposed that *urohs* can be seen as the contemporary *sakau* of

women, as they have replaced sehu, a female agricultural good, as a form of women's wealth today. Given that I cannot write about all the innovative and dynamic mwahi continually being produced by sohn deidei, I described and analyzed "six special urohs." These skirts illustrate how "things Pohnpeian," such as sakau, wehi, elinpwur, notions of being (lih tohrohr), are creatively and, at times, humourously displayed on urohs. Iso Nahnken en Kitti's urohs dundun is one of these skirts, and I wrote about my time spent with him and Nahnkeniei as an ethnographic case study. As a high chief who sews urohs, Iso is a fascinating, transgressive figure, who through sewing these textiles gives manaman and prestige to menginpehn lih. Lastly, I explored the role of urohs as cherished kisakis that allow women to share, reciprocate, earn favour, be Pohnpeian, and most importantly, spread joy and happiness. Lien Pohnpei are so attached to these textiles that we carry them with us in our hearts and in our travels away from home to make new island homes, like Guam.

Chapter 5: Pahn Urohs 0: what's under the skirt

"We define ourselves not through what we reveal, but what we hide."

~Azar Nafisi (2008, 56)



Figure 5.1. "Always on my mind" urohs worn by Rinte Pelep at a mehla, Harmon, Guam, 31 July 2012.

"always on my mind"

it was a Madolenihmw mermaid
with green thread scales
surrounded by red roses
that I met that night
at the mehla in Harmon
people lined up to view
the young woman in the casket

she wears it
no other urohs like it
the mermaid with white hair smells a flower
in a lush jungle that isn't quite Pohnpei
no roses grow there
Sirena¹ has yet to make an appearance
but that doesn't matter
I want one too

¹ A mermaid found in Chamorro legend.

the girl wears her island
a love song
around her waist
e sonamwahu ieng kilie

I photographed the mermaid urohs above at a funeral on Guam for a young Pohnpeian woman I am distantly related to who died of cervical cancer on her way to the Philippines. Many people attended the funeral because of the circumstances surrounding her death—her age, being in transit, her illness. Pohnpeians wanted to show their support for the family. The mehla was a parade of elaborate urohs. I could tell that women were wearing their finest. A 17-year-old woman named Rinte Pelep was wearing this urohs. It was the first time I'd seen this particular style of mermaid urohs, and it stood out as having a mwahi kapw.² Rinte returned to Pohnpei before I had a chance to talk with her further, although I wouldn't have been able to interview her since she wasn't yet 18. I asked her a few questions though about her urohs that evening at the funeral, and she told me her aunts in Madolenihmw made the urohs and sent it to Guam. Rinte also mentioned that she loved wearing urohs, which was quite surprising coming from a woman her age, and it made me happy to know that some young women still love wearing urohs. About four months later, I interviewed Rinte's aunts, Enolynn and Younerine Thomas, the Madolenihmw women who are famous for this style of urohs. My time with these sohn deidei will be described in greater depth in Chapter 6.

This urohs symbolizes how many Pohnpeian women living on Guam feel about their home island. Pohnpei is "always on my mind" like the 1982 Willie Nelson hit that is still popular among Pohnpeians.³ Lien Pohnpei may be living away, but their hearts are still attached to home and their urohs keep them connected. For many migrant women owning, wearing and gifting the latest styles of urohs from Pohnpei reinforce their identities as Pohnpeian women. Essentially when they wear their urohs they are wearing Pohnpei. The urohs, like the sari of India, is so much more than just ethnic wear; it is a "lived garment" (Banerjee and Miller 2003, 1). One could say they put on an

² When I went to Pohnpei in July 2012, I spoke with several other women who had mermaid urohs like Rinte's, which reconfirmed that indeed this urohs was a new style.

³ Pohnpeians, like other Pacific Islanders, love Country and Western music and many Pohnpeian songs are sung over the music from country songs.

imagined Pohnpei when they wear urohs, and it's almost as if they are there (see Anderson 1983). An urohs can evoke many memories as well, and the skirts serve as reminders of people, places and even events. And because most women wear urohs to Pohnpeian functions it can almost feel like being in Pohnpei.

In this chapter I discuss how migrant Pohnpeian women living on Guam feel about urohs. My interviews reveal a complex, multi-layered/threaded relationship with this textile art that lien Pohnpei are clear to claim as their own. Despite women articulating that urohs are a Pohnpeian form of dress (personal interviews), my ethnographic study reveals that there is no single narrative when it comes to this skirt, although there are definite patterns. The women's stories, like the many different mwahi designs, are colorful and feature multiple threads. I think it is safe to say that lien Pohnpei are still negotiating their identities on Guam and this is reflected in how they feel about and when they wear urohs. It is in the wearing of urohs that lien Pohnpei are simultaneously empowered and at times disempowered, as I shall illustrate further.

I begin by providing historical context to the Pacific Islands region of Micronesia and how it continues to be marked by cultural and linguistic diversity, with islanders from the region viewing themselves as uniquely Palauan, Chamorro, Pohnpeian, Chuukese, etc. I situate Pohnpei within the context of the young nation of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), and the migration of its citizens to the U.S. Pacific Territory of Guam over the past thirty years. As part of a larger "Micronesian" ethnic group, Pohnpeians on Guam are oftentimes marginalized and discriminated against, which has affected notions of ourselves and how we wish to be perceived. While most migrant lien Pohnpei still feel a strong attachment to urohs as a "clothed" representation of home, the wearing of urohs shifts along with our identities, particularly so in terms of the "Micronesian" skirt. This shift is explored through what isn't seen, what isn't obvious, what is beneath the surface, hidden under these valuable Pohnpeian textiles and the women who wear and don't wear them on an island that is geographically located in Micronesia, but in many ways is an ocean apart (see Hau'ofa 2008 for a somewhat different perspective on "the ocean in us"). I then discuss "sites of wearing" (Sandhu 2007, 36) urohs on Guam to reveal how wearing urohs in certain places and for particular events and activities can make lien Pohnpei feel *at home*, but at the same time

feel “unhomed” (Bhabha 1994). As Karen Tranberg Hansen writes for African dress and fashion, and which is relevant to Pohnpeian female dress on Guam, “there is an experiential and physical dimension to the power of clothing, both in its wearing and in its viewing. Our lived experience with clothes, how we feel about them, hinges on how others evaluate our crafted appearance, and this experience in turn is influenced by the situation and the structure of the wider context” (2013, 3).

The important Pohnpeian concept of *kanengamah*, which refers to a way of being that values restraint and concealment (Petersen 1993), is also examined in relation to women’s intentional concealment of large collections of *urohs*. This *kanengamah* serves to reveal just how *kesempwal* (valuable) these textiles are in *lien Pohnpei*’s lives away from home. For several *lien Pohnpei* with extensive *urohs* collections, their *urohs* wardrobes truly mirror their lives on Guam. They are extensions of themselves, their “second skins” (Küchler and Were 2014, xx).

In the last section of the chapter, I discuss young Pohnpeian women’s perceptions of *urohs* both on Guam and in Pohnpei. My ethnographic research shows that most young Pohnpeian women, particularly those under 25, are somewhat disinterested in *urohs*. I distributed a survey to college⁴ age Pohnpeian women designed to give me a general idea of their thoughts on *urohs* as a form of dress, as my oral history interviews were not focused on this age group. As I describe, their answers to the survey questions reveal a certain ambivalence towards wearing *urohs*, while at the same time an appreciation of their beauty and cultural significance as a distinctively Pohnpeian female form of clothing, much like young *ni-Vanuatu* women’s experiences with the “island dress – the national dress for women in Vanuatu” (Cummings 2013, 33). I end the chapter by looking “*pahn urohs o*”— at the paper, the layer of fabric that supports the *appliqué* and machine embroidery, at what is worn underneath between the skin and the *urohs* itself, and what these “say” about us as *lien Pohnpei*.

⁴ When I refer to college, I mean community college or university, after high school.

Micronesia and Micronesians⁵

Colonialism established the boundaries that divide the Pacific Islands, including Micronesia, and it is also colonial, as well as neocolonial, forces, that created the “Micronesian skirt.” Although we have Gregoire-Louis Domeny de Rienzi and Durmont d’Urville⁶ to thank for drawing lines across the Pacific and naming these geographic areas Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia in 1831, we have the Congress of Micronesia and the American government to account for the political entities that exist within Micronesia today (see Hanlon 2009). From as early as the Solomon Report submitted to the U.S. Congress in 1963, Micronesia was described as ““a series of individual communities rather than a unified nation”” (Hanlon quoting from the Solomon Report 1998, 92). The same can be said today despite the existence of the Freely Associated States that include the FSM, and the Republics of the Marshall Islands and Palau, political entities that were “chosen” by the Congress of Micronesia in the 1970s under pressure from the United States (Hanlon 1998). Even the very creation of these nation states was the result of difference and wanting the U.S. (and the world) to recognize it (see Hanlon 1998). After the Saipanese negotiated for Commonwealth status in 1975, the Marshallese and Palauans approached the U.S. wanting to have separate political arrangements. Thus Yap, Pohnpei, Chuuk and Kosrae were left to form a Federation, although Pohnpei voted for independence (Petersen 1985). As a Federation comprised of four island states and many outer islands with more than ten different languages, it is far from unified. Pohnpeians predicted this (Petersen 1985) and scholars today acknowledge the challenges faced by the FSM as a nation (Hezel 2013), and discuss the fact that Micronesia as a whole remains a “nonentity” (Hanlon 1989, 2009). Pohnpeians, like many other Pacific Islanders from hierarchical societies, such as Tongans, Samoans (Huntsman 1995) and Yapese, (Labby 1976), pride themselves on being unique and different from their neighbours. This was expressed most strongly in the Pohnpeian vote for independence in 1975 and again in 1983 (Petersen 1985). Away from Pohnpei, the Micronesian identity lumps us all together as the same, and does not recognize our differences culturally and linguistically; differences that have become part of our

⁵ This is also the title of Chapter 2 in Petersen’s *Traditional Micronesian Societies* (2009).

⁶ Hanlon explains that d’Urville “attributes the origin of the term “Micronesia” to Domeny de Rienzi” in 1831 (footnote 4, 1989).

identities (Linnekin and Poyer 1990; Marshall 2004, E. Kihleng 2005; Bautista 2010; Jetnil-Kijiner 2013).

The FSM, under a Compact of Free Association with the U.S. that took effect in 1986, allows its citizens to travel freely to live and work throughout the U.S.

(<http://www.fsmlaw.org/fsm/index.htm>). This has resulted in a large out-migration from the FSM and “about 50,000 FSM people and their children currently live in the United States or one of its jurisdictions, like Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands, while the resident population of the FSM numbered 102,000 in the 2010 census (FSM 2010)” (Hezel 2013, 4). Chuukese make up the largest population of FSM citizens on Guam; there are more than 17,974 Chuukese residing on the island (compared with Pohnpeians at 3,942) and they are, therefore, the most visible (Temkar 2012, Government of Guam Bureau of Statistics and Plans, 2010). Recent headlines read: “80.3% increase in migrants from Chuuk” from 2000 to 2010, according to Guam Census statistics (Limtiaco 2012). The term “Micronesian” on Guam and in Hawai‘i refers to migrants from the FSM, a large, diverse population, and in often negative, discriminatory and misrepresenting ways (E. Kihleng 2005; Hezel and Samuel 2006; Jetnil-Kijiner 2013).

Although Guam is a Pacific Island and is located in Micronesia, being and looking “American”⁷ is the trend, with most people wearing quite stylish western clothing, not Pacific Island, and certainly not “Micronesian” wear. In the eyes of many people from the region, Guam is considered a hub, a kind of gateway to America; after all, Guam is “Where America’s Day Begins.”⁸ Guam is also geographically close to Asia (only 3.5 hours away from the Philippines), and a tourist hub for the Japanese. Historically, Continental Air Micronesia (now United Airlines) has had a monopoly in the region and people from the other islands in Micronesia have had to fly through Guam to get to Hawai‘i and to other international destinations. Anthropologist Mac Marshall, who has

⁷ See Christine Taitano DeLisle’s PhD dissertation (2008) for a thorough analysis of Chamorro notions of their identities as Chamorro and American in relation to language, dress and modernity, as well as notions of the body.

⁸ Guam is a day ahead of Hawai‘i and the rest of the States and this is the slogan that is used; it is even on the Guam Driver’s License and used to promote tourism. Chamorro scholar, Michael Lujan Bevacqua, critiques this slogan and its relationship to Guam as a colony of the U.S. (2014).

worked with Chuukese from Namoluk Atoll and their migrations “beyond the reef” to Guam and elsewhere, describes the island as “an odd mix of a Third World country and a Southern California suburb” (2004, 117). While some people might not agree with or like this description, for Micronesians coming from smaller, less developed islands, like Namoluk and even much larger islands like Pohnpei, Guam can be overwhelming and quite different. Given Guam’s unique colonial history, different from the rest of the region (including the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) whose indigenous people are also Chamorro), Chamorros from Guam have thought of themselves as different (and in the experiences of Micronesians, oftentimes superior) from the islanders in the rest of the region who haven’t had such an intimate relationship with the U.S.⁹ On this developed and urbanized American territory, one can understand why Micronesian women in colorful, flower-patterned urohs stand out in a way that could be viewed as undesirable.

The “Micronesian skirt”

When women from the FSM, primarily from Pohnpei, Chuuk and Kosrae, wear urohs, they are often referred to by non-Micronesians (and at times when Micronesians are talking about themselves) as a “Micronesian skirt”¹⁰ (see Blair 2011; Keany 2011; Falgout 2012). This “Micronesian skirt” has become a symbol of a complex Micronesian identity on Guam, where it represents a regional immigrant identity, and in Hawai‘i, where there are large and growing populations of Micronesians. The term, however, is more pervasive in Hawai‘i (Blair 2011, Keany 2011; Jetnil-Kijiner 2013). When the urohs is referred to as a “Micronesian skirt” it implies that it is a textile made and worn across the region, and this is not the case. The urohs becomes homogeneous, as something that represents all of our identities, and any Pacific woman wearing an urohs automatically becomes “Micronesian” and on Guam, Chuukese. I have yet to hear a Pohnpeian call an urohs a “Micronesian skirt.” Like the Micronesian identity, the

⁹ Chamorro scholar Lola Quan Bautista writes about the lack of knowledge Chamorros from Guam have about their Micronesian neighbors, and how many Chuukese she interviewed described being treated as inferior by Chamorros (2010, 20, 32). Several of the Pohnpeian women I interviewed also describe being discriminated against by Chamorros as reason for not wearing urohs.

¹⁰ Marshallese women are also quite fond of wearing urohs.

“Micronesian skirt” grew from an outside-imposed identity resulting from migration outwards from our “home islands” to Guam, Hawai‘i and the U.S. For the women who make and sell urohs, these skirts are a uniquely Pohnpeian textile, worn and appreciated by women from other islands in Micronesia, but it is certainly not a “Micronesian skirt.”

The contexts in which urohs are worn therefore shift significantly in migrant communities where urohs and identity are much more complex. On Guam you are likely to see women at Payless Supermarket, walking on the side of the road, at Guam Memorial Hospital (GMH) and in many other locations wearing urohs. While some of these skirts are urohs en Pohnpei, most are urohs en Ruk (Chuukese skirts), and the women wearing them are Chuukese, not Pohnpeian. I open this chapter with the Azar Nafisi quote because it challenges readers to look beneath the surface, beyond what is glimpsed on the roadside or in the supermarket. For many people on Guam, that woman in the long, flower patterned skirt is Chuukese, a Micronesian. She represents a stereotype, and not much else is known about her let alone that the skirt might have come from Pohnpei, where urohs have a special cultural significance. Many lie Pohnpei choose not to wear their skirts precisely because these skirts, on Guam, are not identified with Pohnpei. Lie Pohnpei want to wear their urohs and be recognized as Pohnpeian, not mistaken for Chuukese (see Falgout 2012). Pohnpeian women would rather not wear their beautiful urohs than be taken for Chuukese who are the most discriminated against ethnic group on Guam (Bautista 2010; Ridgell 2013; Daleno 2014). Most Pohnpeian women would never wear a Chuukese uros, whereas Chuukese women desire to wear the latest styles from Pohnpei. So what does this say about lie Pohnpei? Are we that insecure? Is the discrimination that Chuukese and other Micronesians face on Guam that severe? Are Pohnpeians mwomwehda (stuck up)? My conversations, interviews with, and personal experience as a Pohnpeian raised in Pohnpei, Guam and Hawai‘i reveal that this is one complicated skirt and we Pohnpeians are not easily understood.

Urohs can provide the comfort of home in a new land, however, they can also cause discomfort and can be a constant negotiation for some women torn between wanting to be themselves, but not feeling at ease in this “urohs skin” on an island where

Micronesians or “regional immigrants” aren’t always welcome (Limtiaco 2012). Pohnpeian women on Guam enjoy wearing urohs around other Pohnpeians, and we wear these skirts for other Pohnpeians and sometimes other Micronesians to see, not for the eyes of the greater Guam community (personal interviews). For some lien Pohnpei what lies beneath the skirt (pahn urohs o) is an ambivalence about our identities, especially when the urohs is worn on an island that is not our own. According to Sandhu:

Clothing is considered as an essential material item in the construction of personal and group identity as well as national identity; and like identity, it cannot remain fixed over time. Furthermore, for these identities to be transmitted convincingly clothes have to be worn in a specific fashion and clothed bodies must perform according to particular conventions. The act of migration brings about the need to adapt and adopt new sartorial forms in order to ‘fit-in’, while at the same time preserve some link with one’s culture of origin (2007, 32).

Urohs also play a role in the maintenance of group identity for lien Pohnpei as revealed through where women choose to wear their skirts, mostly to Pohnpeian celebrations and activities. At Pohnpeian events, women in their urohs perform as lien Pohnpei, engaging in activities they would back home (preparing, serving and partaking in food, exchanging various dipwisou en lih, conversing with friends and family, welcoming guests, etc.). As migrants, however, some women wish to be inconspicuous, to blend into greater Guam society at least in appearance and when not with other Pohnpeians. They may prefer wearing jeans and outfits purchased at Ross¹¹ and other Guam stores because these clothes are not essential to our identities and allow us to move about more comfortably on Guam. Yet, for most women, their urohs are their “link” to their culture of origin, whether or not they choose to wear their skirts. Others, however, like the women whose urohs statements I open the following section with, love their skirts and are proud to wear them wherever they go.

I wouldn’t say these women who wear their urohs regularly are necessarily deliberately asserting their identities as lien Pohnpei, but rather, their skirts are an extension of themselves. Their urohs are part of who they are no matter where they live. For others, urohs are an important part of their identities as well, but they feel more at ease

¹¹ Ross Dress for Less is an American department store. There is one Ross store on Guam and many Pohnpeians shop there, as it’s less expensive than other stores, such as Macy’s. Nearly every time I shop at Ross I run into Pohnpeians.

wearing them only in certain contexts. Urohs hold a symbolic meaning for lien Pohnpei, and women want to wear and display their textile heritage in environments where they feel content in their own skin. On Guam, lien Pohnpei are “wearing” new identities for themselves that are not restrictive or confined to a “Micronesian” identity, and their relationships with their urohs show that women want to be themselves, wearing and not wearing their urohs as they please.

Chuukese uros or skato¹² are different from urohs en Pohnpei. Chuukese skirts are longer and use colors and patterns that are quite distinct from those used in Pohnpeian skirts. Chuukese women wear their uros longer and in larger sizes than lien Pohnpei. They are also fond of skirts with writing. Members of the local Guam and Hawai‘i populations would not recognize the difference between a Chuukese uros and a Pohnpeian urohs, but the differences are obvious to most Pohnpeians and Chuukese. Because of their large population on Guam, it is the Chuukese version of the “Micronesian skirt” that is most visible. Although Chuukese women make their own skirts, they love urohs en Pohnpei. In fact, when I lived on Guam between 2008 and 2010 my friends in Pohnpei used to send me urohs that I would sell to Chuukese women, and the venture was quite profitable. There are two Pohnpeian stores on Guam where urohs are sold, Pohnpei Fish Mart and P.H. Market, and their biggest customer base is Chuukese women, which I discuss in the next chapter.

¹² Another word for uros or Chuukese skirts (personal communication, Nedine Songeni, 5 July 2014).



Figure 5.2. (clockwise) Chuukese women from the island of Uman shopping at Cost-U-Less in their uros/skato, Tamuning, 2014; Marisa Naich, owner of Fan Itach Retail, wearing an uros en Pohnpei, Yigo, 2013; Chuukese women wearing uros/skato at Micronesia Mall, 2013.

Pohnpeian women, particularly those living in Pohnpei, wear mwuhmwuhn Ruk (Chuukese muumuu), usually to church on Sunday. Lien Pohnpei are fond of the latest mwuhmwuhn Ruk fashion and purchase these dresses from Chuukese stores in Pohnpei and on Guam, Pohnpeian stores that sell them, as well as directly from seamstresses. Despite appreciating and wearing mwuhmwuhn Ruk in specific contexts and for specific activities, Pohnpeians have generally made a concerted effort to be different from Chuukese and this means, not looking like them. Over the years, I have repeatedly heard

lien Pohnpei on Guam say they don't like wearing urohs because they don't want to be mistaken for Chuukese. And if they do wear urohs, other lien Pohnpei tell them not to for the same reason (personal interviews). If lien Pohnpei are purposefully not wearing their urohs because Chuukese women are, the "Micronesian skirt" becomes even more visible as something Chuukese and the variety and diversity of urohs are misunderstood and further misrepresented, as are the Micronesians who wear them.

urohs and Pohnpeian women's identities on Guam

Ihme I keiiun pereniki. I pereniki urohs en Pohnpei pwe e saledek oh e kasalehda me kitail mehn Pohnpei oh I pil mwahuki pwe lingaling, kaselel.

It's what I like the most. I like urohs because they are free and comfortable and it shows that we are Pohnpeian, and I also like [urohs] because they are shiny, beautiful.

~Silinda Abraham (Saladak, U), 22 August 2012, Astumbo, Dededo, 34 years old

Ehng! Ke kasalehda me kowe mehn Pohnpei. Ke pahn kin iang urohs pwe mehn Pohnpei me kin urohs, likamw e pil oang ke pahn esehkih ihs mehn Pohnpei. Ke pahn urohs, identity ieu ma ke pahn urohs.

Yes! You show that you are Pohnpeian. You wear urohs because Pohnpeians wear urohs; it's like a way for you to know who is Pohnpeian. You wear urohs; it's an identity if you wear urohs.

~Merleen Alokoa (China Town, Kolonia), 9 August 2012, Yona, 48 years old

Ehi udahn pwe ihme I kin iius sangete mahs; ih atail likou.

Yes of course because it's what I use for a long time; it's our clothing.

~Silihda Felix (Pali Powe, Nett), 12 February 2013, Pagat, Mangilao, 27 years old

Ih nei favorite en men...ih udahn ahi likou en mwo. Ansou me I kak rausis, apw ansou koaros urohs.

It's my favorite...it's my true clothing. I can wear pants sometimes, but always urohs.

~Bernartina Panuelo (Dien, U), 20 August 2012, Yigo, 52 years old

Ei, ih ahi likou urohs. Yes, that's what I wear, urohs.

~Cathy Santos (Wone, Kitti), 17 August 2012, Pohnpei Fish Mart, Dededo, 39 years old

These are the declarations of five Pohnpeian women from various wehi in Pohnpei ranging from 27 to 52 years of age who live on Guam. Silinda, Merleen, Silihda, Bernartina and Cathy all wear urohs on a regular basis, and they wear them everywhere. They express their love of this skirt in terms of it being something they consider their own; it is part of their identities as Pohnpeian women and wearing urohs is a demonstration of these identities, one that they are proud of. All of these women were born in Pohnpei and came to Guam as adults. Three of them, Bernartina, Merleen and Cathy, have lived on Guam for more than 20 years. Merleen and Cathy have in fact lived on Guam longer than they lived in Pohnpei. Both Silinda and Silihda came to Guam in 2008. Despite their differences in age, wehi identity and time spent on Guam, these lih represent a particular demographic as migrants. They also have a similar affection for and identification with urohs en Pohnpei, which I attribute at least in part to their having spent their formative years growing up in Pohnpei. There are marked differences between how these women view urohs and the wearing of these skirts in comparison to their daughters' relationships to these skirts. I will discuss these differences later in this chapter.

James Clifford writes, “women in diaspora remain attached to, and empowered by, a “home” culture and a tradition—selectively. Fundamental values of propriety and religion, speech and social patterns, and food, body, and dress protocols are preserved and adapted in a network of ongoing connections outside the host country...They connect and disconnect, forget and remember, in complex, strategic ways” (1994: 314). Urohs en Pohnpei are a vital part of this “home” culture particularly for the women¹³ born and raised in Pohnpei who came to Guam as adults. Urohs play an important role in how migrant women create their *homes away from home* allowing them to not only feel Pohnpeian, but also to behave Pohnpeian (see Sandhu 2007). Many of the women I interviewed described urohs as a respectful form of dress, one that is appropriate for wearing around a woman’s brothers and other relatives for whom one must show wahu, and to Pohnpeian events, kamadipw and mehla in particular (personal interviews). The wearing of urohs is a way to perpetuate a “culture of respect” for

¹³ While Pohnpeian migration has been to the U.S. and its Pacific jurisdictions rather than transnational, I argue that it can be considered a diaspora given the size of the U.S. and the distances between its largest nodes – Guam, Hawai’i and Kansas City, MO (email communication, T. Teaiwa, 2014).

families at least within the home. For the children of migrants who are born and raised on Guam, urohs can also represent a “home” culture, a kind of replica of or an “imagined” Pohnpei created within the homes of Pohnpeians on Guam. In these *homes away from home* urohs are worn by their migrant mothers, visiting grandmothers, other female family members and by the first generation girls themselves. These first generation women and girls born on Guam also associate urohs with going to visit Pohnpei, their parent’s “home,” which is also their ancestral home.¹⁴

As I demonstrate, urohs make lien Pohnpei *feel at home* on Guam when worn within the home and when with other Pohnpeians, but these skirts when worn in other contexts are also *too close to home* and can cause discomfort and unease. Yet despite the many layers of identity/tradition/culture/migration/connection/disconnection, most migrant lien Pohnpei are still so attached to urohs that even though some of us may not wear them regularly we still in fact have closets, suitcases and plastic containers full of them (Clifford 1994; personal interviews). Most lien Pohnpei collect urohs to give as gifts, wear and save for future use, as these skirts are integral to larger exchange practices between women, families and communities all of which strengthen, maintain and continually link Pohnpeians at home and away in migrant communities.

As expressed in earlier chapters, possessing urohs is part of being a Pohnpeian woman. The urohs industry will not die because even when we feel “unhomed” by the anxieties and discrimination we face as Pohnpeians and “Micronesians” away from Pohnpei in environments that may not welcome us, we still cling to our cultural identities and urohs are essential to these identities (Bhabha 1994; personal interviews). Many lien Pohnpei on Guam, like those in Pohnpei, compete with one another to have the latest, most fashionable urohs. They want to show other Pohnpeian women they have access to the current styles despite living away, which makes them feel simultaneously *closer to home yet more ‘at home’ away*.

While most lien Pohnpei collect urohs, certain women are known for their extensive urohs collections or wardrobes. These women have what I refer to as urohs archives,

¹⁴ In developing my play with the notion of “home,” I found Golparian’s PhD thesis (2012) useful.

and are the ones for whom their skirts truly function as a mirror of themselves (Banerjee and Miller 2003). Banerjee and Miller write:

In visual representations such as films, women are often portrayed trying on a garment and looking in the mirror. But in truth the most important mirror is the wardrobe itself, for the full range of a woman's clothes projects far more than merely a single image of her. It reflects both the various personae she has been and those she might hope to become. Each sari within an Indian woman's wardrobe evokes the memory of who had given it to her and in whose presence she had worn it, and embodies stories and anecdotes of triumphs and *faux pas*. Thus, the wardrobe is an anthology and collection of memories, a multi-faceted, multi-layered mirror which reflects back the full complexity of an individual's identity and history. (2003, 47)

Much like the Indian women Banerjee and Miller describe, the possession of urohs wardrobes, kohpwa (trunks) and plastic containers for Pohnpeian women is a "multi-faceted, multi-layered mirror" reflecting back their genealogies, histories, material and social relationships and identities. One woman whose identity is very much wrapped up in her urohs is Amoreen John. Amoreen is Nahnep U's granddaughter and has lived on Guam since 1997 working as a housekeeper at the Westin Resort. She and her husband also run a popular sakau business from their home in Yigo. Berwy Kihleng, another urohs lover and my aunt, suggested I interview Amoreen, and the two of us went to Amoreen's home on her day off. Our interview took place in her bedroom with Berwy and two of Amoreen's children coming in and out of the room. She has hundreds of urohs, most of which were hanging in her closet. Berwy and I sat on the floor looking up at her extensive urohs wardrobe (Banerjee and Miller 2003) and Amoreen sat on her bed. It was an intimate experience, and one I felt privileged to be a part of. Amoreen pulled a lot of her skirts down for me to take pictures of, and she told me about her favorites, as well as where and whom she got them from. When I asked Amoreen how many urohs she has, she told me "upwuki samwa apw I sohte wadek depe"; "one hundred some but I haven't counted how many" (29 August 2012). In the course of the interview Amoreen expressed that she didn't enjoy wearing her older urohs:

Sehse I kahng I sohte men likauih...likamw mehn Pohnpei me mihmi sapwet ka re kin siaikipene urohs e pwe ma ke pahn kohla soangen ni kapokon en mehn Pohnpei re pahn nda lel en lahpen urohs o de ehu sidail kapw mwo de soang ko. Ni kamadipw udahn I kin anahne oahte ahi ehu me [kapw] ama e pwandehr a I pwurehng nan me mwur kapw...Pohnpei I sohte nsenohki (29 August 2012).

I don't know; I don't want to wear [old urohs]...it's like the Pohnpeians who live here like to compete with their urohs because if you go to a Pohnpeian gathering they will say her urohs is nice or that's a new style and such. At kamadipw I really have to order a new urohs and if it [arrives] late then I have to re-wear a newer one...in Pohnpei I don't care.

Amoreen thinks it's important to wear the newest, nicest urohs to Pohnpeian functions on Guam, such as kamadipw or mehla. She even orders new urohs from Pohnpei, something only a few other women I know do. Her urohs come with the sakau she orders. Amoreen also has greater access to new urohs from Pohnpei, as her maternal grandfather was the Nahnmwarki of U at the time of our interview. Her mother often sends her urohs that I assume she collects at the many feasting events she attends on behalf of her father. Amoreen also purchases urohs from the two Pohnpeian stores on Guam and from Pohnpeian women who visit Guam and sell urohs from Pohnpei like, Kiomy Albert, who I write about in Chapter 6.

Women like Amoreen and Berwy are known for their extensive urohs collections among those of us from U, and as a result, they are closely associated with their urohs wardrobes and a kind of expectation comes with this identity. Amoreen, for example, will wear her older urohs at home or to the Mom and Pop stores close by, but not to parties and feasting events. According to lien Pohnpei living on Guam, women like Amoreen are more competitive about their urohs, as there is an expectation in place for women with large wardrobes, such as hers, to always wear the newest, most fashionable urohs to these events. Amoreen's Guam identity is one that is closely tied to her urohs. Her urohs wardrobe reflects so much of who Amoreen is that she only wishes to wear her best (see Figure 5.3). Like Nohno Emi, my great aunt I write about in Chapter 3, and the likouli she used to sew to wear to church every Sunday, Amoreen feels pressured to always wear urohs with mwahi kapw. For Nohno Emi, the ihmwsarawi was the site for competition with the other young women who wore their finest likouli. For Amoreen, it's the mehla, kamadipw and other events that Pohnpeians attend on Guam. Her urohs are integral to her identity as a Pohnpeian woman living in a small migrant community.

Women with large urohs collections in Pohnpei and Guam have a personal archive of urohs past and present. I recorded Berwy, Amoreen and me having koasoai about

Amoreen's urohs collection (an excerpt of this koasoai is in a poem I include in Chapter 2), as I took pictures of Amoreen's skirts. This koasoai, as well as the photographs, illustrate the many different mwahi that come in and out of style throughout the years that connect the women who have, sell and gift them in a web of memories of place and time in the "home" island and on Guam. Amoreen and Berwy had many of the same mwahi ranging from the sele, mahi (breadfruit), dipenmei maram (crescent moon) and elinpwur mwaramwar (August 29, 2012). In several cases, they mention how they bought particular urohs from the same lien pisines and recall particular events when they wore certain skirts. Amoreen rarely wears most of her old urohs, but she holds on to them because like the other urohs collectors, she is attached to her skirts and wants to keep the old mwahi designs for memory's sake. Each urohs is precious as a site of her personal history and as a mirror of her life and identity. One of Amoreen's favorite urohs at the time of our interview was one with yellow bell shaped flowers and the deidei menirahn (centipede sewing), which she says she likes to wear with a yellow shirt. She loves it because it is "deidei soan," "the sewing is neat/symmetrical."



Figure 5.3. (clockwise) Amoreen and her urohs wardrobe at home in Yigo, 2012; watermelon urohs; older style urohs with layered, scalloped hemlines; her favorite urohs; dipenmei maram mwahi.

Bernartina “Dihna” Panuelo, another urohs collector with a large wardrobe, who is my aunt and has lived on Guam since 1990, also expresses a strong desire for the newest urohs fashion: “Urohs kapw ma kin kohdo sapwet, ma I sohte kin iang ahnkihdi likamw nan paliwereiie kin sonsuwed pwe udahn kin men iang kapware sidail o.” “When new urohs arrive here, if I don’t get to have one it’s like my body feels discomfort because I also want to wear the new style” (20 August 2012). Dihna’s words stood out for me. She described her desire to possess and wear the latest urohs as affecting her physically. I wrote this poem following my interview with her.

Urohs feed me

my husband understands
he cannot complain
urohs fill a need in me
one only lien Pohnpei can understand...

my body aches
itches
craves
urohs kapw sang Pohnpei
I have plastic containers full
that I keep hidden

Carrie Bradshaw¹⁵ once said
that when she first moved to NYC
she would spend all of her money
on Vogue
because she felt it fed her better

urohs feed a hunger
a thirst
for beauty
for recognition
for competition
for Pohnpei

I suspect that this ache for urohs that Dihna described, and that I reflect on in the poem above is tied to a longing for Pohnpei, which the skirts symbolize. It expresses the larger notions of female identity and home in the physicality and materiality of urohs and the social relations they signify.

Dihna also mentioned her identity as mehn U and equates her need to have fancy urohs with being from this particular chiefdom and having to wear nice urohs to U functions. As discussed in Chapter 6, wehi identity is extremely important in Pohnpei and this transfers to urohs as well. Kitti sohn deidei are known to be the best, whereas U women are renowned for their purchasing power and desire to have and wear the newest, most elaborate urohs. These wehi identities extend to Guam where Pohnpeians continue to maintain close ties to people from their particular chiefdom.

¹⁵ The main character, played by Sarah Jessica Parker, on the popular HBO series, *Sex in the City*.

“Ohlaka pil iang ese mehnia me lel; re wehwehki”; “the men also know which [urohs] are nice; they understand” I said to Dihna, her husband, Walder, and my dad following our interview. Dihna replied:

pwe Walder, I pahn ndahte urohs o tala paisek limau, e sohte kak pil mwemwehliki ape pwe mwo likamw kiht mehn U ka kin kohpehne ah emen te kin men ahniki me kaselel eh pwe party. Koaros pahn wie kilkilang urohs ka. Because Walder, I just say that the urohs is \$45; he cannot even get mad because it’s like us from U when we come together everyone wants to have a nice one because it’s a party. Everyone will be looking at the urohs (20 August 2012).

Wehi identities are especially visible when Pohnpeians on Guam play sports, with teams being organized by wehi. These teams will often have the name of their wehi written on their uniforms, which are also in their respective wehi colors. The various games can also get quite competitive with people from various wehi going to watch the games to support their team.

Many of the women with extensive urohs collections or archives in Pohnpei also have a strong desire to possess urohs with mwahi kapw, however, their desire obviously does not come with the same longing and nostalgia for home that the women on Guam experience. New urohs are readily available in Pohnpei. Lien Pohnpei on Guam not only want to have urohs with mwahi kapw to wear to Pohnpeian events, but they want to imagine they are in Pohnpei by wearing their new urohs. As Sandhu writes:

Appadurai also suggests the creation of ‘imagined spaces’ within which immigrants dwell, which rely heavily on memory and nostalgia to create a new cultural space. This nostalgia is both for the past (a home that was left behind) and a longing for the present (which they are currently missing)...The concept of belonging becomes a composite of be-ing and longing (2007, 33).

When Pohnpeian women possess (and wear) their new urohs they feel as if they are “in touch” with fashion trends and contemporary life in Pohnpei. Their urohs bring them closer to home in a new cultural space that is Guam. Obtaining skirts with mwahi kapw takes an effort on the part of women on Guam, therefore, making the skirts more highly valued and yearned or longed for. They feel empowered by displaying their new urohs in Pohnpeian contexts, or “imagined spaces” that demonstrate they are current with contemporary urohs fashion and with Pohnpei itself.

Amoreen is unique in that she rarely wore urohs in Pohnpei. Wearing urohs as part of her identity developed away from home. We had an interesting discussion of her preference for urohs in our interview. After telling me how much she loves urohs, I asked her “Dahme ke nohn perenkihki [urohs]? pwe udahn dir en ahmw urohs”; “Why do you love urohs so much since you have so many?” Amoreen answered saying:

Ihme I sonamwahuki, pwe rausis I sohte nohk [interrupts herself] soh Pohnpei I kalapw rausis, pereniki rausis Pohnpei a I lel Guam sohla mwahuki rausis, kalapw urohs. [EK: “Wei e? Ke opposite ekei mehn Pohnpei. Re kohdo me uhd rausis da.”] Ekei sohte kin rausis Pohnpei e, sohte arail rausis, kohdo me re kahngala iang urohs [EK: “A dahme ke wikisang kin irail?”] Sehse. Met sohte ahi rausis. Ehi rausis en iakiu, palipwol, ih me kin mihmi. Ah I pahn kohla nan opihs, de I pil kohla nan sdohwa I urohs. Re kin mwemwehl pahi oh lok...(29 August 2012)

It’s what I find comfortable, but pants not so much [interrupts herself] no in Pohnpei I frequently wore pants; I enjoyed wearing pants in Pohnpei and I got to Guam and no longer liked wearing pants, always wearing urohs. [EK: “Really? You are opposite of most Pohnpeians. They come here and start wearing pants.”] Some don’t wear pants in Pohnpei right, don’t own any pants, come here and no longer want to wear urohs. [EK: “So why are you different from them?”] Don’t know. Now I don’t own any pants. I have my baseball and volleyball pants. But to go to an office or go to the store I wear urohs. They [Pohnpeians] get mad at me until they are fed up.

I asked Amoreen if there was anything that happened to make her no longer want to wear pants, and she said no. Some of the women I interviewed and spoke with say they no longer wish to wear pants because they gained weight, especially after having children, and feel they no longer look good in pants. They literally “grew into” urohs as they became adult women. In many ways Amoreen is an anomaly. She couldn’t articulate why she no longer wishes to wear pants, all she knows is that she likes to wear urohs because “dahme sonamwahu engie ihme I pahn wia,” “what feels good to me is what I will do.” Other women who felt similarly about wearing urohs, such as Cathy Santos and Silinda Abraham, have always preferred urohs to pants. Amoreen, on the other hand, preferred pants when she lived in Pohnpei. I suspect that her close relationship to her urohs since moving to Guam 15 years ago has a lot to do with coming here when she was a young woman of 20. She has spent most of her adult life living on Guam. The possession and wearing of urohs is closely associated with doadoak en lih as dipwisou en lih, and to her “be-ing and longing” for Pohnpei (Sandhu 2007).

Merleen Alokoa, a great aunt of mine, came to Guam when she was 21 years old and, like Amoreen, she didn't often wear urohs in Pohnpei. Following in the footsteps of many young Micronesians, Merleen moved to Guam to attend the University of Guam in 1985 where she met her husband Betwin, a Kosraean, settled down and never left. She also loves wearing urohs, but doesn't actively purchase urohs like Amoreen. Part of Merleen's explanation for why she enjoys wearing urohs was loneliness, "Kapwurelahng mahs, oh na ke loleidiki Pohnpei ke pahn wie ururohs Guam met pwe ke katkataman Pohnpei"; "Looking back, you get lonely for Pohnpei making you wear urohs on Guam to remember Pohnpei" (9 August 2012). Here, Merleen confirms that lien Pohnpei on Guam are wearing urohs to remember Pohnpei, as a way to ease their longing for home. The wearing of these textiles creates a new cultural space of home for many women.

Merleen didn't wear urohs very often as a young woman growing up in Pohnpei. As she explains:

Pwehki met I kak pein pwain ahi urohs de likamw e kesempwalehngie pwehki I sohte mihmi nan ahi dekeu. Ansou me I mihmi ni ahi dekeu I sohte nsenohki. Pwehki ahi kohkohdoh ah udahn I kesempwaliki pwehki sang ni ahi deke. Sehse apw likamw pwehki I teenager I sohte kesempwaliki urohs. Mie mehkot I kesempwaliki sukuhl de song kau. I sohte kesempwaliki urohs pwe I mihmi nan udahn ahi wasa. Ma nohno kihdo ahi ah I ale. Aramas pil saik medowehda kihdo ahi pwehki I pwulopwul. Ah ahi mahlahr ngehi kohdo sapwet ah re kohdo kilangie ah re kihdo ahi urohs. I soang medowehla mahs likamw sohte nohn ahi urohs e, ansou me I mihmi seli Pohnpei oh ah I kohdo sahpwet ah ih ahi tepda collect (9 August 2012).

Because now I can buy my own urohs or it's like it's important to me because I don't live on my own island. When I lived on my own island I didn't make the effort. Because [when] I came here I really valued it because it's from my island. I don't know, but it's like because I was a teenager I didn't care about urohs. There were other things I valued more, like school and those things. I didn't value urohs because I was living in my own true place. If my mom gave me [an urohs] I took [it]. People didn't start to think to give me any because I was young. And now I'm old and I came here, so when they come and see me they give me urohs. I tried to remember the past and it's like I didn't have many urohs you know, when I was hanging around Pohnpei, until I came here and I started to collect.

Merleen's urohs mirror her journey to and on Guam where she, like Amoreen, has spent most of her adult life. She only began to value urohs and identify with these skirts as a mirror of herself after leaving Pohnpei. She learned to appreciate urohs as a significant part of her identity as a Pohnpeian woman living away. Urohs are a highly valued

textile, and are, therefore, not something most serepein (young girls) wear on a regular basis. Given that these textiles are readily available in Pohnpei, and Pohnpei is “ours,” wearing urohs means something quite different. Urohs are part of Pohnpeian life like uht sukuuk (pounded bananas with coconut milk) and mwahmw inihn (barbequed fish). Urohs wrap Merleen in a kind of nostalgia for Pohnpei and provide a means in which to feel Pohnpeian when not physically present on the island.

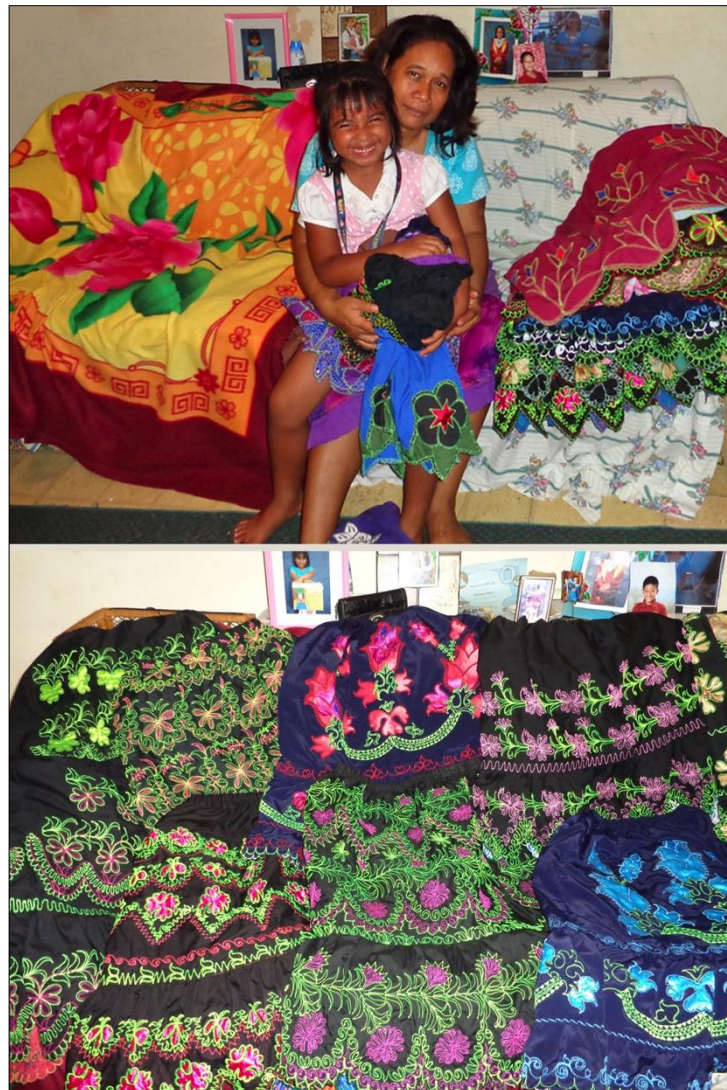


Figure 5.4. Merleen and her daughter Jemima at home in Yona, 2012; some of Merleen’s urohs.

Urohs and kanengamah

Like their past nting on skin, which was an integral part of their identities, partially hidden under likou meimei and likoutei, lien Pohnpei today purposefully conceal their urohs for various reasons having to do with kanengamah, a Pohnpeian virtue that requires restraint and patience (Petersen 1993). Kanengamah plays an important role in women's interactions with their urohs both in Pohnpei and away on Guam.

When I interviewed Dihna, I knew that she liked urohs, but I had no idea that she had so many. Dihna told me that she had more than fifty urohs, when in fact she had quadruple that amount. The lien Pohnpei I interviewed often deliberately underestimated how many urohs they owned, and I suspect they did so for several reasons. From a Pohnpeian, as well as a more anthropological perspective, I believe this underestimation has to do with kanengamah, a concept that facilitates deliberate concealment and silence; this includes not revealing one's material possessions (Falgout 1984, 2009; Petersen 1993). Kanengamah is a valued characteristic for Pohnpeians. As anthropologist Glenn Petersen writes:

In short, as a quality, *kanengamah* more often than not refers to a person's *ability* to keep knowledge, emotions, interests, and possessions concealed; as a behavior, *kanengamah* refers to the *act* of concealing one's knowledge, emotions, interests, and possessions from others. To be endowed with or to have acquired *kanengamah* is among the major Pohnpeian virtues...In practice, *kanengamah* deters people from telling the truth (1993, 334-5).

Kanengamah is a way of being that Pohnpeians are continually aspiring to live by. For mehn Pohnpei the act of keeping something concealed adds to its manaman. This secrecy is what makes a secret so intriguingly attractive, increasing its value, but once the secret is exposed, it loses its manaman (Petersen 1993). Petersen ranks kanengamah as "among the highest of virtues" for Pohnpeians, and I find what he writes to be quite true (1993, 340-347). For certain women, their urohs are so precious that they wish to hide them literally and figuratively.

Following my interviews, I would ask my interviewees to show me some of their favorite urohs, which I would then photograph with their permission. With Dihna, she went into her bedroom and dragged out two large plastic containers full of brand new

urohs. Each container held at least 30 urohs, and there was another container she left in her bedroom. During our interview she told me she came to Guam without any urohs, and has since purchased most of her skirts, however, Dihna claims to no longer purchase urohs saying:

I sohla pwainda pwe udahn pweilaud. Ihte ma nei serepein o kin kdarohdo ahi. Ah pil ehu pwainda ahi urohs sapwet, mwein sounpahr ehr mwein ehu samwa de riau I solahr pwainda. I ese me nei serepein o pahn kdarohdo ahi pweitikitik sang. Menda ma I leliki apw sohla en mwo duwehte mahs me udahn I pahn kilangehte a menda rehi ma ihte nei sent I pahn pwainda (20 August 2012).

I no longer purchase [urohs] because they are so expensive. Only if my daughter sends me any [does she purchase]. As for buying another urohs here, it's been more than a year or two since I've stopped buying. I know that my daughter will send me ones that are cheaper. Even if I like them, it's not like before where I would just see and not care if that was all the money I had, I would buy.

She has been collecting the urohs in the three containers for years. Dihna didn't even show me the personal collection of skirts she actually wears. She still had many urohs in her possession despite her mother-in-law, who recently visited from Pohnpei, taking many of Dihna's urohs back home. This is an example of urohs circulating outwards from the home island to Guam and then back again. Despite saying that she no longer purchases urohs, she did purchase some Filipino skirts (see Figure 5.6) for her church's isimwas, a feast to celebrate the completion of a newly constructed



Figure 5.5. Dihna with her urohs containers at home, Yigo, 2012.

building, such as a church. Dihna is a member of Christ the King, a Pohnpeian Protestant church in Yigo, Guam, and an active member of the church's Lien Alem. As explained in Chapter 3, Lien Alem or "Women of Friday" is a women's church group that exists in every mwomwohdiso throughout Pohnpei, and is an extremely active and vital part of

the Protestant church (see Kihleng 1996). Pohnpeian churches on Guam and in Hawai'i likewise have Lien Alem. On 11 July 2012, Christ the King held an isimwas, and all of the leaders of the Protestant mwomwohdiso in Pohnpei were invited to the elaborate celebration that cost tens of thousands of dollars.

Dihna and her pwihn (group), which consisted of two other women and their husbands, had to provide a gift. Each of the women in the pwihn had to purchase at least 15 urohs in addition to many other goods ranging from ice chests (coolers) to Korean blankets and take-outs (takeaways) for the event. Rather than use the urohs she had in her containers, Dihna purchased urohs from the Filipino shops at Dededo Mall. She purchased 15 skirts for \$10 each, which is much cheaper than her urohs en Pohnpei would have cost. There are several Filipino-owned shops on Guam that sell skirts that are modeled after Pohnpeian urohs, but are made in the Philippines. I didn't specifically ask Dihna why she purchased the skirts rather than gifting the ones in the containers, but she did say that she bought them because they were inexpensive, and given the many other items she had to purchase for the isimwas, she was clearly working within a budget. It seems that Dihna no longer purchases urohs en Pohnpei, but will purchase cheaper, Philippine-made skirts, and as for the urohs in the containers, perhaps she is saving those for another occasion. I don't know, but as Petersen points out about kanengamah, "This reserve extends to the treatment of one's possessions as well; they are not to be flaunted and care should be taken to conserve and preserve them, until the time is appropriate for using or distributing them" (Petersen 1993, 339). Dihna is most likely saving her urohs for a greater purpose that only she knows.



Figure 5.6. Filipino skirts and Chuukese uros for sale at Dededo Flea Market, 2012.

Dihna's kanengamah with regard to her urohs shows just how precious these textiles are to her. She deliberately chose not to use her more expensive urohs en Pohnpei for the isimwas, and chose to purchase the Filipino skirts instead. With large celebrations such as these, lien Pohnpei wish to show that they can do all that is asked of them, and it's about the gift as a whole, although people would have noticed that their pwihn gave Filipino skirts and not urohs en Pohnpei, thus decreasing the gift's value. After she told me about everything she'd purchased as part of her pwihn for the isimwas, I asked Dihna: "e mwahu?" or "was it good?" in reference to the isimwas, and she replied:

Oangie likamw I mwahuki pwe re ndahieng kit ah i sohte mwahuki ren nda me I sohte kak eng wiahda ahi doadoak. Likamw lelohdo ansou kiset sohte kahpwal ieu me I lelkiheng pwe udahn I ndah me sang nan ei moangioang e. I nantiheng ien kak wiahda (20 August 2012).

For me it was good because they [the church leaders] told us, and I didn't want them to say that I can't handle doing my work. It's like up until now I haven't had any hardships because I believe that it's from my heart. I tried my hardest to do it.

Here, Dihna is also expressing herself as lih tohrohr who is capable of meeting her obligations. She is also demonstrating her Christian faith. Women in Pohnpei and on Guam go above and beyond for church, family and community events. They continually demonstrate their agency in these situations, an agency that functions outside of colonially imposed systems and that has, with the exception of Kihleng's work (1996), been largely un-documented.

To wear or not to wear & where to wear...

Most of the women I interviewed on Guam wear their urohs to Pohnpeian events. There were women wearing urohs at all of the mehla, bingo nights, weddings and parties I attended while conducting my Guam research. Dihna saves her favorite urohs to debut at Pohnpeian parties and Berwy describes wearing one of her new urohs to a mehla recently and coming home to take it off for fear that someone would ask her for it (personal interviews). Yourihne "Youri" Nakamura, a 42-year-old woman, who has lived on Guam since 1990 claims, "aht doadoak en Pohnpei koaros I kin anahne urohs en Pohnpei pwehki atail custom; koaros kin mwahuki urohs me lingan." "I have to wear urohs en Pohnpei at all of our Pohnpeian activities because it is our custom; everyone

likes to wear urohs that are beautiful” (15 August 2012). She wears urohs to Pohnpeian events, but doesn’t wear urohs to the store or to other locations. Many of the interviews that were part of my ethnographic research reveal that Pohnpeian women wear urohs for other Pohnpeian women, and this seems to be exacerbated in the small community of Pohnpeians who live on Guam.



Figure 5.7. Urohs bingo prizes, Agana Heights, 2012; Erimi Kustin wearing urohs while playing bingo.



Figure 5.8. Two women wearing urohs at a party, Hagåtña, 2013; Lien Pohnpei wearing urohs at a mehla in Harmon, 2012.

Several of the women I interviewed who wear urohs on a regular basis expressed how other Pohnpeian women are “always mad” or annoyed with them for wearing urohs out and about on Guam. When I asked these women why other lien Pohnpei would be mad, comments I’ve heard several times, they told me that it’s because they are concerned about people thinking they are Chuukese. A pattern grew out of my interviews, one that showed how Pohnpeian women seemed to dictate what was appropriate and inappropriate to wear on Guam, and wearing urohs in non-Pohnpeian contexts, and “looking Chuukese” was inappropriate. Lien Pohnpei on Guam have various reasons for why they wear urohs to certain places and why they don’t to others.

Cecilia “Cecihl” David, who is 50 years old and from Takaiu, U has lived on Guam since 2004. Cecihl is a kedwini (female medical practitioner), and she makes a living by helping people (Pohnpeians and non-Pohnpeians) with various ailments and problems ranging from headaches, to stolen property, to healing broken hearts. Because of the line of work she is in, Cecihl is both loved and hated by Pohnpeians on Guam. People often come to her for assistance, but she is also blamed when certain things go wrong.¹⁶ Cecihl is a fascinating woman, and extremely knowledgeable about medicinal plants, as well as Pohnpeian history and culture. Hers is an interesting relationship with urohs. She wears urohs around the house, but not when she goes out. As she explained to me:

Nan ei kohkohda kilkilang mour kohkohdo lel rahnwet I nda me sohte me mwahu sang ei pein likauih ei pein likou. Apw ni udahn mehleh kalaudila sahpwet karepen ei sohte kin urohs o kiheng kohm ni moangeiie dene mehn sahpwet kadek idenih. Mie ohl emen I kin apwapwalih me mahs. Se kin mih pene. Ma I pahn kohla ni sdohwa ohl o kin ndahngie in kapwuhrasang ei likou en mehn Micronesia. In ale rausis pwe I de kahkoloangehte ah mehn sapwet ka kilang me ngehi mehn Ruk. I tikida ih me I likauih en urohs...(1 August 2012).

As I’ve been growing, observing life all the way until now I think there is nothing better than wearing my own clothing. But the real reason that I don’t wear urohs or put a comb in my hair developed here because people from here are good at looking down on us. There was a man that I used to take care of a while ago. We lived together. If I was going to the store he used to tell me to take off my Micronesian clothes. To put on pants because I might step inside [the store] and locals will see me and assume I’m Chuukese. When I was growing up urohs were what I wore...

¹⁶ For instance, during my research the owners of a sakau marked on Guam were blaming Cecihl for driving them out of business.

Cecihl went on to describe how she has always preferred pants to urohs even when she lived in Pohnpei. Her words, however, convey that she would wear urohs more often on Guam if it weren't for her personal experiences and being told not to wear "Micronesian clothes" by the retired Chamorro physician she took care of. Her expressions and descriptions of herself remind me a lot of Amoreen. Like Amoreen, Cecihl believes in wearing what she feels most comfortable in. However, unlike Amoreen, who wears her skirts everywhere she goes, Cecihl refuses to wear urohs out of the house. Both women are very lamalam kehlail (strong willed) and do as they please without regard for what others think (personal interviews). They also possess an incredible sense of humour, and are the life of the party, particularly among mehn U (people from U) on Guam. Cecihl is also unique in that most lien Pohnpei her age prefer wearing likouli and urohs (personal interview).

The most common place where most of the women I interviewed and spoke with told me they didn't wear urohs was to the store (personal interviews). Other locations include the University of Guam, Guam Memorial Hospital, doctors' offices, Micronesia Mall and other locations where there are crowds of people. While many did not mention whether they wore urohs to work or not, for those who work as hotel maids, it was assumed they did not as they wear uniforms. Some of the women who did mention wearing urohs to work were Cathy Santos, who wears her urohs at her and her husband's store, but wears a uniform to work at her job in housekeeping at the Sheraton, Berwihna Kihleng wears urohs to work as a maid in the homes of two Chamorro families, as well as Merleen Alokoa who sometimes wears urohs to her job at the Department of Public Health. Also, some did not work or were students. Besides not wanting to be mistaken for Chuukese, I suspect that similar to the immigrant Indian women in New Zealand who Sandhu writes about, lien Pohnpei don't wear urohs to specific locales "due to the discomfort of 'standing out like a sore thumb'" (2007, 36). Sandhu's interviewees also choose not to wear their "Indian traditional clothing" to locations such as the bank or to work. One woman expressed how wearing Indian clothing to the bank would make people assume she couldn't speak English and went on to say, "You are already in a struggle [being Indian to be recognised, noticed, valued] you don't need added attention" (2007, 36). Dressing "Micronesian" can sometimes make the simplest thing like going for a check-up or to buy groceries so much more

challenging because of the level of discomfort experienced by the fear of being discriminated against and/or misunderstood.

Youri Nakamura's explanation for why she wears urohs to Pohnpeian social events and not to the store reflects a common sentiment among women on Guam. She explains:

Mehn sapwet ka pahn kilkilangie re kin nda me ngehi mehn Ruk...Irail wiahki me mehn Ruk pwon kin urohs; mwein irail leme me mehn Ruk te me mie arail urohs; people from here will be looking at me and say that I am Chuukese...They think that all Chuukese wear urohs; they probably think that only Chuukese have urohs (15 August 2012).

She went on to say that there's a difference between Chuukese and Pohnpeian skirts and that Chuukese uros aren't as nice as Pohnpeian urohs, and how she'd be "satisfied" if locals could tell she was Pohnpeian when she wore urohs, but they can't so she doesn't. Judging from Youri and the words of many other Pohnpeian women, if Chuukese stopped wearing their skirts, Pohnpeians would start wearing theirs. However, I believe it is more complicated than this, and reflects an insecurity and/or ambivalence *lien Pohnpei* have about our identities on Guam, and rather than address this ambivalence (by acknowledging them in our interviews or by wearing their skirts more), it's easier to blame Chamorros for misreading them as Chuukese and to blame Chuukese for wearing their uros because they are an easy target.

One thing was especially clear to me after analyzing my interviews, appearance is very important to Pohnpeian women. The culture of *kanengamah*, tied closely to being a *lih tohrohr*, involves not showing weakness or vulnerability. Some of the women I interviewed found it easier to say they don't wear their urohs because they don't want to be mistaken for Chuukese (which is a reality) than to delve deeper and explain their own discomfort or insecurity, which could be interpreted as weakness on their part. I was aware of our concern with appearances, which comes with being from a small island whose people are highly competitive, but my *koasoai* with women, especially regarding urohs wearing, really brought these insecurities and concerns to light. We care a lot about how we are perceived by others, other Pohnpeians in particular, but on Guam, we are more concerned about how the local population perceives us. Our sensitivities are heightened on this island that is not ours and where one's cultural dress can cause discrimination and discomfort. Urohs automatically associate us with a

Micronesian and Chuukese identity that comes with a host of other issues relating to being a burden on the Guam economy, compact impact funds,¹⁷ and violent crime (Hezel and Samuel 2006; Bautista 2010; Falgout 2012). For many lien Pohnpei, wearing urohs disempowers us within the larger Guam community where we don't feel accepted or understood. Some of us just don't want to be bothered with the burden that comes with both being and "looking" Micronesian, and making the choice to wear jeans instead of a colorful urohs can make it easier to get through the day.

Unlike lien Pohnpei on Guam, the reason Indian women in New Zealand do not wear their sari and salwaar kameez is not about being mistaken for another ethnic group, but about not wanting to stand out (Sandhu 2007). Despite this marked difference, Pohnpeian women like the Indian women in Sandhu's study tend to restrict the wearing of their "traditional clothing." According to Sandhu:

sites for wearing their traditional styles of dress become limited to special occasions or social events that centre on cultural practises and rituals (in which I have already mentioned how women play a central role as bearers of tradition); or within a more casual setting at home or on the weekend (2007, 36).

Lien Pohnpei's "sites for wearing" include the home, as well as Pohnpeian social and cultural activities where their urohs have a purpose and can be admired. Tracy Ann Helgenberger, a 26-year-old University of Guam student whose family owns P.H. Market, paints an insightful picture for why lien Pohnpei wear their skirts in certain locales:

Pwe competition o nan pwungahrail mehn Pohnpei eh...ma mehn Pohnpei pahn kohla wasa me mehn Ruk mihe udahn ke pahn urohs en Pohnpei pwe ke ese me re udahn attracted to urohs en Pohnpei eh...Ma ke pil kohla songen GPO ape, sohte me pil care ape mwo ihte me mwein re pahn ndahkin uhk "dah lahpem pil urohs en Pohnpei ki" de "lahpen kahng likou [mwahu]...pwe e mihmi e nek pwurahla sapwehu ih wia..." mwo eh...uhd kohla ni kapoakon en mehn Pohnpei...ihthe me re pahn kin nda "nahn udahn lel...ke kihsang ia?," kepinga de pil lipahnedki ma peirin. [E kourur] (16 February 2013).

Because the competition is among Pohnpeians...if Pohnpeians go somewhere where there are Chuukese you have to wear urohs en Pohnpei because you know they are very attracted to urohs en Pohnpei...if you go to GPO [Guam Premium Outlets] or somewhere, nobody even cares. All they might say about you is "why is she wearing an urohs en Pohnpei" or "she doesn't want to wear [something nice]...because she's

¹⁷ U.S. federal funds that are dispersed to territories and states most impacted by the migration of citizens from the Freely Associated States.

here she can go back to her place and do that” like that...but if you go to a Pohnpeian gathering...all they will say is “nahn that’s so nice...where did you get it?,” praise it or gossip about it if they are jealous [She laughs].

We don’t feel compelled to wear our precious urohs to places like shopping centers where they will be ignored or even thought of as backward. We wear our urohs where they are appreciated and even envied (around Chuukese). As a Pohnpeian textile, urohs serve their purpose best among Pohnpeians where a competitive spirit never ceases to exist.

My urohs (the Guam version)

urohs are me
the real me
Nanpailong, Saladak, nan wehi
princess
popping gum, laughing
saledek, free, fearless me
when I wear them here on Guam
I feel exposed
no longer *that* me
timid, awkward
bashful eyes looking at the ground
shifting into the *other*
eyes dart away from faces
that might judge
cashier that might not greet me
or smile like she usually would
Chuukese eyes staring
curious
that might, what might...
happen

wearing Micronesia
becoming one of *them*
don’t get me wrong
I still wear my urohs
when I am feeling strong
to visit other Pohnpeians
even elsewhere on some days
but even my nicest, newest
most kaselel urohs
fade
lose their glimmer
when worn here

at the tip of the spear¹⁸
where the sun rises
on America
it isn't appreciated
admired or desired

no longer visible
under this flower skirt
this kil pwetepwet¹⁹ Pohnpeian
this Micronesian
mermaid frowns

This poem illustrates how I feel about wearing urohs en Pohnpei on Guam. Urohs are a part of me, my identity as a lien Pohnpei, and they tie me to other women who I have loved and lost. Urohs wrap me in nostalgia and thrill me with new mwahi that I desire to possess and show off. On Guam, though, my love for urohs shifts because I am always torn about wearing them. I want to wear urohs, but then I always have to think about where I am going on that particular day and whether I will feel comfortable wearing urohs to that particular location. Like other lien Pohnpei, there are certain "sites of not wearing" for me, such as Micronesia Mall, Payless Supermarkets or GPO, because there are a lot of local people, and I want to blend in. My "sites of wearing" are around the house, to the homes of other mehn Pohnpei, and to Pohnpeian parties and other social events and activities. But there are some days, when I just think "screw it," and slip on my urohs and go. I wish though that when I wear my urohs around Guam, I could feel confident and beautiful like I would in Pohnpei, but I never do unless I am surrounded by other mehn Pohnpei or other Micronesians. I think it's more difficult for me, however, because I am ahpw kahs. People tend not to think I am Pohnpeian or Micronesian, so when I wear urohs I stand out even more. I, therefore, have to really be in the mood to wear one on Guam. It is much easier to just wear pants because there is no thinking involved, and I don't have to feel awkward or uncomfortable, concerned that people are looking at me funny or wondering why I am wearing a "Micronesian" or a Chuukese skirt. Western clothing is liberating because it allows me to just blend in. But then I also feel guilty for not wearing my beautiful urohs that I love so, and feel that I've abandoned them and part of who I am. It saddens me to think I live on an island, a

¹⁸ Guam is often referred to as "the tip of the spear" in terms of its strategic importance to the U.S. military.

¹⁹ White skin.

Micronesian island, where I don't feel happy in my urohs skin, which actually brings me such joy. I know other women feel similarly...

One woman I share many of the same sentiments with regarding urohs en Pohnpei is Trish Billen of Kolonia, Pohnpei who I introduce in Chapter 2. She had been living on Guam for 5 years when I interviewed her. She loves urohs and learned how to sew urohs from her mother, Florihna Anson. Skirts were all she wore in Pohnpei. In fact, when Trish arrived on island, she claims “urohs tohr me I wa kohdo”; “urohs were all I brought” (15 February, 2013). She describes how when she first came to Guam she wore her urohs everywhere, and she began to notice that most of the other Pohnpeian and Chuukese students didn't wear their urohs often, especially around campus. Her Pohnpeian friends would ask her why she didn't wear pants and encouraged her to try wearing them, and gradually she stopped wearing her urohs everywhere and began to wear pants more. She still wears her urohs around the dorms and to nearby stores. I wrote the following poem based on our interview.

na song rausis²⁰

I only brought urohs
that's what I wore
that's all I wore
I wanted to fit in
I kin ekis namenekda

this is Guam
kaidehn Pohnpei
be modern
na song rausis

so I tried wearing pants
I still do
I stopped wearing my skirts
I don't think it's good
urohs kesempwal
I feel guilty for not wearing urohs
it's our culture

urohs are for inside the house
not for going to school or Micronesia mall

²⁰ Try wearing pants.

where there are lots of people
not just other Pohnpeians

if the other Pohnpeian girls wore urohs
I would
but the feeling left out feeling
was strong

do you want to be the only one?
wearing something different
come on try
na song rausis

As I mentioned earlier, Pohnpeian women tend to dictate what other lie Pohnpei wear even on Guam. I know that I, along with Trish and other women, feel a kind of pressure to conform to what other Pohnpeians wear, and most don't wear urohs out and about. The women who choose to wear their urohs everywhere on Guam are criticized by others (personal interviews). I asked Trish if she would wear her urohs if the other Pohnpeian students did, and she told me:

Mehlel ma kiht mehn Pohnpei ka koaros kin urohs kohla sukuhl mwein I pahn kak urohs kohla sukuhl a pwehki mwomwen madamadau en likamw feeling left out o udahn kehla for me...Ihte me I sohte kin men urohs ki pwehki I sohte men kehepw oh pwehki sahpwet; Pohnpei I sohte katapaniki pwe ih atail likou en mwo (February 15, 2013).

Truly if we Pohnpeians all wore urohs to school I would probably be able to wear urohs to school, but because the thought of feeling left out was really strong for me... That's the only reason I don't want to wear urohs because I don't want to be alone and because it's here [Guam]; Pohnpei I don't care because that's our clothing.

It's very difficult to be the only one wearing an urohs on a university campus when there are other Pohnpeians who choose not to. Like Trish, I know I'd feel more compelled to wear urohs if other lie Pohnpei did. She went on to describe how she's changed, and even when she goes to Pohnpei now she tends to wear pants more. We had an interesting koasoai about how the wearing of urohs in Pohnpei has shifted particularly within the last 15 years or so, and how it's our generation that seems to be the last that appreciates urohs in the way that our mothers and grandmothers do. We both noticed that in contemporary Pohnpei, women in their 20s to early 40s, particularly in Kolonia Town, prefer not to wear urohs en Pohnpei to restaurants, offices, the bank and elsewhere. They wear pants or other western clothing to these locales. Even in Pohnpei there is a kind of pressure that exists to wear pants as a sign of

sophistication and modernity. When I worked as an English Instructor at the College of Micronesia, Pohnpei Campus in 2007, I used to wear my nicest urohs to work. No other Pohnpeian female Instructors wore urohs en Pohnpei to work, and my boss, who was Pohnpeian, preferred wearing jeans and high heels. She claimed that urohs were for wearing around the house and were not professional dress. Obviously, I did not agree with her and continued wearing my urohs.

I asked Trish what she thinks about women in Pohnpei no longer wearing urohs. She expresses how she doesn't think it's positive:

My opinion in Pohnpei...I sohte leme me e mwahu mwo aramas en kesehla. Urohs kesempwal pwe pelien atail culture. I pil kin feel bad ahi kin kohla ngehi kin sohte men urohs kohla liki ekei pak. I kin feel guilty like I'm giving up my culture. Likamw I nameneki eh, eri ma I kin medowehda mwadang eri I kin ndah te menda, ngehi kin urohs da...miehte ekei atail peneinei...me sohte mwahuki rausis, irail kin men kitail en urohs...eri soahng ma se pahn kohla rehn aht, amw nohnokahlap sahn kin anahne urohs da pwe symbol of our culture, wahu, oh mwo respect oang irail...(15 February, 2013).

My opinion in Pohnpei...I don't think it's good for people to discard it. Urohs are important because it's part of our culture. I feel bad when I go [to Pohnpei] and don't want to wear urohs out sometimes. I feel guilty like I'm giving up my culture. It's like I'm ashamed, so if I think quick, I just say forget it, and put on an urohs...there are still some of our relatives...who don't like pants, they want us to wear urohs...so if we go to visit our, your grandmother we need to wear urohs because it's a symbol of our culture, respect, and respect for them...

Trish's statement above reflects that even in Pohnpei, some women feel conflicted about their relationship to urohs. Although they are home, there are other issues involved in wearing these skirts that are so culturally valued. In Pohnpei today, women want to stand out and many young women, especially in Kolonia, believe the best way to do so is by wearing western clothing, not urohs. Women in rural communities or wehi, however, still wear urohs most of the time, although they might wear pants or "dress up" when they go to town.

urohs as kamaiiai

Urohs Sexy

sexy is a popular word
throughout the world
like Coke
even in Pohnpei
women and girls want to be sexy
to be desired

Nahnep was sexy
extremely
even the words that came out of her mouth
were almost all sexy
she had many lovers
very sex-y
her personality was sexy
her laugh, mannerisms
super sexy sexual
I never saw her wear skinny jeans

but apparently
skinny jeans are what's sexy
wearing clothes that show the shape
of your thighs and ass
and if you are a grown woman
with a child or five
a muffin top that may hang over your jeans
sexy?

but urohs?
that's what our mothers,
grandmothers wear
long and loose
uber colorful, neon cultural
respectful and nonsexual
but highly sensual...

sensual?
Yes.
that's hard to find
in skinny jeans and music videos

I recently spoke with a young Pohnpeian woman in her early 20s, who I have never seen wearing an urohs. I asked her whether she ever did wear skirts, and she said "soh," "no," she never wears urohs. When I asked her why she said, "it's not sexy." I was a little surprised, as I had never heard that response, however, she expressed what my own

observations had been telling me all along. I immediately thought of how Amoreen had described young women's feelings towards urohs as "re kamaiiaiki"; "they find it unlucky, embarrassing, undesirable" (29 August 2012). In other words, urohs are not sexy; the skirts are not something they would want to be wearing if they knew they were going to run into their secret crush. From what I saw throughout my ethnographic research and prior to it when living and working on Guam and in Pohnpei, most young Pohnpeian women appear to prefer to wear their skinny jeans. Serepein want to dress "sexy," and if they wear urohs they are made fun of for dressing like "lih laud," elderly women (Cathy Santos, 17 August 2012). In terms of Vanuatu, Cummings writes:

I show that ni-Vanuatu women, especially young, unmarried, childless women, feel a great deal of ambivalence about wearing the island dress and the ways in which it may or may not enable them to look good or to look nice as they see fit... young women want to look modern, comfortable, and sometimes even sexually attractive- and not to look fat, pregnant, or like someone's mother" (2013, 38, 45).

Serepein en Pohnpei feel similarly in wanting to wear clothes they believe make them look and feel good about themselves.

Young women and girls in contemporary Pohnpei and in the migrant community on Guam, have what can be described as a conflicted relationship with wearing urohs.²¹ Most young women on Guam, such as Shelter and Tracy, said they feel uncomfortable wearing urohs and are more comfortable in western clothing (personal interviews). They may wear urohs at home or when attending Pohnpeian events, but most of the time, they wear pants or shorts. Marleen Alex, a 22-year-old Pohnpeian woman who grew up in Pohnpei and moved to Guam in 2008 to attend college, told me, "Ehng I iang kesempwaliki apw ihte I sohte kin nohk pereniki likauih"; "yes I also think urohs are important, but the thing is that I don't really enjoy wearing them"²² (personal interview, 12 February 2013). She told me that she wore urohs more often in Pohnpei and thinks they are kesempwal, especially since her mother sews urohs and the skirts she sews help support her family. However, she prefers not to wear them. While they may not say it outright, it became obvious that the young women I interviewed on Guam, find urohs

²¹ Falgout writes about young Pohnpeian women's reluctance to wear urohs in Hawai'i (2012).

²² The ni-Vanuatu girls in Cummings' study almost said the same thing, "I like the island dress, *but* I don't want to wear it" (2013, 40).

burdensome as a visibly Micronesian identity marker for those living away, as well as old fashioned—not the kind of clothing that would make them feel desirable.

“a flower that shines”: the surveys

Although my ethnographic “homework” was not focused on serepein en Pohnpei and young women’s articulations of urohs, the interviews I conducted with several women who were under the age of 26,²³ as discussed above, provided important insights on how a younger generation of Pohnpeian women feel about these skirts and their actual wearing at home in Pohnpei and in their home away from home on Guam. To augment these interviews and the information they revealed, I thought an anonymous survey would be the best way to assess a large number of young women’s perceptions of urohs and their decisions around wearing or not wearing, as well as where to wear them. The survey I designed was comprised of a total of 10 questions, some of which required just a yes or no answer about whether or not these women wore urohs, felt beautiful in urohs, and whether their mothers wore urohs. There were also some short answer questions about when they wore urohs and if they didn’t, why and what they wore instead. A final question asked, “If you could look like any woman in the world, who would you want to look like?” I collected a total of 119 anonymous surveys²⁴ while on Guam and in Pohnpei, 92 from the two College of Micronesia campuses (Pohnpei campus and National campus) and 27 from the University of Guam, Pacific Islands University and Harvest Baptist Bible College on Guam.

²³These young women included: Shelterihna Alokoa, Erica Reyes, Tracy Helgenberger, Marleen Alex, Evenglynn Andon and Liberty Nakasone.

²⁴ The surveys were distributed to and completed by young Pohnpeian women between the ages of 18-26 years old.



Figure 5.9. (clockwise) College of Micronesia-FSM students filling out surveys, Pohnpei, 2012; Harvest Baptist Bible College students wearing urohs, Guam; University of Guam students, 2013.

The results of the survey show that most serepein en Pohnpei do wear urohs. Only seven girls said that they did not wear urohs, while twenty-three said they did not feel beautiful when they wore urohs. Some of the reasons cited for not feeling beautiful in urohs were: “feeling ugly,” “because I feel like old,” “I don’t think I look good,” and “I don’t feel comfortable.” Most of the girls said they wanted to look like their mothers (fifty surveyed) or look like themselves. What I found interesting was that most of the girls who said they didn’t feel beautiful when wearing urohs also stated they wanted to look like their mothers who did wear urohs. Similar to the young ni-Vanuatu women’s relationships to the aelan dress (Cummings 2013), many serepein en Pohnpei are taught that urohs are respectful dress and what look best on Pohnpeian women, but this doesn’t necessarily mean that urohs are what they want to wear. Urohs are what their mother’s wear, and they love their mothers, and perhaps want to look like them in the future. Other girls wrote down the names of friends and relatives, or simply said, they

wanted to look like a “local island woman,” and the rest wrote down the names of various American celebrities (eighteen total) ranging from Jennifer Lopez to Alicia Keys.

The survey findings surprised me. I assumed that given my own observations, interviews with young women, and the anonymity of the surveys, that most young Pohnpeian women would say they do not enjoy wearing urohs. This was definitely not the case, however. Even the two survey respondents who mention a preference for skinny jeans when not wearing urohs, do not condemn urohs wearing, but instead, one of the two respondents said that urohs “fits my body and I always look pretty when I wear urohs” (19 year old, COM Pohnpei Campus student). As a kind of “poetic transcription” (Glesne 1997), I wrote the following poem based on direct quotes taken from the survey question, “Do you feel beautiful when you wear urohs? Why or Why not?”

I feel beautiful in urohs...

like a flower
that shines
a real woman
everyone wants to look at

I’m wearing a design
not easily made
the island’s creation
an image,
art
fashion
created by talented people

makes me look clean
not exposed
respectful island beauty
comfortable
an urohs angel
pretty
just right for me

admired
proud
unique
Represent! Lien Pohnpei 691

Most of the survey responses reveal that the young women find urohs to be “comfortable” and “respectful,” representing their identities as Pohnpeians, part of their “culture” and “tradition,” all of which make them feel attractive. So why then don’t they seem to be wearing these skirts? Obviously, what these serepein disclose on paper and do in real life in their articulations of urohs is complicated, as there is a discrepancy between what they are writing about these skirts and how often they wear them. I believe young women really do appreciate these textiles as most lien Pohnpei do, however, like the ni-Vanuatu girls, there is an ambivalence towards wearing them that is expressed by their choice not to wear urohs on a regular basis. Most young women in Pohnpei wear urohs at home and to specific “sites of wearing” (Sandhu 2007), but not as everyday wear. Another important factor is that most serepein cannot afford to purchase urohs, and only own urohs given to them by family and friends (personal interviews). I suspect that some young women would like to wear urohs on a more regular basis if they owned nice urohs en Pohnpei of their choosing. Lastly, as I’ve expressed earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 4, urohs are associated with being lih, being grown, mature women, oftentimes women who are married with children. Urohs are what many of the young women surveyed will grow into, eventually looking like their mothers.

The deeper, layered meanings of urohs for Pohnpeian women on Guam and how they negotiate their shifting identities through the wearing and not wearing of these skirts is often revealed by what is not seen or obvious. What is under the urohs tells a great deal about these lien Pohnpei and their complex relationship to home and being away from home that is embodied in these beautifully designed machine appliquéd and embroidered skirts.

pahn urohs o

Many things lie beneath urohs. When an urohs is turned inside out, you may find paper which functions as a stabilizer²⁵ to help prevent the fabric from “puckering up” (Lonsdale 2014), particularly when sohn deidei machine embroider, or you may find

²⁵ Personal communication with Micki Lonsdale, quilter, 4 September 2014; see Lorna Knight (2010).

backing fabric from the appliqué and/or machine embroidery. You will always find thread from either the appliqué stitching or machine embroidery from the front of the skirt. The paper is almost always recycled²⁶ from office trash, children's homework assignments, church programs, check stubs and more. This nting on paper is sometimes typed or handwritten in cursive menginpeh.



Figure 5.10. Paper under iki of a skirt.

Sohn deidei nting or write onto the urohs they sew with the misihn en deidei's dikek (needle) and dereht (thread). The dikek is their pen and the dereht the ink through which they carefully illustrate on the fabric, which become urohs. Their hands embroider freehand moving the fabric back and forth under the needle forming flowers, mermaid hair, sakau stems, turtle shells and more. It is precise and methodical. Under the skirt though is a different story and often an entirely different urohs. It is messy. It is the backside of the canvas, not meant to be seen, but there, supporting the mwahi that decorate the front and sometimes back of the skirt, a necessary part of the greater whole. The thread that creates the mwahi sometimes change color underneath; the backing may be in patches of different printed fabric, and pieces of paper remain that haven't yet washed off. There is something beautiful about the haphazardness of it all. When an urohs is turned inside out we see the labour that went into creating this work of art.

²⁶ See Māhina-Tuai and Māhina (2011) for some of the creative ways Tongan women use recycled materials to create their textiles.



Figure 5.11. (clockwise) Rahn sakau with ngarangar urohs front and inside out; check stub; church program; handwriting on paper; mermaid urohs inside out.

Pahn urohs o are also women’s denge (thighs), kaue (butts), and pihpi (vaginas). These parts are thick and muscular, flabby, skinny, flat, curvaceous and even shapeless, moist, dry, fragrant and often sweaty. For Pohnpeians, as for most Pacific Islanders, these body parts are most sacred and in need of protection, from “sin,” as most of us are Christians, but even more so from exposure. Most lien Pohnpei never want to expose our lower bodies, and we, thus, take precautions to avoid it.

urohs sohte safe

lien mahs sarmadahki pelipel²⁷
black ink protected those sacred parts
permanently beneath likou meimei
Mother Hubbards and likoutei
lih laud wear suwain amimono
under their likouli
urohs too
layers of protection
for what's no longer tattooed
sarmada is not enough
urohs sohte safe
women tell me
wearing shorts or tights under
is required
kede kirisdi koh salla
kede pei
you could get into an accident
rausis will keep you safe
loale, inside

Several girls wrote in their surveys that they did not feel safe when wearing urohs, and prefer wearing rausis because they are safer. The topic came up on several occasions during my interviews as well where women mentioned how they wear lepin rausis (shorts) under their skirts for the same reason. In our interview, Cecihl clearly explains why shorts are necessary:

Ma ke pahn kanaiehng paliweremwen a ke anahne rausis pwe ke sehse ansou da me ke pahn lel ehng apwal ma pohn pwoht de nan sdohsa, de ke pahn accident, de ke pehi; If you are going to be careful with your body then you need to wear rausis because you don't know when you are going to face hardship, whether it be on a boat, in a car, or you have an accident, or you fight (1 August 2012).

I wear shorts under my urohs when I go to unfamiliar places or to events with large crowds like mehla or kamadipw. Like other women, I want to be prepared if I was to slip and fall, or if something were to happen to me. The worst thing is to be salla (exposed) in a crowd.

²⁷ Personal interview, Cecilia David, 1 August 2012.

On my first visit to the Andon sisters, the two *sohn deidei* I discuss in detail in the following chapter, I noticed they were using interesting paper as stabilizer for the *urohs* they were sewing. These were documents that included, “The Trauma of Sexual Assault” and “The Long-Term Effects of Sexual Abuse”²⁸ with machine embroidered flowers sewn into the paper. It was beautifully tragic. I knew a poem would somehow emerge from this paper that would eventually help create an *urohs kaselel*.



Figure 5.12. Mwahi in process with recycled sexual assault documents being used as stabilizer underneath the fabric.

²⁸ The recycled paper comes from the Andon sisters’ mother, Kedinlik’s, place of work, Pohnpei Public Health.

Pilen Mese²⁹

red and green pwomaria
hide the trauma
the blue on her inner thighs
frequent UTIs
kapehd medek and sometimes blood
she wants to die

the touching started when she was six
in the evenings
when he and her mom drank sakau
outside by the container
she, her little brother
and the neighborhood kids
would watch videos inside the house
he'd come and stand in the doorway
and call her name, "Me, Mary, kohdo mah"
she'd follow him
into the darkness

when she got older
she made excuses to stay with her cousins
always avoiding him
trying not to be alone with him
wearing tights under her urohs
sometimes two pairs plus sarmada
but the tights couldn't protect her
late at night
when the household was in a deep sleep

she stopped going to school
put on her uniform in the morning
walked to school but never got there
ended up at the river,
cried and fell asleep
sometimes the bad boys would come
she'd drink kisin popohr³⁰ with them
and pass out

when she'd wake up
her tights would be hanging
from the mango tree
only an urohs covering
her naked body

²⁹ A river in Madolenihmw above Kepirohi meaning "tears."

³⁰ "A little slap in the face," meaning hard liquor.

In this poem I critique the notion that wearing shorts or tights under urohs make a woman “safe.” I also use some of the language from the sexual assault educational documents I saw and photographed. My research did not explore sexual assault among Pohnpeians, although I am well aware that it is a problem on the island and in migrant communities, like Guam. It is a topic that is whispered about, not talked about, and is one of the main causes of suicide, especially among young women and girls. While engaged in my ethnographic research in Pohnpei, I attended a Human Rights Day Workshop and March³¹ held by the Pohnpei Women’s Advisory Council where lawyer, Marstella Jack, gave an informative presentation on family violence, with a particular focus on violence against women, and we marched to the Pohnpei State Legislature in support of L.B. 22-12, the Family Violence Bill, which, two years later, still has yet to be passed. I ask, what is revealed pahn urohs o by sexual assault documents being used as stabilizer in the making of a highly creative and beautiful female textile and form of dress?

In this chapter I explore the layers of feeling—the nostalgia, homesickness, affection and love—migrant lien Pohnpei have for urohs, as well as the discomfort, ambivalence and reluctance we experience towards wearing these skirts in our homes away from home (Clifford 1994). The complexities “pahn urohs o” that are not easily seen or articulated by women themselves and in our wearing of urohs is also discussed. More importantly, I express how those of us living away from home are still very much attached to these textiles, as they represent who we are as lien Pohnpei. This attachment is revealed in the large urohs archives of several women on Guam, and in the wearing of skirts to clothe our identities in the context of our own community. In addition, the voices of young Pohnpeian women are heard through their perspectives on the meanings of urohs in their lives. Lastly, I turn the urohs inside out to take a closer look at what lies beneath the skirt. I end with a poem that evokes much of what this chapter is about. In the following chapter, I return to the “Always on my mind” urohs that I opened this chapter with, to the sohn deidei who made it, and to other seamstresses and lien pisines, who sell these highly valued works of art.

³¹ The march and workshop took place on 10 December 2012 at the Governor’s complex.



Figure 5.13. (clockwise) PWAC women marching to the Pohnpei Legislature, Kolonia, Human Rights Day, 2012; Marstella Jack (left), Susana Sohs, PWAC President, and Lululeen Santos presenting in front of Senators.

I leave a paper trail

like nting on skin
 paper under urohs
 is hard to wash off
 you can turn it inside out
 carefully remove the white
 scrub it with a dawasi
 koh siped seli
 but pieces will remain in the fabric
 some refuse to wear paper skirts
 they can't be bothered

pahn urohs o
 mie ah secret

irresistible mwahi defy
 what's in her bank account
 daropwe is an inconvenience
 well worth it

and if you really love
your fresh off the sewing machine skirt
you'll just wear it
allow the paper to caress your thighs
worth the eyes
of envy and admiration

pahn urohs o
she has secrets

recycled paper hides
beneath the fabric
other nting lingers
unnoticed
typed and handwritten
social security pay rates
church programs
children's homework
blank daropwe

some of us
just leave the paper there
letting it gradually fall off
with every wash
every wear
piece by piece
until only traces are left

I leave a paper trail of poems
in a sea of longing
and laughter adrift
fragments of mour

Chapter 6: Sohn Deidei and Lien Pisines: the economy of urohs en Pohnpei

“We were witnessing the birth of an economy that would soon be—and today now is—thoroughly dependent on imported goods, contracted skills, and annual outside aid.”

~Lazarus Salii, member of the Congress of Micronesia and future president of Palau, as quoted in 1976 (Hanlon 1998, 158).



Figure 6.1. Urohs for sale at Yoshie Enterprises, Kolonia, Pohnpei, 8 December 2012.

Pohnpei Christmas

here comes Santa Claus, here comes Santa Claus
right into Kolonia, Pohnpei
you will find him standing next to
the white tuhken Kirimas
and the fake Hawaiian lei

everything in Yoshie
besides the urohs and mwuhmwuhn Ruk
came on a boat from somewhere
globe ornaments in gold and purple
Jessica Simpson’s perfume
Oreo cookies and Sapporo ramen

it's Christmas
and everyone in Pohnpei has a dirty American dollar to spend
money in Pohnpei isn't crisp and clean
it's crumpled, stained from inside a young man's pockets
who's been out all night drinking and chewing
mwoarok¹ money from the bottom of the ngaranger
someone will drink it
transfers from pocket to bra

urohs lingaling
they sparkle and shine
Rudolph's red nose



Figure 6.2. An isimwas in Nan Mand, Kitti, photo taken by Kimberlee Kihleng, 10 March 1990.

This chapter explores the importance of urohs for lien Pohnpei in terms of economic power, continued agency in the performance of tiahk and, as previously discussed, as the most valuable dress of women today. While the 'economy' of urohs has not been recognized in Pohnpei State or FSM government economic and budget reports, it nonetheless plays a significant role in women's economic wellbeing. This is revealed in interviews I conducted with ten established businesswomen, who sell urohs in Pohnpei

¹ Mwoarok en sakau is the residue at the bottom of a cup of sakau. Some people like to drink it, but others don't because they find it too strong.

and on Guam, with female consumers of urohs, who also engage in the informal sale of skirts, including myself, and with four of the most successful sohn deidei,² as well as through ethnographic experience. In the chapter I also offer a detailed look into the female genealogy of creativity through the lives and work of the four sohn deidei, two sets of sisters, to reveal how their impressive menginpeh or “fine-hands” (Māhina-Tuai and Māhina 2011, 25), privilege the continuity of matrilineal kinswomen working together to produce valuable textiles.

In reviewing my research photos, what has come to my attention, particularly with those taken in and outside stores where urohs are sold, is that the skirts are always prominently displayed. Usually, they are deliberately hung up above everything like shining prizes. In the first photo above, we have urohs on display in one of the most popular department stores in Pohnpei, Yoshie Enterprises. Yoshie sells a range of imported goods from America and Japan ranging from Victoria’s Secret lotions to Japanese homeware and 50 lb. bags of rice. The back of the store is where their clothing and electronics department is located and where I found Santa Claus standing next to a white Christmas tree covered in lights, bundles of fake lei and urohs en Pohnpei. The urohs and mwuhmwuhn Ruk, Chuukese muumuu (hanging behind the urohs), are the only products made in Pohnpei³ by lien Pohnpei and perhaps lien Ruk or lien Motulok (Mortlockese women⁴). I was surprised to find that they sold urohs given that Food Mart, a very popular store that sells hundreds of urohs, is right next door. Yet there they hung prominently, almost higher than Santa Claus and shining brighter than the cheap Christmas tree. It was also not surprising that urohs are sold in Yoshie given that urohs are a necessary part of life in Pohnpei, and people who go to purchase certain items in the store might just pick up an urohs or two as well. Yoshie is the kind of store

² I interviewed a total of ten sohn deidei, some of whom sell more skirts than others and some who treat it more as a hobby.

³ The only other Pohnpei-made products on sale at Yoshie are coconut oil and soap produced by the FSM Coconut Development Authority.

⁴ The Mortlocks are a group of islands that are part of Chuuk State, and there is a large community of Mortlockese who live in Pohnpei. Some of these Mortlockese are descendants of those who originally came as refugees from a large typhoon that hit their islands in 1907. Given that they have resided in Pohnpei for more than a century, they often don’t identify as Chuukese, but inhabit a unique identity as Mortlockese from Pohnpei (see Oleson 2007).

people stop at on their way to a kamadipw where they can pick up several Japanese plastic basins, some t-shirts and a case of soda or two to take as gifts. Visitors to Pohnpei also tend to shop for urohs in Kolonia town not necessarily knowing where the best bargains are.

The display in Yoshie reminded me of the second photograph taken by my mother 22 years ago. Here urohs are also prominently displayed but in a very different context. These urohs rohs of an older style were part of one of six dahl or “plates” given as gifts by pwihn belonging to the Nan Mand mwomwohdiso during an isimwas feast in honor of the new Protestant church that had just been built (Kihleng 1996, 370). Like the ones at Yoshie, these urohs are prominently displayed as part of the elaborate gift. In fact, more than 100 urohs were displayed at this particular isimwas (Kihleng 1996). These two photos look quite different: the first appearing very commercial and consumer-oriented, and the second looking “cultural” and celebratory, however, they have much in common and both images also evoke a multisensorial (Pink 2009) experience of urohs. The first is a Pohnpeian/Micronesian customer-oriented display in a Japanese/Pohnpeian-owned retail store located in the heart of Kolonia’s business district. The photo depicts a very Pohnpeian use of both Pohnpeian and imported American and Japanese merchandise that tiahk en Pohnpei (Pohnpeian culture or custom) necessitates, including urohs, fake flowers, t-shirts and “Hawaiian” beach towels, all of which are found in Yoshie.

As scholars, such as Kihleng (1996), Hanlon (1998) and Petersen (1982b) argue, Pohnpeians continue to use American and Asian products, including imported food, cloth and other merchandise for very Pohnpeian purposes that include feasting events like the one pictured in Nan Mand. Indeed economic statistics and ethnographic descriptions of day-to-day life in Pohnpei show that we have become dependent on outside aid in the sense that Lazarus Salii described in the epigraph I use to open this chapter. However, Pohnpeians, like Tongans (Leslie and Addo 2007; Addo 2013), use imported, as well as indigenous Pohnpeian goods in uniquely Pohnpeian ways both at home and away. This is especially so with regard to the fruits of doadoak en lih, urohs en Pohnpei in particular, which function as commercial and cultural goods.

Kihleng's photo visually demonstrates the hierarchy of these Pohnpeian and imported goods. The dahl structure features kehp (yams) and sakau in the top tier with cases of soda, ramen and 50 lb. bags of rice in the second tier and kiamoro (coconut leaf baskets) filled with other agricultural items and more in the bottom tier (Kihleng 1996).

"Hawaiian" towels, urohs, appliquéd sheets and pillowcases, and pieces of material are strung throughout the structure adding color and depth. These women's goods complement the male agricultural products, and the photograph visually expresses the ways in which both men and women work together to make such large-scale gifts and celebrations possible. What these two photos ultimately reveal is how menginpehn lien Pohnpei on urohs and other cultural products visually express the cultural and social landscape of the island. The work of lien Pohnpei is present everywhere, and not only is it beautiful, it seeks to enhance and perpetuate tiahk, and is also extremely profitable.

The literature that exists about the FSM economy primarily focuses on this young nation's economic dependence on the U.S. (Bascom 1965, Hanlon 1998, Hezel 2013). This is the stark reality of the FSM. The four Island States continue to grow more and more dependent upon American assistance with Yap being the most self-sufficient and having the most exports (SBOC 2012). Recent statistics show that 167,864 kgs or \$591,270 USD worth of goods (agricultural and marine products and all others) were exported from Pohnpei State in 2011 compared with a staggering \$83,382,966 worth of goods that were imported into Pohnpei. For the FSM as a whole 20,811,840 kg or \$36,918,702 USD worth of goods (agricultural and marine products and all others) were exported whereas \$188,080,935 worth of goods were imported into the country in 2011 alone. Indeed, we Micronesians have become prolific consumers while producing very little of our own. Urohs en Pohnpei are one of the few "homemade" products created and authentically "produced in the FSM" that are highly profitable both within the country and as an export. As such, it is important that this kesempwal (valuable/important) commodity is studied and written about.

Women's roles in business and their significant, largely undocumented contributions to Pohnpei State and the greater FSM economy are virtually absent from the literature on Micronesia. This is despite the fact that 48.4 % of FSM women over the age of 15 are employed (2010 FSM Census). The FSM's Office of SBOC currently does not have

statistics on the export of urohs en Pohnpei, and the numbers that they do have on handicrafts and koahl are not comprehensive (email correspondence, Sharon Pelep, 20 November 2013). According to FSM statistics, Pohnpei's largest export is copra, followed by betel nut and sakau. Although third, sakau is the most profitable with 29,195 kg at a value of \$195,044. If urohs exports were to be documented, they would show how profitable these textiles are given that they are quite expensive (in 2012 Pohnpei urohs range in price from \$10-100 USD⁵), and according to my interviews and observations, urohs are being exported on a weekly basis if not more. The two Pohnpeian stores on Guam receive sakau and fish from Pohnpei via airfreight every Tuesday, which oftentimes also includes a fresh supply of urohs. Flights come in from Pohnpei every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Pohnpeians who have fundraising events on Guam always order urohs, along with sakau, and these events take place on a weekly basis. Then there are the many people who mail urohs to friends and family as gifts, but also to sell. Many of the Pohnpeian women who sell urohs in Pohnpei also bring urohs with them when they travel to Guam, Hawai'i and the American continent, which they then sell to Pohnpeians and other Micronesians living away. Lien Pohnpei are thus actively contributing to Pohnpei and the greater FSM economy through urohs making and selling.

Of the 11,590 employed Pohnpeian women who were surveyed during the 2010 FSM Census, 2,506 were engaged in formal work and 2,641 were involved in "home production" that includes "subsistence" (1,190) and "market oriented" (1,451) work (2010 FSM Census). Urohs production would fit under the "market oriented" category. Pohnpeian women continue to bring themselves into Pohnpei and FSM's economies, which is recorded in the skirts produced and money made, although not in the government's statistics. Unlike in India where the textile industry is primarily controlled by men who make, distribute and sell sari that are worn by women (Banerjee and Miller 2003), in Pohnpei the industry is dominated by women who make, distribute and sell urohs to other women who wear urohs. Iso Nahnken and the few other men who sew urohs are the exception to the rule, and these men primarily sell their urohs to businesswomen. Pohnpeian women are at the forefront of the urohs business and are highly visible. It is, therefore, quite misleading that their valuable contributions to the

⁵ These are adult women's urohs prices.

island economy remain largely and officially unrecognized. The fact that their work is not documented also contributes to the misrepresentation of Pohnpeian women having less power than *ohl en Pohnpei* (Kihleng 1996). The business of *urohs* is actually one of the most significant ways that women maintain their power and agency in contemporary Pohnpei. Importantly, they are producing a unique Pohnpeian product that is often exported. In addition, *lien Pohnpei* living away from Pohnpei are actively sending money home to pay for *urohs* that will be sent to them. This cycle of *urohs* circulation is endless, and one that according to all of the businesswomen I interviewed will never stop.

In March of 2013, an FSM Women in Business Network was established in Pohnpei and Chuuk with plans to expand to Yap and Kosrae through the efforts of Janet Panuelo, Administrator for the Office of Social Affairs for Pohnpei State, Lululeen Santos, Women's Interest Coordinator for Pohnpei State, Marstella Jack, Attorney and Legal Advisor to the Pohnpei Women's Advisory Council (PWAC), and others (email correspondence, Lululeen Santos, 18 March 2013). With the creation of women-centered organizations such as this, hopefully the talents and skill of Pohnpeian and other Micronesian women will be better recognized and documented.

Lien Pisines

Throughout my ethnographic "homework," I interviewed ten businesswomen who sell *urohs*. For these women, *urohs* are very important as their main income generator, although most of the *lien pisines* also sell other products, such as food, *sakau*, alcohol and cigarettes in their stores. They all express a kind of shared commitment to providing *urohs* for *lien Pohnpei*, who wish to wear and gift them. These *lien pisines* understand the passion Pohnpeian and other Micronesian women have for *urohs*, and they conveyed a certain pride in knowing they make these women happy with their purchases. The women are also *urohs* experts in their own right, as several of them sew themselves and spend much of their time around *urohs* dealing with *sohn deidei* and *urohs* customers. In many ways the businesswomen help determine what gets sold and what styles and designs become popular. They are fully aware of the unique talent that

lien Pohnpei possess when it comes to sewing urohs, and they dedicate their energy to the production and sale of these highly valued textiles.

I begin this section in Pohnpei where I provide a rather detailed profile of Linda Carl who is one of the pioneers of the urohs business. Our forty-minute interview was one of the most comprehensive I had with a lien pisines. Linda carefully and thoughtfully answered all of my questions providing funny anecdotes and fascinating information about the urohs world she is so knowledgeable about. I also provide shorter profiles of two other successful businesswomen, Karly Tom and Kiomy Albert. These lien pisines have quite different business operations, and the reasons they engage with urohs and the women who make, as well as buy them are also distinctive.

On Guam, Pohnpeian and Chuukese businesswomen have a clientele that is comprised mainly of Chuukese women. While the Pohnpei-based lien pisines sell urohs to Chuukese women too, in the Guam context, Chuukese women are the primary customers. During my time on Guam, I interviewed two Pohnpeian businesswomen, Cathy Santos and Meileen Sultan, who own stores where urohs are sold. I also interviewed Angie Aneko and Rozie Takamine, two Chuukese women who run a successful Fish Mart where they sell fish, of course, and other Chuukese foods, as well as urohs en Pohnpei.

The following profiles capture how lien pisines articulate their identities through the purchase and sale of urohs en Pohnpei as valued commodities. The circulation of these skirts at home, between Pohnpei and Guam, and in migrant communities on Guam reveals the “social lives” of these important textiles that stitch together the sohn deidei who make them, the lien pisines who sell them and the customers who buy them.

The Pohnpei Players

Linda Carl's store feels like it has always been there. Her name is synonymous with urohs en Pohnpei. Kiomy Albert describes her as the nohno of the urohs business in Pohnpei (personal interview, 1 October 2012). This description is a very appropriate one, as motherhood is highly valued in Pohnpeian society where older, senior ranking women are also described as nohnohn keinek, mothers of the matrilineage or limesekedil (see Chapter 3 and Kihleng 1996). Linda was one of the first women to sell urohs in Pohnpei, with her business opening twenty-four years ago (since 1990, personal interview, 17 October 2012). Her store is located on one of the busiest streets in Kolonia, Pohnrakied Road, in a shared building with another established urohs store owned by Ester Carl, a relative through marriage. Linda, like the other lien pisines, describes how urohs have been her main source of income. Her feelings towards urohs are revealed when I ask why urohs are important to her. Linda tells me the following:

Ngehi me iang tepin netikihla urohs nan Pohnpei, tepda pisines ki. Kin pein dehk ansou o, ngehi kin langahda. Eri ansou o I pahn langahdahte sohte kak rahn ehu te nekidihsang ahi urohs ko. Apw kaidehk en soang ka. I kin dehk kiheng suwain ape soang me Sipwoli pereniki ius ka. Ih sohng o me I tepkihda. Mwuri, a mehn Madolenihmw ka tepda dehkada zigzag ape apw e sohte kaselel duwehte ansou et. Eri ngehi tepida pwapwainda. Mie pak I kohkihla Guam, kasale Guam urohs...Kiht pwihn en lih ieu...Ngehi wa urohs, kidipen uluhl, soang kei se kohla kapware sahpwo. Ih me I kesempwalkihki urohs. Urohs me udahn tapiada kihoang ioa kisin sent me I kak kolokolkihdi laud, urohs (17 October 2012).

I am one of the first to sell urohs in Pohnpei, start doing business with it. I sewed at the time, and would hang them up. At that time I would hang them up and it wouldn't be a whole day and the urohs would be gone. But not these kinds. I would sew adding suwain and such like the kinds Sipwoli likes to use. That's how I started. After, people from Madolenihmw started sewing zigzag, but it wasn't nice like now. So I started to buy. I even went to Guam, showed urohs on Guam...a group of us women...I brought urohs, pillowcases, various things that we took to show there. That's why urohs are important to me. Urohs are what first gave me some money that I could hold onto, urohs.

The way Linda describes her relationship to urohs demonstrates how the skirts give her financial independence and self-satisfaction. Her extensive urohs knowledge is also expressed when she mentions what styles were being made at different times, and how she shifted from making and then selling urohs to buying urohs to sell. Her store used to take up the entire building and in the early years she had two sohn deidei sewing for her. She lost interest in sewing once her business took off. Linda is now 61 years old

and has ten of her grandchildren living with her, and she says she keeps the store for them. “Kisin sdohwa I wiahdahte kanat sen momouriki; se deh men mwoangoahda a sohte kanat mwoangoa.” “I built this little store for us to eat; to live off of so we don’t get hungry and there’s no food.” Linda’s store, hence, urohs, are equated with food, with life. Urohs provide physical nourishment through the money made through their sale, and also much happiness through making women feel beautiful in a distinctly Pohnpeian form of dress.

According to Linda, there are more than ten sohn deidei from different parts of the island who bring urohs to sell to her on a weekly basis. She usually puts \$5 on top of the cost of each urohs. The day I interviewed Linda, I was wearing an urohs my friend Sipwoli gave me that was purchased from her store, and Linda proceeded to tell me she bought the skirt for \$28 and sold it for \$33. Some sohn deidei come in with a price in mind and depending on what Linda thinks the urohs is worth, she’ll either buy it for the price suggested or give it her own price. She then proceeded to tell me about a woman who came to her store the night before and tried to sell her an urohs for \$15, but Linda refused to buy it for that price. She told the woman, “urohs en mwotomwot oh kisin decorate silu kumwail kioang mwowoa sohte worth tala riesek ien netkiheng aramas.” “This skirt is short and the three decorations you put on the front are not worth me selling it to people for twenty dollars.” She bought the skirt for \$10 and sold it for \$15 with the knowledge that had she had purchased it for \$15 and tried to sell it for \$20, she may not have been able to do so.



Figure 6.3. Linda (left) and Ester Carl's storefronts (right) in Kolonia, 2012.

In a good week she can sell more than twenty urohs, but sometimes just three or four. She has regular urohs customers, and even has customers who pweipwand (to “pay late” or purchase on credit) urohs. These particular customers come in on their payday and pay for the urohs that they purchased on credit earlier, and then select a few more urohs that they will pay for on their next payday. Linda says these customers prefer to “purchase” urohs in this fashion because obviously it helps their urohs collections continue to grow at a faster rate. She did not seem concerned about these women always owing her money perhaps because she knows they will continue to come back for more urohs. Linda and I agreed that women with urohs pweipwand truly “noahroke urohs” or are “greedy for urohs” (17 October 2012).



Figure 6.4. Antonia Panuelo with a \$33 urohs purchased from Linda; Linda Carl in front of her store.

I composed the following poem based on a funny story Linda told me about a woman who almost got into a car accident because she got so distracted by an especially beautiful urohs that she describes as having “wahn rohs seli,” “flowers all over” on the front and back of the skirt.

Full Speed for Urohs⁶

urohs can cause accidents
they are hazardous
especially in Pohnrakied
along Ester and Linda Carl's stores
traffic!
congestion
pink, purple, red flowers
create massive distraction
a sea of fabric waving
colorful sirens beckoning
the woman no longer aware
she sits behind the wheel
of a moving vehicle
once she sees it
she brakes
the car behind her brakes
she pulls over
gets out
pays \$55
leaves with her urohs
in the ehd rarrar
it's a good day

Linda, as is the case with several sohn deidei, learned to sew through observing her mother and sister. Her mother she claims was “songen lih me mwahuki kilangoatoa mehkot, wiahda”; “the kind of woman who saw something she liked, [and] made it.” Linda's sister is also a very good sohn deidei, and although she can sew urohs, prefers to sew mwuhmwu. Like many of the sohn deidei I spent time with, Linda learned to sew from her own kinswomen. At 28 years of age, she worked at the Kolonia Community Cooperative Association (KCCA) as a cashier where she learned how to run a business. As a businesswoman who knows how to sew, she fully understands the unique skill that urohs making involves, and she believes Pohnpeians to be the best urohs makers. She explains:

Mehn Pohnpei sohte kak kesehla urohs, nan wasa koaros doadoak en urohs wiawihda udahn Pohnpei me keiiu mai. Mehn mwasel wia sakanakan, mehn Ruk wia sakanakan. Re sohte kak wiahda dahme mehn Pohnpei wiwia. Pwe re kin lemleme me misihn ka me wiahda apw soh. Ke pahn pein mwohndi ko kilang arail deidei a ke pahn pwuriamwei pwe re pahn kihdihte likou o pahn misihn o pehrail kah te me pahn pein pirer, pirpirer. Wiwiahda soang ka, wiwiahda soang ka. A re kin idoak songen misihn da me wiahda men. Soh kaidehn misihn o; koiiek en arail

⁶ Title inspired by T. Teaiwa's poem “I can see Fiji” (2008).

mwokmwokidki poahrail ka me wia. Ih karepen arail kihda pwei laud pwe dene udahn doadoak laud” (17 October 2012).

Pohnpeians cannot abandon urohs, everywhere that the work of urohs is conducted Pohnpeians are the best. Marshallese make them poorly, Chuukese make them poorly. They cannot make what Pohnpeians are making. They think that it’s machines that are making it but no. You have to sit down and watch them sew and you’ll be amazed because they put the fabric under the machine and it’s their hands that are turning, rotating. Doing it like this, doing it like this. So they ask what kind of machine makes it. No, it’s not the machine; it’s their skillful hands moving that makes it. That’s why they make it expensive because they say it’s really hard work.

Menginpehn sohn deidei, the handwriting of sohn deidei, is what Linda is describing here and it requires skill and technique, along with creativity and a certain aesthetic sensibility. The Janome machines that most sohn deidei prefer allow them to drop the feed dogs that grip the fabric allowing for freedom of hand motion⁷ (personal interview, Kiomy Albert, 1 October 2012). Most of the other women I interviewed expressed similar sentiments to those of Linda about urohs made by other Micronesian woman, Chuukese in particular. Marshallese, Chuukese and Kosraean women prefer Pohnpeian urohs to the skirts they themselves sew. Linda in fact exports urohs to a woman in Chuuk, sending twenty urohs per week priced at \$25 each. Recently, Linda’s daughter, Maymay Carl, went to Guam to sell urohs for her mother at the Guam Micronesia Island Fair in 2014 (see Figure 6.5).



Figure 6.5. Maymay Carl hanging urohs en Pohnpei for sale at the Guam Micronesia Island Fair, Ypao, 2014.

⁷ Most modern machines allow for this (personal communication, Micki Lonsdale, 4 September 2014).

I now turn to the shorter profiles of the other two *lien pisines*, mentioned above, who I also interviewed while in Pohnpei. These profiles demonstrate the diverse ways in which *lien Pohnpei* carry out the business of *urohs*—how they engage with the *sohn deidei* who make the skirts, the customers who purchase them and negotiate their roles in promoting this valued female textile. I begin in Pehleng, Kitti at Karly Tom’s store. She began her business in 1999, and is well known for selling nice *urohs* at good prices. Many *sohn deidei* from throughout *wehin Kitti* (Kitti chiefdom) bring their skirts to her to sell. Karly is 40 years old and married to Destry Tom of Dien, Kitti. They have four children. Like Quleen Kustin’s store, which I mention later in this chapter, Karly’s store, *Middar*, is named after her two eldest children, *Midson* and *Darsy*.

Middar is a very popular store, known primarily for *urohs en Pohnpei*. Several people had mentioned the store to me, and when *Sipwoli* and I drove around the island to survey stores that sold *urohs*, people in Kitti kept pointing us in the direction of *Middar* thinking we were looking to buy skirts. During our interview, I asked Karly whether she believes her store sells the most *urohs* in Kitti. “*Ih me I medmedowoa pwe likamw nei customer tohtoh; re kin kohdo sipele sdohwa tei ko tangatang oh kohdo*” (14 December 2012). “I think so because it seems I have a lot of customers; they drive past the other stores and come here.” She says this is the case because her prices are lower than in *Kolonia*: “*wadki me Kolonia 25 I 23 me*”; “so what’s 25 [in] *Kolonia* is 23 here.” Even in the two or so hours I was at her store, several *sohn deidei* brought *urohs* to sell. *Middar* is a Kitti *urohs* hub. Like *Linda Carl*, more than ten *sohn deidei* bring their *urohs* to Karly to sell on a regular basis. Many of these *sohn deidei* come from households where three or four *sohn deidei* reside, usually as sisters, sisters-in-law and/or mothers and daughters. This insight supports my and *Kihleng’s* (1996) premise that important forms of knowledge continue to be shared between kinswomen⁸ perpetuating matrilineal bonds that have existed since pre-contact times. One of these households is the *Andon* family where two sisters sew, and which I write about later in this chapter. Karly tells

⁸ When Karly mentioned that several of her *sohn deidei* are from households where several *sohn deidei* reside, she also mentioned *Leonard Hainrick*, the young man who came and sold the *urohs* he had made during our interview, and his sister. In rare cases, there are men who sew alongside their sisters or in the case of *Iso Nahnken*, fathers who sew alongside daughters and wives.

me that she makes the most profit from the sale of “urohs, pihru oh sika,” “urohs, beer and cigarettes.”

I actually first knew of Karly on Guam, as she supplies urohs to Angie Aneko, the owner of Angie’s Fish Market. Angie is Karly’s inoun pirien (promised sister), a relationship that began when Angie visited Pohnpei in 2008-09 to shop for urohs. They came to an agreement that they would be business partners, and becoming inoun pirien only solidified their relationship. Karly supplies urohs to Angie, and Angie sends her products that go on sale in Guam, such as coffee, perfume, lotion and shower gel. They charge each other for the products only, but pay for the airfreight themselves. Karly is constantly purchasing urohs from sohn deidei and rather than hanging them up in her store for her customers to buy, she puts them to the side until Angie tells her to send them. She usually sends more than 70 urohs at a time every few months when Angie runs out, including adult and children’s sizes. When I interviewed Angie in August 2012 she told me she bought one hundred urohs on her last trip to Pohnpei earlier in the month, but Karly told me it was a lot more than a hundred. Karly sells her urohs to Angie for the same prices she sells them in Pehleng. I asked her if she knew the prices that Angie sells her urohs for on Guam, and she did. Karly explains that although she has first cousins living on Guam, she prefers to deal with Angie because “e mehlel”; she is “sincere.” I write about Angie later in this chapter.

As a result of Karly’s business arrangement on Guam, she often doesn’t have many skirts for sale at her store. In fact, on the day I interviewed her, there was only one urohs mwei likou (patchwork skirt) and a few little girls’ urohs, but no urohs kaselel for sale. This was until two sohn deidei (a woman and one young man) brought in their urohs to sell. The urohs made by the young man, Leonard Hainrick, sold within twenty minutes. I didn’t act quickly enough and instantly regretted not buying the urohs as soon as he sold it to Karly. Perhaps because I was interviewing her about urohs and there were only two for sale, Karly offered to bring some of the skirts she had been saving for Angie on Guam, so that I could see them and take photos.



Figure 6.6. Urohs bound for Guam ranging in price from \$53 (far left) to \$28 (far right), Middar, Pehleng, Kitti, 2012.

The twelve urohs and three girls' urohs were incredible! They were nicer than most urohs I'd seen since arriving in Pohnpei three months before. The skirts featured elaborate mwahi that I had yet to see, most were irek silu (having three layers of flowers), and several had Chuukese writing with 2013 sewn on them. They ranged in price from \$23 to \$53, and the \$53 urohs that I purchased was, according to Karly, priced higher because it was longer than the rest and, therefore, required more material and time to sew. The most inexpensive urohs had mwahi only on the front of the skirt. It was very obvious that Karly saves the nicest urohs for her inoun pirien, urohs that get purchased by Chuukese women on Guam at exorbitant prices. I bought two urohs pidiring (urohs covered in flowers and thread; a term I learned from Karly) for \$53 and \$50, and one little girl's urohs for \$7. I gifted the \$50 urohs to Marli Lorens, who accompanied me on several of my urohs excursions to nan wehi (the chiefdoms), as she liked that particular urohs. The long \$53 urohs and little girl urohs I bought with the intention of selling on Guam. Karly claims she cannot meet the demand from her customers, and exporting her urohs to Angie is the main reason. The result is that a significant number of urohs from Kitti are not available to customers in Pohnpei, but instead are being purchased and worn by Chuukese women on Guam. It is an interesting situation, and one in which I can't help but think that the sohn deidei and Pohnpei customers lose out.



Figure 6.7. Karly Tom and urohs with Chuukese writing; two sohn deidei, Amy and Leonard, with the urohs they made.

Urohs are more of a hobby to Kiomy Albert, although Pohnpeians on Guam and in Pohnpei associate her name with the business of urohs. She is also quite well known among Pohnpeians, as she unsuccessfully ran for Lieutenant Governor in 2007. Kiomy is an entrepreneurial woman who enjoys working with sohn deidei to improve their quality of life. When I asked her whether she thinks urohs are *kesempwal* she replied “*keiiu kesempwaliki...pwehki I kesempwaliki mour en lien Pohnpei*” (1 October 1, 2012). For Kiomy urohs are “most important...because I value the lives of Pohnpeian women.” I was struck by her answer in that she places the lives of *lien Pohnpei* at the center, and sees the direct relationship between urohs and women’s livelihoods. I smiled. It was my second interview in Pohnpei and her words made me excited about my research.

Unlike the other *lien pisines* I interviewed as part of my Pohnpei research, Kiomy does not have a store. Rather, she works with six *sohn deidei* who live in *Wapar*, *Madolenihmw*, where she resides, and six others who live in different parts of *Kitti*. She provides her *sohn deidei* with everything they need to sew urohs from the sewing machine to fabric and thread, and then she purchases these skirts and delivers them to various stores throughout *Kolonia*. She also takes urohs orders for women. Kiomy has

fundraisers where her urohs are raffled off, and she also occasionally has teneki urohs (urohs displays) where she sets up a large tent at the Spanish Wall or in the Telecom parking lot in Kolonia for her sohn deidei to display and sell their urohs. She was supposed to have a teneki urohs while I was in Pohnpei, but unfortunately never did.

Kiomy is 53 years old and grew up in Adoroi, Saladak in U. She is married to Nickson Kilmede of Kitti and has ten children, one of whom passed away. She also works for the Pohnpei Supreme Court as their Chief Probation Officer. Although she does not sew urohs, her appreciation for urohs began at PICS when she took Home Arts and observed how urohs were made. She understood that lien Pohnpei are extremely gifted at urohs making, however, what they were lacking was equipment. Therefore, in 2003 Kiomy began to invest in sohn deidei. She went to Palm Terrace and 3 Star⁹ and bought seven Janome sewing machines for seven sohn deidei. It was an experiment of sorts where she would purchase the supplies and they would sew the urohs. Kiomy actually inherited several sohn deidei who Linda used to employ.



Figure 6.8. Kiomy Albert with an urohs customer, Joy Hotel, Kolonia, 2012.

⁹ A store in Nett chiefdom that closed many years ago.

According to Kiomy, she doesn't really profit from her urohs business. She claims that after all of her deductions from the sale of urohs, which include thread, fabric, cash power (electricity that is paid for in advance, which she sometimes purchases for certain sohn deidei), gas (for driving around distributing skirts), and more, she makes little to no profit. It is her passion that drives her. She enjoys working with these women, helping with their art form and coming up with new mwahi and other design ideas. Kiomy herself draws many of the mwahi that her sohn deidei sew on urohs. Her desire to help and sawas pehne (work together or help each other) comes with its challenges though:

ihte me palilaud en nei sohn deidedi wia, udahn irail sohte mehlel...I pahn kiheng irail likou irail dehkohdo meh depe ah re tepda netikihla liki...irail kin kohdo song pwainda, kohdo men wiliando, ah pwandasang ahi oaht en mwo. Dierekda, irail pek mahk, pil pwurehng. Ihme I sohkihla nainiki me tohtoh; the thing with most of my sohn deidei is they are very dishonest...I give them fabric and they sew me so many and then they start selling to others...they come and try to purchase, come and want to exchange, but it's too late for that order. They are discovered, apologize and do it again. That's why I no longer have many [sohn deidei]...(1 October 2012).

I asked her why she thinks this continually happens. Kiomy replied:

anahn. Re sohte kak awiawi ien pwokahda niesil. Re anahnehier sent o pwe re ese me pahn kak netila a kaidehn irail me pwainda likou kau. Eri ihme I sohla kakehng songen dir o, wiwia song kau; need. They cannot wait for me to pick up [the urohs] on Wednesday. They already need the money because they know it can sell and they are not the ones who bought the fabric. So that's why I can't handle so many, doing such things.

But, for Kiomy, the benefits of helping rural lien Pohnpei, who for the most part have little or no formal education and, thus limited employment opportunities, outweigh her profiting from her business endeavors. The assistance she has provided to sohn deidei in Madolenihmw and Kitti has given some of these women the opportunity to send their children to school, buy cars and have a better quality of life. She was the only lien pisines I spoke with who expressed frustration at men, and specifically male politicians, who she believes are not interested in urohs and helping Pohnpeian women. According to Kiomy, they fail to recognize that "urohs me kamwkamwakid kerenieng wasa koaros...songen sempoak"; "urohs are what keeps things moving almost everywhere...there's no love." Despite all of this, working with sohn deidei and selling their urohs to her customers makes Kiomy happy.

Several *lien pisines* describe themselves as being the first to start certain *urohs* trends. These women know what *lien Pohnpei* want and understand their desire to stand out. In order to do so, new *mwahi* and new *urohs* trends and styles need to be created and popularized. These businesswomen are visionaries. One of these women is Quleen Kustin, who has a store in Saladak, U. Quleen claims she was the first to have *Pohnpeian urohs* sewn in the Philippines. In the early 2000s *urohs en Pilipihn* (Filipino *urohs*) became popular, as they were different and more affordable than *urohs* made and sold in *Pohnpei* (see Figure 6.9). Quleen gave an *urohs en Pohnpei* to a Filipina friend who took the *urohs* to the Philippines and had Filipina seamstresses sew something similar. She also claims to have been the first to have words such as “*kaselehlie*” and “*serepein en Pohnpei*” sewn on skirts (28 November 2012). Through her Philippine connection, Quleen began to order *urohs* from the Philippines to sell in *Pohnpei*. I recall that I had a few Philippine-made skirts that I had been given as gifts around that time. I mostly wore them around the house and wasn’t very fond of them because these skirts weren’t made in *Pohnpei* and their sale was, thus, not promoting *doadoak en lih*. In fact, importing Philippine-made skirts seemed disempowering to *sohn deidei*. It was easy to spot these skirts, as the style of stitching was different and of inferior quality and the designs, although meant to imitate *Pohnpeian urohs*, could not. When conducting my research in *Pohnpei* I did not see any Philippine-made skirts for sale, and, therefore, their brief period of popularity did not devalue *urohs en Pohnpei* or the agency of the women who make and sell them.¹⁰

¹⁰ Philippine-made skirts, similar to *urohs*, are sold on Guam by Filipinos, and while *Pohnpeian* women may purchase them for specific reasons or occasions, as I discussed in Chapter 5, they are perceived as being very different from *urohs en Pohnpei* exactly because they are not the machine sewn appliquéed and embroidered skirts made by *lien Pohnpei*.

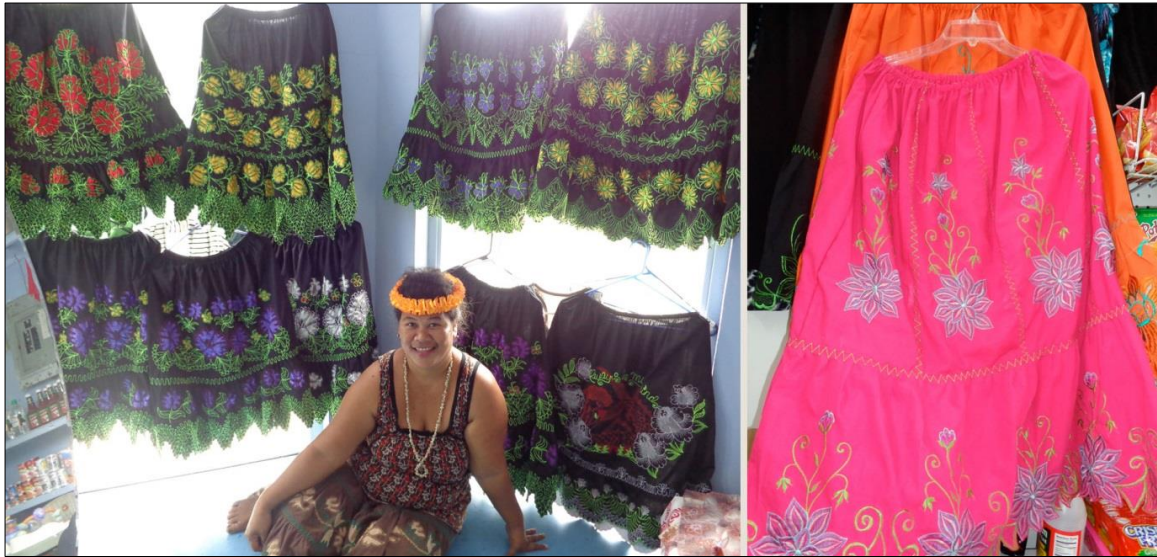


Figure 6.9. Quleen Kustin posing with urohs for sale in her store, 2012; Philippine-made “urohs” for sale, People’s Bazaar 1, Compadres Mall, Harmon, Guam, 2013.

Similarly, Kiomy Albert told me she was the first to have lien Pohnpei sew urohs with the designs that are entirely thread-based. Urohs dereht (thread urohs) are the most popular urohs in Pohnpei today. She had gone to the Philippines with her husband in 2003 and saw some skirts with thread designs. She purchased several, along with spools of thread, which she brought back to Pohnpei. She took the skirts to her sohn deidei and they began experimenting with designs. The result was the first urohs dereht being sewn in Pohnpei, a trend that spread like wildfire, and soon all of the other sohn deidei were also sewing urohs dereht (1 October 2012).

The Guam players

The first lien pisines I interviewed were on Guam where there are two Pohnpeian-owned stores.¹¹ One is Pohnpei Fish Mart, owned by Cathy Santos and her husband, Gibson “Kihkid” Santos, and the other is P.H. Market owned by Mayleen “Meili” Sultan and Patrick Helgenberger. Both stores contain similar merchandise, such as fish from Pohnpei, urohs, dohnas (donuts) from Pohnpei, leh (coconut oil), dawasi (Japanese brushes for cleaning) and other food products. Both Kihkid and Patrick make sakau for marked and there are places to sit outside of both stores and drink. The stores’ weekly sakau, urohs and fish supply from Pohnpei comes in on Tuesday evening and

¹¹ P.H. Market and Pohnpei Fish Mart relocated because of financial constraints, however, both stores have since closed.

Wednesday is their busiest day. According to both Meili and Cathy, fish, sakau and urohs make the most profit for both of their stores. Pohnpeiens come in to purchase the sakau and fish whereas Chuukese women are interested in the urohs. Both Meili and Cathy told me in their interviews that Chuukese women are their primary customers for urohs en Pohnpei.



Figure 6.10. Pohnpei Fish Mart in Dededo, Guam.

Cathy and Kihkid moved to Guam in 1991 to attend the University of Guam and started their business in 2010. It's a small store, which shares a building with a popular Chuukese store called Angie's Fish Mart. Angie Aneko, the owner, is Karly Tom's (of Pehleing) inoun pirien. It's located on the corner of a very busy intersection across from the Dededo Flea Market. Cathy gets her urohs from another lien pisines in Pohnpei by the name of Ester Carl, whose store is next to Linda Carl's. She gets 15 urohs every Tuesday evening. Sometimes all of the urohs will sell out the following day because regular customers know Tuesdays are when they get their airfreight from Pohnpei.

P.H. Market is located in Barrigada in a small strip mall down the road from Untalan Middle School, before the 76 gas station. The P.H. in the market's name is Patrick's initials and the store opened in October 2011. Meili was adopted and grew up in Pehleing, Kitti and, therefore, gets most of her urohs from there, although she also gets urohs from Nan Mand and Wone. She is 46 years old, and followed her husband to Guam in 1987. She has worked in various retail establishments on Guam, the most recent being K-Mart. The pride Meili takes in her store is obvious. It is very clean and neat, and like the urohs in the two photos I open this chapter with, her urohs hang like prizes on the white walls, above everything else in the store. These urohs are top quality with the most expensive being \$80. Like Cathy, Meili believes the nicest urohs come from Wone. She claims that she used to order more urohs on a weekly basis, sometimes 20 or 30 a week, because at that time "urohs kin mwekmwekid"; "the urohs were moving," but now less so. The day before I interviewed her she only ordered eight urohs because the ones her associates in Pohnpei keep sending her are too small. This has to do with Chuukese taste in skirts, as Chuukese women are her most enthusiastic clients. When I asked Meili who her urohs customers are she replied as follows:

Urohs udahn pali tohtohn nei customer mehn Ruk. Pwehki mie wasa me re kin ale urohs a re ndah me e pwei laud eh. Ehri irail kohdo kilangada dahme I netiki ka, songen sidail ko, e pweitikitik sang dahme re netiki. Wehwehki ihmwo re nda me I



Figure 6.11. P.H. Market in Barrigada.



Figure 6.12. Urohs en Pohnpei for sale at P.H. Market, 2012.

netiki 80 ka mie wasa me netiki 150. [EK: Mehn Pohnpei kei mwo?] Mehn Ruk; shipper mehn Pohnpei. Dahme I netiki me 65 ka, ihme re netnetiki dene 95 song ko. Dahme I netiki 35, 45, re netiki 65 eri karehda re mwahuki kohdo wasah. Ihte me e kin pwandikihla ahi urohs ka pwe udahn irail mwahuki mehkot me lapahla oh reirei eh. A pali tohtohn ahi urohs me kohkohdo ka oang aramas me paliwar tikitik eh. Nin tapio mwahu pwe re pil kin kdarohdo urohs me lapahla ah met ih songen sais en urohs ka me re kihdo apw lien Ruk me kin kohdo ka udahn mie me lapahla. Nei customer en Ruk ka oang urohs ka irail kin kohdote kak spend sang 600 ansou kis (9 August 2012).

With urohs most of my customers are Chuukese. Because there's a place where they buy urohs but they say it's expensive. So they come and see what I'm selling, the same styles, and it's less expensive than what they're selling. This means that the ones I sell for 80, there's a place that sells them for 150. [EK: Are they Pohnpeians?] Chuukese; the shipper is Pohnpeian. What I sell for 65, they're selling for say 95 and such. What I sell for 35, 45, they sell for 65 so they like to come here. The only thing that makes my skirts slow to sell is that they really like things that are big and long. And most of my skirts that are coming are for people with small bodies. At first it was good because they also sent large urohs but now it's this size that they send, but some of the Chuukese women who come are really big. My Chuukese customers who purchase the skirts when they come can spend from 600 at one time.

An understanding exists, especially among the lien pisines on Guam and in Pohnpei about what Chuukese women like because they are so fond of urohs en Pohnpei and often buy large quantities of these skirts at one time. The Chuukese "place" that Meili is talking about is Angie's Fish Mart where on at least three occasions when I stopped by the store I saw urohs en Pohnpei that were priced at \$150. These urohs are top of the line, but Meili is right in saying that she sells ones that are just as nice for half the price. She has some regular Chuukese clientele who come to her because they know her prices are more reasonable. We went on to koasoai about how Pohnpei Fish Mart is next to Angie's Fish Mart and how this creates competition between the two stores. However, Meili made a point during our interview about how Chuukese, unlike Pohnpeians, support one another, and how despite Angie's high urohs prices, Chuukese continue to buy urohs from her. As I describe in Chapter 1, "Pohnpei sohte ehu" ("Pohnpei is not one"), meaning that for many reasons, particularly those associated with wehi rivalries and competition, along with peirin (extreme jealousy), Pohnpeians often don't support one another, and this also applies to business.



Figure 6.13. Mayleen Sultan inside of her store; Cathy Santos inside of her store, 2012.

When I interviewed Cathy she didn't seem very concerned about her store being located alongside Angie's Fish Mart. She says sometimes the Chuukese women go next door and then come to her because her urohs are so much cheaper, but also nice. She likes to order urohs from Pohnpei that are middle range in price rather than the elaborate urohs being sold at Meili's and at Angie's. This is how she competes. Cathy explains "wadki re ndinda me nan Guam wadki me netinet en urohs ngehi me keiiun pweitikitik"; "so what they are saying is that in Guam with those selling urohs, I am the most inexpensive" (17 August 2012). She then goes on to compare her prices with the many other stores including Filipino and other Asian owned shops that sell urohs (most of which are made in the Philippines) expressing how she is "pwuriamweiki" (shocked) by their urohs prices and how they keep increasing. Some Chuukese women will come in and buy most of the skirts hanging spending up to \$300 cash. They do this before traveling off-island she says or when they receive their income tax refunds. She mentions that some of these women will be getting their refunds next week, so she'll need to order extra urohs in preparation. Cathy is from Wone and she sometimes gets skirts from there that sell very quickly. These skirts are more elaborate and, therefore, more expensive, and she sells them for around \$75. Each time I went to her store, there were no skirts from Wone available.

Towards the end of the interview, Cathy describes how urohs popularity has expanded well beyond Pohnpeians. The most obvious group I needed to talk to about urohs on Pohnpei on Guam were Chuukese women. I began with Angie Aneko, owner of Angie's Fish Mart, and Angie's business partner, Rozie Takamine. I ask them whether they wear urohs and they both said no, explaining that they no longer wear urohs because they live on Guam and they have become "modern" and find wearing urohs inconvenient in their line of work (15 August 2012). I thought this was really interesting given that they sell urohs. I ask them why Chuukese women like Pohnpeian skirts. Angie replies "it's really beautiful the skirt from Ponape [Pohnpei], just like that," and she points to one of her skirts hanging in the store. I then ask whether Chuukese women have a preference for Pohnpeian skirts or Chuukese skirts and they both tell me that Chuukese like both. Rozie elaborates: "the Chuukese skirt is still plain, not too many sewing, not too much decoration. Now Chuukese are looking for the Ponape skirt, but they still like their own skirt; they want their own skirt because there is meaning on their own skirt, and they can write words meaning something to them on their skirt. They wear both." Angie and Rozie both say that Chuukese women like to wear Pohnpeian urohs because they are expensive and it's a way to "show off" that they can afford to buy such skirts. They have customers who come in when they get new shipments and buy \$500 or \$700 worth of urohs at once, but given that one elaborately designed urohs is \$120 in their store, that isn't that many skirts.

Chuukese enjoy writing messages, sometimes entire sentences, on their skirts and these words are often meant for people they are in love with or even meant to hurt one's enemies. The urohs with the Chuukese writing that Karly was holding in Figure 6.6 says "Kete neto ketechuun, echipang amom"; "Don't look my way or you'll go blind. Your mouth is tired."¹² Angie orders skirts with particular Chuukese sayings, like the one mentioned, from Karly who has sohn deidei sew them onto urohs, which she then sends to Guam. As expressed by the Pohnpeian *lien pisines*, as well as by Angie and Rozie, Chuukese women prefer longer and bigger urohs. Angie explains that it is not just about culture, but has more to do with fashion and style. Chuukese women have different

¹² Translation provided by Nedine Songeni, 5 July 2014 and Karnim Judah, 1 December 2014.

ways they like to wear their skirts; some girls like to wear them very low on their waist and others even like to wear them over jeans.



Figure 6.14. (clockwise) Angie Aneko inside her store, 2012; urohs for sale at Angie's Fish Mart; Nedine Songeni (left) wearing an urohs and Tgna, wearing an uros, Dededo, 2013; Mikaela Aneko wearing a new urohs, 2012.

Angie expresses how her relationship with Karly, the Pehleng lien pisines, is one built on trust because she cannot afford to go back and forth between Pohnpei and Guam on a regular basis. She relies on Karly to send her the nicest urohs, and judging from what I've seen, Karly comes through on her word. Angie says that on her first shopping trip to Pohnpei when she met and befriended Karly in 2008-9, she spent \$5,000 on urohs.

Angie leaves for Pohnpei in a few days where she hopes to purchase more urohs before Christmas.

I now return to Pohnpei to the women who make the skirts that the *lien pisines* in Pohnpei and Guam rely on to largely sustain their business enterprises. These *sohn deidei* express their complex and multifaceted identities through the design and making of these highly valued *dipwisou en lih*, as well as through their sale as important commodities. The skill, creativity and ingenuity of *sohn deidei* in the continued production of women's wealth also reveal their social and economic agency in Pohnpeian society and beyond to migrant communities, such as Guam.

Kitti vs. Madolenihmw

"Madolenihmw and Kiti were traditional rivals. Since the time of the Saudeleurs [and their dynastic rule of Pohnpei from the ancient city of Nan Madol], the different sections of Kiti had defied the dominance of the east. With the fall of the Saudeleurs, Madolenihmw had assumed ritual primacy over the island's affairs" (Hanlon 1988, 82). Hanlon goes on to describe a series of wars that took place between the two *wehi* in the early 1850s, followed by the 1854 smallpox epidemic that crippled Madolenihmw, resulting in an eventual compromise between the two *wehi*. To this day, however, Madolenihmw remains paramount in the hierarchy of the chiefly system, followed by U, Kitti, Nett and Sokehs. The rivalry between the two territorially largest chiefdoms (an ongoing argument persists regarding which of the two *wehi* is actually the largest) continues in various forms in the present, including with *urohs en Pohnpei*.

According to the Pohnpei and Guam businesswomen, most *urohs en Pohnpei* today, including those that are exported, come from Madolenihmw and Kitti. The majority of Pohnpeian women I interviewed and spoke with reaffirmed that the nicest *urohs* come from these two *wehi*, with the *sohn deidei* from Kitti being the most skilled. U, Nett and Sokehs don't have as many *sohn deidei* and while some of them may be good, they are not considered to be in the same league as *sohn deidei* from Kitti and Madolenihmw. Kitti also has the most *sohn deidei* in Pohnpei, many of whom live and sew in the communities of Pehleing, Nan Mand and Wone. In Madolenihmw, *sohn deidei* can be

found in Wapar and Lohd. The rivalry is most apparent when women from Madolenihmw and Kitti explain their preferences for certain urohs. This rivalry was most apparent when I interviewed sohn deidei and lien pisines in the two competing wehi. Karly expressed a strong interest in buying urohs from Madolenihmw sohn deidei to sell at her store: “I soangosoang pwe ien alehdi lien Madolenihmw pwe mie deidei me I pil mwahuki...”; “I’m trying to get Madolenihmw women because I also like their sewing” (14 December 2012). After she said this, we both agreed that it is difficult because of peirin between the two competing wehi. While Karly may eventually get some Madolenihmw sohn deidei to sell urohs to her, it will not be very easy given that her store caters to Kitti urohs makers. The Madolenihmw sohn deidei are obviously more inclined to bring their urohs to a Madolenihmw store.

In the next section and toward the end of the chapter, I write about two sets of sisters at the heart of this Madolenihmw/Kitti rivalry, the Andon sisters of Wone, Kitti and the Thomas sisters of Lehpwel Tik, Madolenihmw. The Andon and Thomas sisters are four of the most successful sohn deidei in Pohnpei today. It is significant that they are sisters who sew together continuing a genealogy of creativity based on matrilineality. As kinswomen they support each other, their peneinei laud (extended families) and their larger communities. These women also actively perpetuate a legacy of menginpehn lih, and its visual origins with kedin nting, through their deidei, which I interpret reflexively and experientially through my ethnographic poetry and scholarly writing. The following case studies of these two sets of sisters explore their talent, competitive spirit, innovation and creativity, as well as the hard work that goes into making their beautiful appliquéd and embroidered skirts that are true works of art.

The Andon sisters in Wone

urohs language

urohs speak to her
late at night as
she sews on her Janome
the quiet doesn’t faze her
she listens
her world is visual, physical
textile spiritual
fingers red from Kool-Aid

pwuh in her mouth
she is in the zone
colors and patterns zip past
the misihn hummzz

kisakis ieu
they call it
her self-taught gift
for sewing
she watched her mother
continued learning at NMHS
even taught her elder sister
who draws their mwahi
they communicate in their
sisterly speak
signing, enunciating with lips
and mouth
she grunts then points
her likes and dislikes
combining and creating
her own unique patterns
she has an eye
for what pops

sisters sit together
at the dining room table
wearing urohs and bra
too hot for t-shirts
she always at the head of the table
her sister beside her
hands pushing fabric
faces concentrating
flower designs forming in bright green
pieces of red, black and patterned fabric
scattered across the table
mermaids and serehd sketches
on the tile floor
next to babies fast asleep

when she finishes a new one she likes
she'll put it on
ih likauih seli¹³

¹³ "She'll wear it around."



Figure 6.15. Vengelynn (right) and Evenglynn Andon at work in their home, Wone, 2012.

When my cousin, Jessica Reyes, heard that I was researching urohs she told me of a woman she works with at Public Health whose daughters sew urohs en Pohnpei. She had just gone to a kamadipw in Wone where she saw the most beautiful urohs en Pohnpei being worn by the women and thought that it would be ideal if I went down to Kitti to interview her colleague's daughters. On 18 November 2012, Jessica and I drove down to Wone from Kolonia where we met sohn deidei sisters Vengelynn and Evenglynn Andon at their home. Their mother, Veronica Andon, was also there; she sews as well but she usually sews likouli rather than urohs. Veronica's kousapw title is Kedinlik and her husband, Sohder, is Soulik, the soumas en kousapw for Sounkiroun; the chief of their kousapw in Wone. Knowing this, I wanted to make sure to bring something to their home, as it was my first time to visit. I brought along one of Nohno Emi's opwong (large plastic plates) and Jessica and I stopped at a nearby store and bought some cold sodas, which we placed on the opwong and gave to them, a small gesture to acknowledge my appreciation for being welcomed into their home and their taking time to meet with me. The Andon family is very busy given their heavy involvement in tiahk and church, in addition to employment and sewing urohs. This was the first of four visits I made to their home in the course of my research in Pohnpei.



Figure 6.16. Andon property, Sounkiroun, Wone, Kitti; Evenglynn (center) and customers, 2012.



The Andon property is located just before the bridge that crosses over the Wone River. There is a store that sits close to the road and some benches and a covered area attached to the storefront for sakau drinking. Their house is situated in the back to the right behind the store, and they also have a large nahs to the left. When we arrived two Kitti women were examining several urohs the sisters had sewn and some urohs in the making. These were spread across their dining room table, and were mostly mermaid urohs, several for little girls and a few women's sizes. The women were discussing their order with Vengelynn and Evenglynn. I was struck by how different their mermaid urohs were from the Madolenihmw mermaid urohs I'd seen since coming to Pohnpei and the first urohs I saw at the mehla in Harmon, Guam (see Figure 6.17). Although the style is essentially the same, featuring a mermaid at the center of the urohs surrounded by flowers, the mwahi and surrounding flowers and patterns are strikingly different from the Madolenihmw skirts, although they are both of high quality. The Thomas sisters' urohs are entirely machine embroidered whereas the Andon sisters' are a combination of machine embroidery and reverse appliqué. The flowers surrounding the

Wone mermaids are reverse appliqué whereas the mermaids are primarily machine embroidered with one exception, a mermaid with a white rayon tail that was special ordered by their top customer, Lorehda Ladore, whom I discuss later. It is easy to distinguish between the Andon sisters' skirts and the Thomas sisters' as the photos below illustrate. These mermaids are accessorized and have reddish brown hair, green eyes and bright red lips, which can look slightly scary, but also visually stunning when the urohs is worn. Overall, I'd say the design of the Madolenihmw mermaids is more subdued.

Vengelynn and Evenglynn work side by side and are well known throughout Pohnpei for their sewing skills. During our interview a woman from Awak in U arrived at their house. To get to Wone from U one has to drive through Madolenihmw, a territorially large wehi, and the drive, thus, takes close to two hours on a road full of potholes. Only the very desperate will drive all this way, and it is often women from U¹⁴ who are in search of urohs kaselel. Other women simply call and place their orders. The Andon sisters' urohs are so popular that they don't have to take their skirts to stores for other women to sell, although they used to take them to Karly Tom in Pehleing, but lately they have been way too busy. Vengelynn lists 12 women who called on the Sunday before I visited and ordered a total of 24 urohs, most of which they want before Christmas. They also invite me to a Christmas fundraiser that will be taking place on 14 December where they will be raffling off urohs. They said they would need to sew new



Figure 6.17. Andon mermaid, Kitt; Thomas mermaid, Madolenihmw.

¹⁴ Several sohn deidei and lien pisines I interviewed described lien U (women of U chieftom) as being their best customers.

urohs for their fundraiser as well. Obviously, they are extremely busy women.

Vengelynn is 27 years old and a mother of four children, the youngest was not even a year old; Evenglynn is 25 and has one son. In addition to sewing, Vengelynn is a full-time student at the College of Micronesia, Palikir campus where she is studying Liberal Arts; she graduated in December 2012. Evenglynn “sehse lokaia” (“doesn’t know how to talk”), as she was described by her sister in our interview. Evenglynn is hearing impaired and I wrote the poem “urohs language” about her. Vengelynn spoke for her during our interview, although Evenglynn was there and participated as best she could with her sister as interpreter. Evenglynn is an extremely gifted sohn deidei who learned on her own through observing their mother sew and continued to learn at Nanpei Memorial High School (NMHS) in Kitti. Vengelynn describes her sister as follows:

Udahn lahp e udahn mai sang ie nan deidei, nan dehkada urohs ka, udahn ih me kin deidei mai e ngehi apw kin mwomwohd kilkilang iangiagihte oh met I pil kak iang dehkada urohs kaselel. Pwe ih mwein ah koiiek mwein kisakis ieu, kisakis oa kohieng ih, ngoai apw kin kilkilang, rahnwet se kin sawaskipene aht deidei. Ih me padahkihengioa” (18 November 2012).

Really she is so much better than me at sewing, at sewing urohs, really she is the better one, but I sat and observed her and now I can also sew beautiful urohs. Because for her it’s probably that her skill was a gift, a gift that was given to her, I just kept observing and now we help each other with our sewing. She taught me.

The admiration, acknowledgment and respect that Vengelynn showed for her younger, disabled sister was moving and endeared these sisters to me. They had this incredible way of communicating with each other, which involved their own system of signs and a unique language in which they were able to communicate about urohs. Vengelynn is more skilled at drawing mwahi, which Evenglynn adapts and sews into urohs. Oftentimes Evenglynn embellishes the flowers or leaves in her own way, adding her own flair to the urohs she sews. She does this quite effortlessly as if she were born next to a Janome sewing machine.

Prior to our visit to the Andon household, Jessica and I (and most lien Pohnpei) knew that mermaid urohs were the current trend, however, this became very obvious when we got to Wone. While Jessica and I were visiting, Lorehda Ladore, who is also from Wone, stopped by to pick up a mermaid urohs she had ordered and to take a peek at

several others that were in the process of being made. The urohs was incredible: black with bright yellow flowers and different types of leaf patterns throughout; the mermaid had a white rayon tail and matching flower seashells as breasts, as well as a white flower necklace and a white flower in her ear. Like the others, her hair was reddish brown, her eyes bright green and her lips red. Both sisters had spent days on this urohs and it showed. The skirt was much too flamboyant for me, but I could see how certain women could pull it off. Lorehda, a short, heavysset woman, is one of them; urohs are serious business to her. She picked up the urohs and sat and examined it carefully spreading it across her legs. Vengelynn, Evenglynn and their mother Kedinlik went over to her. Lorehda sat in their doorway and Evenglynn and Kendinlik sat to her right while Vengelynn stood next to her listening to what she wanted. They took this customer very seriously. Once she left, they explained that she wasn't happy with the mermaid's silk tail and instead wanted the thread tail that looks more like fish scales. They were going to change it for her. Vengelynn went on to say that Lorehda was a sohn urohs, an urohs expert, and that other women wait for her to debut new mwahi. The sisters were in the process of sewing a new mwahi specifically for her to debut. The mwahi is of a girl seated on a bed of flowers holding a serehd. This mwahi was inspired by a similar mwahi on an old urohs Vengelynn reworked, updated and made distinctly her own.



Figure 6.18. (clockwise) Wanida Inos wearing an Andon mermaid urohs, Pohnpei International Airport, 2012; mermaid urohs gifted to me, Yona, Guam, 2012; Alipherta Benjamin and her old mermaid urohs, Ohmine, 2012; Lorehda Ladore and her mermaid with the white tail, Wone, 2012; \$60 blue mermaid; a single mermaid urohs for sale at Food Mart, Kolonia, 2012; wearing my old mermaid urohs with Pahpa, Nanparangon, Nett, 1992.

I ask Vengelynn about other mwahi that she and her sister have created, and she said that in addition to the design mentioned above, there's a girl seated on a bed of flowers (without serehd), their own style of mermaid (different from mermaids made by other sohn deidei), the heart in the flowers, as well as the woman and the man. These same mwahi are also being made by other sohn deidei, including the Thomas sisters, who also claim to have been the first to debut the designs. It is very difficult to know who in fact created these mwahi first when there is no copyrighting of the designs. Sohn deidei continually "pirap mwahi" (steal mwahi) from each other and this is part of the business. In fact, during our interview Vengelynn even described to me how Lorehda, the sohn urohs, purposefully buys urohs from other sohn deidei or at stores that she likes and brings them to the sisters to improve upon. It's as if she is their sohn pirap mwahi (person who steals mwahi).

Vengelynn says that their customers play a large role in the urohs she and Evenglynn sew as their business depends upon the orders they receive from their large customer base. She explains:

Udahn se kin men wiahda pein aht apw udahn se sohte kak...e sohte kak pweida. Se kin pilahnehda apw aramas kin "menlau ahi moa; i pahn ale moa" udahn eri e kin sawpung eh. Nan wihk koaros mwein e kin kerenioang urohs eisek se kin netikihla. Mioa nihpwong me se sohte kin meir oh wasa rahn" (18 November 2012).

We really want to make our own, but we just can't...it can't happen. We plan to, but people keep saying "this one for me please; I'm gonna take this one," therefore it just can't happen. Every week we sell close to ten urohs. There are nights when we don't sleep until daylight.

Vengelynn explains how she and her sister really want the freedom to be creative and sew urohs with mwahi they feel like designing. She has so many ideas for new mwahi. However, given the popularity of certain mwahi and the competitive nature of the urohs business and the lien Pohnpei who fund it, the Andon sisters can barely keep up with the large quantities of urohs orders they receive each week. They sell up to ten urohs in one week, but they receive many more orders, as the 24 urohs ordered on the one Sunday attests to. The urohs demand is too high for the two of them and it limits their creativity.

The urohs business, like any business, is based upon customer demand, therefore, if lien Pohnpei want mermaid mwahi, sohn deidei will be compelled to keep sewing them until a new urohs trend takes over. Therefore, sohn deidei continually compete to have the newest, nicest mwahi to attract customers. Although their creativity is limited in that they need to sew the mwahi the customers want, they also have to be creative with their mwahi to make sure their designs are unique. Sohn deidei want women to glance at an urohs and immediately recognize their menginpeh, and if women don't know who sewed a skirt at first glance, they will ask and word spreads fast. It is the menginpeh that is important, and some urohs makers have such a distinctive "handwriting" that women immediately recognize it. When women compliment another woman's urohs, they might say "udahn e menginpeh mwahu," "she has really nice handwriting." This is likely to mean that the sohn deidei's sewing is neatly arranged and tidy, with nicely shaped flowers and designs and the overall affect is what Pohnpeians call soan. Although the color and pattern scheme is also important, the menginpeh is what shows an urohs maker's skill and expertise. Sohn urohs like Lorehda propel and help facilitate the Andon sisters' creativity. When placing her urohs orders she tells them exactly what she wants and if she isn't satisfied with an order, she has them change it to her liking as she did with the white mermaid tail. Customers like Lorehda keep the sisters on their toes, or should I say, fingers.



Figure 6.19. Andon women and my cousin Jessica (left) with their top customer, Lorehda, 2012.

The Andon sisters are continually seeking inspiration for new mwahi and ways they can make their designs distinctive as Vengelynn explains. I ask her “ke kin ale ia ahmw inspiration en mwahi?”; “where do you get your inspiration for mwahi?” She replies:

I kin pein medowoahda song da me se pahn kapwarehda me lihaka pahn pereniki eh. Pwe wehwehki I roangahda me mehn Madolenihmw ka dehk pwutak o serepein. Ngehi pein nda udahn I pahn wiahda nei pwutak oh serepein me pahn wiksang neirail. Ngehi wiahda. Pwutak, serepein oh. Ngehi roangada me re dehk mermaid. Udahn I pahn wiahda nei mermaid me pahn wiksang neirail ko. Wehwehki I kin roangada mehn ia me kin kapw duwehte Pohnpei ah I kin pein. Kohkohla o I nda met I sehse dahme [I pahn uhd wiahda]...pwe likamw mermaid te me koaros [mwahuki]...Met I pahn wiahda me serepein o pahn kol serehd o. Ekei pak I kin oh kohla nan computer o. I kin kak kohla nan songen art, craft blog spot o. I kin kohla kilang seli songen design ka e ngehi kin padikolong song da me I mwahuki; I kin pein rapahkihda...” (18 November 2012).

I think of what kinds [of mwahi] we are going to debut that the women will like. So what happened is I heard that the people from Madolenihmw sewed the boy and girl. I told myself that I am definitely going to make my boy and girl different from theirs. And I made it. The boy and girl. Then I heard that they sewed the mermaid. I am definitely going to make my mermaid different from theirs. What happens is I hear who is making what in Pohnpei and I do it myself. Until I didn't know what [to make next]...because it's like the mermaid is what everyone [wants]...Now I am going to make one where the girl holds the serehd. Sometimes I go on the computer. I go on those arts and crafts blog spots. I go look around at the different designs and type in what I want; I look for it myself.



Figure 6.20. Vengelynn (left), her son, and Evenglynn with some of Vengelynn's drawings.

Again, Vengelynn’s words show us how vital this Kitti vs. Madolenihmw competition is to the urohs makers’ creativity. In a very real sense, these women have to come up with unique mwahi because although they may be copying other sohn deidei’s mwahi (who may have also copied or “stole” their mwahi), they have an artistic responsibility, as well as the business savvy to know that their designs need to be distinctive. This desire to be different, especially from Madolenihmw for these Kitti urohs makers and vice versa is intense and very Pohnpeian. As I describe in Chapters 3 and 4, one of the foundational elements of tiahk en Pohnpei and what it means to be Pohnpeian is competition (Riesenberg 1968; Petersen 1982a; Hanlon 1988). Pohnpeians thrive on this competitive spirit, and members of a certain wehi will always seek ways in which to outshine other wehi, and this plays out in the world of urohs too.

The Andon sisters are truly passionate about their work and come from a line of creative women. On my second visit (25 November 2012) I brought some material and thread with me that my friend Sipwoli and I had purchased at Isamu Nakasone Store (INS). INS is where most sohn deidei purchase their sewing material; they even have a van



Figure 6.21. A calendar that inspired Vengelynn.

that delivers these materials to nan wehi (into the wehi). I wanted them to sew two urohs for me using the material and thread I purchased. It was an experiment of sorts in that I wanted to see what they would create. I deliberately chose material that wasn’t black. I had grown quite tired of black urohs, which was pretty much all I was seeing around Pohnpei. I purchased a yard of plain maroon and plain purple along with two flower printed fabrics and pink and purple thread. I asked them to do as they wished with the material and to make my urohs more fitted and not too loose. I was excited to see what they would come up with. I spoke with Kedinlik, Vengelynn and Evenglynn in their small store by the roadside.



Figure 6.22. Purchasing fabric and thread at INS, Ohmine, 2012.

During our koasoai, Kedinlik showed me an exquisite old yarn mwaramwar made by her mother (see Figure 6.24). It was predominantly red with white, orange, blue and red woven into the inner layer. According to Kedinlik, she was the only woman who knew how to make this style of mwaramwar. Specialized doadoak en lih, such as urohs and appliquéd tehi making, koahl production, eliel (massage) and other healing arts, and sei elimoang (catching mangrove crabs) are often learned and practiced by kinswomen (Kihleng 1996). Sisters have an especially close bond in Pohnpei and it is, therefore, not surprising that the Andon sisters first learned to sew from their mother and now sew urohs together as a team. This is the case with the Thomas sisters as well. Kihleng describes the ways kinswomen work together to produce koahl in the following quote:

Many women also work cooperatively in the production of this form of cloth. These groups are kin-based and may consist of two sisters, a mother and daughter, a woman and her sister-in-law, or a woman and her daughter-in-law, each of whom respectively reside on the same farmstead, or in the Saladak community. Several female members of a residential core of matrikin (delen pahle) may also work together in manufacturing skirts. It is within the context of these small weaving groups, and specifically their senior female members, that women learn to produce and weave the skirts as well as share their labor (1996, 175).

Pohnpei's matrilineal society to a certain extent determines the ways kinswomen work together to support their peneinei and larger keinek. Vengelynn, her husband and their four children, and Evenglynn and her son live together in the same household with their parents, younger sister and brother. Their parents have government jobs and their salaries combined with the money the sisters make from their sewing enables the family to contribute to tiahk, church and other familial and community obligations. The financial contributions Evenglynn and Vengelynn make through their art form add to

the agency and power of women in their household, extended family and community, and perpetuate the manaman of matrilineality in Pohnpei. Like Pohnpeian women of the past who made exquisite dohr and other valuable accessories that added to the prestige of their keinek as described in Chapter 3, these women do something very similar with their urohs in Pohnpei's present day cash economy. Through the sisters' menginpeh they are continuing a legacy of lien Pohnpei's knowledge, creativity and power.

I waited eagerly for the two urohs I ordered from Vengelynn and Evenglynn. I made one last trip¹⁵ down to Wone to see how the sisters' preparations for the Christmas fundraiser were going and to check on my skirts, but they still weren't finished. Only Evenglynn was home with a friend and they were feverishly trying to complete the urohs for the fundraising that night, as well as other urohs orders. The house was a mess with scraps of paper and pieces of likou scattered across the tile floor. I left wondering whether they'd be able to finish my skirts on time. On the day I left Pohnpei,¹⁶ the sisters came to the airport with my two new urohs made from the fabric and thread I had purchased. The skirts are lovely, my keepsakes, treasured urohs that show the sisters' one of a kind nting.



Figure 6.23. My 4th and final trip to the Andon house, 2012; the 2 urohs made by the Andon sisters from the material and thread I purchased.

¹⁵ 14 December 2012.

¹⁶ 20 December 2012.



Figure 6.24. Yarn mwaramwar made by Kedinlik's mother, Wone; 1 of my urohs in the making.

the “sohn urohs”

Lorehda was described by Vengelynn as a “sohn urohs,” an urohs expert. This was the first time I had heard someone described as such, and from my ethnographic experience, I don't believe there to be many women, outside of the *lien pisines* and *sohn deidei*, with such a vested interest and preoccupation with urohs as Lorehda. Her role as *sohn urohs* is one that goes beyond being a mere consumer of urohs—she is a trend setter, a collaborator with *sohn deidei* with a strong sense of urohs aesthetics and her own taste in these textiles. I didn't interview Lorehda, but I did spend an afternoon with her in her office at Public Health in Nett, where I observed her in action in an insightful ethnographic moment, which I describe below.

On 21 November 2012, I went to interview Lorehda Ladore, the “sohn urohs” I had met in Wone, at her workplace, Public Health. It is here that I fell in love. Lorehda shares an office with Kedinlik, Veronica Andon, who wasn't in that day. She is busy and tells me to have a seat, and then proceeds to say that she has work to complete before she leaves for Guam the next day. “Ahn mwahu,” “that's fine,” I say. Lorehda is typing away on her computer, entering numbers into a spreadsheet, and is quite distracted, but tells me that I can start. I explain that it would be better if I came back at another time perhaps after she returns from Guam. She says that would be fine and tells me that she is waiting for some urohs to be delivered by a *sohn deidei*, and tells me that I can wait to see them if I want. I decide to stay because I am really curious as to what kind of urohs she has ordered to take with her to fundraise with on Guam. While waiting for over an hour, I nearly fall asleep on the small rattan loveseat. The air conditioning is blasting and I feel

a bit chilly as I've been perspiring all day. And it's been a long day; I'd driven around the entire island and was exhausted. I wait.

A woman from an office next-door pops in and she and Lorehda look at three of Lorehda's urohs. I take pictures. The first is a golden mermaid with blue flowers; it is exquisite! Immediately I recognize the menginpeh of the sohn deidei who made the urohs I'd seen at the mehla in Harmon, but this one is more striking. It's the color combination; the gold and blue is magnificent, but the deidei also appears more soan than the Harmon urohs I'd seen. The flowers on the Harmon urohs had been red roses whereas these blue flowers had depth. I'm not sure what kind of flowers these are. I am smitten. I want this urohs for myself. I ask Lorehda how much it cost. She paid \$50. Expressing how much I love it, I ask if I can purchase it from her, but she says she wants to take it with her to Guam where she can make triple that amount. I would have given her \$65, but she refuses. Lorehda then proceeds to criticize the urohs saying how it's not worth \$50, and that she doesn't like the mermaid's hair and tail. She also dislikes the colors even though she ordered these colors, saying it is not what she was expecting. Lorehda claims that there isn't enough thread used to justify \$50 comparing it to the purple urohs, which she says is worth the \$50 because of the amount of thread and fabric used.

The other urohs is quite unique as well: black with purple silk flowers and a beautiful green leaf design that connects the flowers. It's the first time I've seen such a style. The leaf-like design is that of the meninrahn which I had seen at Amoreen's house on Guam, but nicer. This urohs she intends to keep for herself and wear when she visits Guam. It was made by the



Figure 6.25. Two of Lorehda's urohs, Public Health, Nett, 2012.

Andon sisters. She says that the purple urohs is just as she wanted it: colors, amount of thread and material used and overall look. "E soan," "it's symmetrical, it works," she

says. Although I see her point, the urohs are so different they are hard to compare. The Madolenihmw urohs is trendy and extremely popular, and guaranteed to make her money on Guam, but it is also incredible, and it's the first I've seen, and according to Lorehda the only one in that color combination. This is later confirmed when I interview the Thomas sisters who sewed it. I am quite sure that her criticism of the mermaid urohs has to do with the Kitti vs. Madolenihmw rivalry. Being from Wone and the Andon sisters' best customer, it makes sense that she allies herself with them and criticizes the work of Madolenihmw sohn deidei, especially successful ones. It is interesting as well that Lorehda purchased this urohs and is taking it to Guam with the knowledge that she will make a lot of money from it despite her claim to dislike it. She again refuses to sell it to me.

Finally the sohn deidei arrives. Her name is Elenda and she is wearing a blue kisin doul (small towel) wrapped around her head and one of those chunky gold necklaces from Guam that are popular in Pohnpei. She looks about my age. She sits on the stained carpet and takes out the skirts and a pair of scissors to clean up the urohs by trimming off the thread and pieces



Figure 6.26. Lorehda (left) discussing her urohs with a work colleague and Elenda, the sohn deidei (right).

of material hanging from them. The three women talk as Lorehda picks up, shakes and spreads several urohs on the carpet. It's almost as if I'm not there, although I am taking photos. They must think I am so odd, this mehn wai, urohs wearing, Pohnpeian speaking stranger taking pictures of them. In two days Elenda has sewn four urohs for Lorehda to take with her to Guam. These urohs are hot off the sewing machine and are quite spectacular: a "60 flowers" urohs rohs with red silk hibiscus flowers and red roses with green thread that decorates the bottom of the flowers; two matching brownish orange and green urohs dereht with large brownish orange hibiscus flowers with green leaves; and finally an urohs rohs with yellow flowers and green thread. Lorehda isn't planning to fundraise with these skirts, and will most likely gift one of the brownish orange and

green urohs since there are two of them. Elenda sells them to her for \$50 each. She has been sewing non-stop for two days for \$200. For Pohnpei this is a lot of money, but it is a tremendous amount of work and doesn't take into account the cost to Elenda, the sohn deidei, of the fabric, thread, cash power and the gas (\$4.95 per gallon) to drive from Madolenihmw to Kolonia. I am impressed with all of the skirts; they are extremely kaselel. Lorehda has ordered four more skirts from the Andon sisters to take with her as well. Two are for her and the other two are little girls' skirts to be given as gifts. These are delivered to the airport. This makes for a total of 11 urohs, 10 of which she special ordered. She spent around \$470 on these urohs, and I would not be surprised if she picks up a few more before she leaves. Six of the skirts are for Lorehda, although she may end up giving several away or most likely selling them. Lorehda is indeed a "sohn urohs" with an urohs eye, and she knows who to order from and exactly what she wants. I wish Lorehda a safe trip to Guam. I leave feeling like a girl who didn't get what she wants for Christmas. I can't forget the golden mermaid.

nan mesei¹⁷

mesemwen te nan meseiie¹⁸
ke teng nan ei moangioang
"always on my mind"
but stuck in my heart

it was your green sister
surrounded by red roses
that I saw first
I remembered that mwahi
carried it with me home
but you replaced her
in color and kaselel
I was smitten
when I saw you
golden
a sunrise
nymph-like

¹⁷ "In my eyes." An expression often used to describe something or someone who is eye-catching, almost a kind of infatuation with the object or person. I was inspired by how Amoreen John used the expression to describe her love of a particular new urohs that was her favorite at the time I interviewed her.

¹⁸ "Your face in my eyes." Also an expression used to describe someone a person is in love with. Nahnep, Eliwiter Moses, who is Amoreen's grandmother, was fond of saying this when she'd tell me stories.

floating on a cloud of mei
smelling a blue flower
a blue orchid?
fragrance of seir en Pohnpei
even heaven couldn't smell this good
I had to have you.

lih mworourou o splayed you out
on that stained carpet
and cut you up
like a karangahp in a Tokyo fish market
called you ugly
too high class
pricey!
way too Madolenihmw
how could she not see?
you could have been Isohkelekel's kerir¹⁹
you belong in a basalt stone nahs
sitting soupeidi
bedecked in mwaramwar

I travelled far to find you
took one of your relatives
as intermediary
thought you were in Lohd
but you were hiding in Lehpwel Tik
at the end of that narrow rocky road
I found you
my "Lien U" mermaid
you smell like sasimi

all roads lead to Lehpwel Tik

As was often the case during my research, one interview would lead me to another, and this is what happened after my interview with Quleen. On 28 November 2012, I interviewed Quleen Kustin of Nanpailong, Saladak in U. I know Quleen personally, as she owns a store just up the road from where I grew up, although the store didn't exist when I was living there. Quleen is 47 years old and grew up in Temwen, Madolenihmw, as well as in Kolonia and Nett. She is married to Kirino, who is from U, and they have two sons and three grandchildren. Their store is called K.F. Store and, like P.H. Market on Guam, the letters stand for her husband's initials, but they also stand for her sons' names, as well as "Kustin Family." Quleen has always sold urohs in her store, and there

¹⁹ Isohkelekel, the first Nahnmwarki, was known to have several kerir, secret lovers.

are always urohs kaselel hanging in the window. I have purchased several from her throughout the years. When I pulled up and parked in front of her store, I immediately noticed that she had one of the Madolenihmw mermaid urohs hanging in the window. This mermaid, sister to the Harmon mehla mermaid and the golden mei (blue) mermaid from Public Health, was a tangerine orange color surrounded by white roses. Quleen was going to raffle off the skirt at her granddaughter's first birthday party just before Christmas. She was selling raffle tickets at 25 cents a ticket. I bought twenty.

I tell her about Lorehda's urohs I had seen at Public Health and how much I wanted it. She said she would call up the sisters who just so happened to be her cousins to order the skirt for me. Quleen also wants to order an urohs for herself; she wants the new mwahi with the man and woman in the heart with the words "Seal for Eternity" written/sewn on it. She



Figure 6.27. Quleen Kustin with a Madolenihmw mermaid urohs raffle prize, K.F. Store, Saladak, 2012.

calls the Thomas sisters and orders me the exact same urohs with the golden mermaid and blue flowers. I am thrilled! Quleen requests to have the skirts finished in a week's time, so I return to Quleen's a week later (5 December 2012) and we head south to Madolenihmw.

Quleen and I drive for over an hour from Saladak to Lehpwel Tik. We turn left in front of my great uncle's house in Parau and head out towards Temwen then make a left heading down an unpaved road. At the end of the road is a small store and our urohs are there hanging in the window (see Figure 6.28). It feels like Christmas. Inside the store we meet Enolynn Thomas, the storeowner and sohn deidei. She is showing a customer some of her latest mwahi in the making, as well as some mwahi drawings. Like Vengelynn's drawings, these also feature a woman surrounded by flowers, although this woman appears to be growing out of one. I explain my project to Enolynn and ask if I can interview her and she agrees. I go and sit on the floor of the store where she sews,

and it is there that I interview Enolynn followed by her elder sister, Younerine. It is truly the most fitting place for an interview with *sohn deidei* about their *urohs* business.



Figure 6.28. (clockwise) Quleen and my *urohs* in the window, Sam & Associates, Lehpwel Tik, Madolenihmw, 2012; a *mwahi* drawing; inside the store where Enolynn sews and where our interview took place; a sample of a *mwahi* in the making; Enolynn shows a customer the latest *mwahi* drawings.

Enolynn is 48 years old, and runs the store, Sam & Associates, which her stepfather, Kadalihno Sam, started many years ago and sews when there are not any customers. Younerine is three years older than her sister. They are from Lohd Pah, Madolenihmw, although Enolynn, a single mother of four, lives in Lehpwel Tik, while Younerine resides in Lohd Pah with her husband and two children. Younerine comes up to Lehpwel Tik to sew with her sister and nieces, Enolynn's daughters. Enolynn went to school up through the 10th grade at PICS and Younerine completed 8th grade. Both sisters were raised by their grandparents, and later learned how to sew from their mother's elder sister, Marli, after their grandparents passed away. Enolynn started sewing around the age of 29 after she had given birth to her eldest child, Brenda. Her daughters learned to sew from observing her, which serves to confirm the belief that much learning in Pacific cultures is visual (Toumu'a 2013) and kin-based. Younerine has been sewing for as long as her younger sister.

When I ask Enolynn if she thinks urohs are kesempwal she replies by saying "apweia" a slang meaning "but of course" or "what else." When I ask her why, she explains, "pwehki ih me I momouriki oh se pil kin wiahda aht kiht kin likauih"; "because it's how I make a living and we also make our own that we wear" (5 December 2012). This is what I continually heard from sohn deidei and some lien pisines as well. Urohs are equated with their livelihoods. Enolynn says she has never purchased an urohs. Like the Andon sisters, Enolynn and her sister used to sew through the night. "Udahn i pereniki deidei nihpwong; I kak deidei te oh lel nisohrahn"; "I really enjoy sewing at night; I could sew until the early morning," Enolynn shares. That was until she got nta laud, high blood pressure, and then she stopped because she was scared. Now she only sews during the day. The Thomas sisters do not pirap mwahi; they purchase their mwahi drawings from a Madolenihmw man named Elsin Makaya. He used to sell drawings for kidipen uluhl for \$15 per drawing, some of which they have adapted into urohs mwahi. Enolynn explains that some of his drawings are small, so she adjusts them to make them larger. He sells some of his newer designs, such as the mermaid and the woman and man in the heart, for \$25 each. The sisters take issue with their mwahi being stolen, especially because they purchase them prior to sewing the designs onto their urohs. Enolynn

believes that if people want to copy their mwahi then they should come and purchase the mwahi from them. I can completely understand her position.

At one point, she heard that a woman from U had purchased a mermaid urohs of theirs and then gave it to another sohn deidei to copy. She said that the next time the woman wanted to order an urohs she turned her down. However, Enolynn gained a new perspective on the matter as she expresses, “I medowehla nda soh, e sapwung, itar pwe mwein mwahu pwe Kauno kosoanehiengieiehr I kak kiheng aramas pwe en wia mehn sawas”; “I thought no, it’s wrong, it’s okay because perhaps it’s good as the Lord has arranged it for me so that I can give people [my mwahi] to help them.” Quleen interjects, saying:

re pahn kopkopi ahmw malen kan apw e kosoandier menginpehn emen, re pahn wiahda okay...aramas pahn kilang en lahp o deidei o soanamwahu sang mwo re sohte pahn ale”; “they will keep copying your drawings, but a person’s handwriting is already decided, they’ll make it okay...people will see that person’s sewing is more neatly arranged from the other and not want to purchase” (5 December 2012).

Basically, Enolynn and Quleen were agreeing that it doesn’t matter if people keep stealing mwahi because it’s all about the sohn deidei’s menginpeh. If their menginpeh is good like that of the Thomas sisters then people will keep trying to copy their designs, but never succeed at sewing an urohs as soon as theirs.

If she were to do nothing but sit and sew, Enolynn says she could complete three elaborate urohs in one week, however, like the Andon sisters, they are much too busy. They haven’t even hung up a single urohs in their window all year long because when they are not taking care of the store, they are catching up with urohs orders. Oftentimes, she and Younerine will work on two urohs at the same time with the help of Enolynn’s daughters as they did with ours. They double team urohs. Younerine and her niece, Enolynn’s eldest daughter, Brenda, sewed my urohs. They charge \$60 per skirt for the newest styles of urohs, such as Quleen’s and mine. Most of their customers are from U, with one of their top customers being Judy Kostka who I write about in Chapter 4, and Madolenihmw women who mostly purchase their urohs to send off-island as gifts, as was the case with the Harmon mermaid urohs. The Lehpwel Tik sisters claim to have sewn more than ten mwahi kapw, many of these mwahi are the same mwahi that the Andon sisters claim to have debuted. They have sewn approximately twenty mermaid

urohs in total, and I've seen four of these twenty. My golden mermaid with blue flowers is the second they've made; Lorehda's was the first. It took Younerine and Brenda two days to sew my urohs, although according to Younerine, it would have taken one day if sewing skirts was all they did.



Figure 6.29. Younerine (left), me, Enolynn and Enolynn's daughter outside their store.

In the poem "nan mesei" I personify the mermaid urohs by telling a mermaid love story that illustrates how I "followed the skirt" (Marcus 1998) and its social life (Appadurai 1986) from the start of my research up until the month I left Pohnpei. I describe how I first saw the green mermaid with red flowers at the mehla in Harmon, Guam then saw an even more beautiful mermaid skirt in gold and blue almost four months later at Public Health in Pohnpei; this urohs was headed for Guam to be used in a fundraiser. The menginpeh was so distinctive that I immediately recognized this urohs was made by the same Madolenihmw women. I was heartbroken the sohn urohs wouldn't sell this skirt to me, but through Quleen, a lien pisines in Saladak, I was able to secure a skirt in the colors I wanted, and more importantly, meet and interview the sisters responsible

for creating this unique style of mermaid urohs. Upon meeting the Thomas sisters I felt like I already knew them through their menginpeh. My ethnography had come full circle.

In this chapter, I have traced the circulation of urohs en Pohnpei through their production by sohn deidei, their sale to lien pisines, and their purchase by varied customers to reveal the mutual agency of women in the economy of urohs at home in Pohnpei and away on Guam. The complex and dynamic relationships between women whose identities are entangled in these skirts, as I discuss above, tell a great deal about the social fabric of these distinctively Pohnpeian forms of dress, and most importantly, the women who are closest to them. Through my experience with the Andon and Thomas sisters, I have also explored the continued significance of matrilineality, where kinswomen work and learn together to make valued female textiles, and in the process, perpetuate their knowledge, skill and creativity through their menginpeh mwahu. Additionally, through these sets of sisters I examined the indigenous rivalry between wehi, particularly Madolenihmw and Kitti, and how this fuels competition and creativity among these sohn deidei. It is in the “business” of urohs that these women are also central agents in their own and their families’ economic wellbeing.

Chapter 7: Kaselel urohs

Kaselel is a farewell and greeting that also has other meanings. Throughout this thesis I use the word kaselel, “precious, beautiful, perfect, fine,” when referring to urohs, urohs kaselel (Rehg and Sohl 1979, 30). As my concluding chapter, this is my farewell, my kaselel, to urohs as I write about them here in this thesis. I am also saying goodbye to this chapter of my life spent researching and writing about these textiles, which mean so much to my fellow lien Pohnpei and me. This kaselel, however, is not one of sadness or permanence because it is also a beginning. Through my multi-sited experiential and experimental ethnographic study in which I spent time with, interviewed, spoke with and engaged in the lives of women and the urohs we love, which clothe our identities, I have only just begun to see the possibilities of these distinctively Pohnpeian skirts. There is an urohs universe out there and this thesis explores only parts of it. I ask my readers to forgive what is missing, and apologize to the lien Pohnpei whose stories did not appear in my thesis. I just couldn’t fit everyone and everything associated with urohs into one thesis, but I say kaselel because I know we will meet again.

While doing my research in Pohnpei, I attended several meetings conducted by the Pohnpei Women’s Advisory Council (PWAC), the umbrella organization of 27 women’s groups from throughout the island. Attending the meetings allowed me to listen to the interests and activities of women, and was also a way to meet women from throughout the island and talk to them about urohs and participate in some of their activities. At one of the meetings that took place on 16 November 2012, I was given time to briefly explain my project and ask for the group’s assistance. Those present at the meeting were excited to find out that I was Pohnpeian, and was interested in learning about why urohs were kesempwal to them. Several women came up to me after the meeting and offered to assist me with my project.

Given that International Women’s Day was quickly approaching, and Pohnpei’s celebration of the worldwide event is organized by the PWAC, preparations were underway for the 8th of March. Lululeen Santos, Women’s Interest Coordinator for the Pohnpei State Office of Social Affairs, who works directly with the PWAC asked me to assist her in applying for an AusAID grant through the Australian Embassy to add a

second day to the Women's Day festivities. Although by March I would already be back in Wellington, I was happy to help. In Pohnpei, International Women's Day has centered on the various women's groups coming together at the PICS track or the COM-FSM gym to compete in a day long dance competition. Adding the second day, we proposed, would expand the meaning of "rahn en lih" (women's day) beyond what most Pohnpeians only associate with women dancing. In the application I wrote, "This year we'd like to draw attention to Pohnpeian women's creativity, skill and talent in the form of creative and traditional arts. By celebrating Pohnpei International Women's Day on March 7 and 8, Pohnpeian women will still have the opportunity to take part in the dance competition (March 8), but also participate in other activities that showcase the valuable work of Pohnpeian women" (2012).

Lulu and I proposed having various competitions, such as weaving kopwou, mwaramwar making and sewing urohs. Women's groups would also have the opportunity to showcase and display their arts and crafts, including textiles, like urohs, kidipen uluhl and appliquéd tehi, baskets, mats and koahl, as well as jewelry. I also proposed that the PWAC host an urohs fashion show, a first for Pohnpei. I later found out from Lulu that our grant application was unsuccessful, and therefore, International Women's Day would be held on the usual one day. I was thrilled, however, to hear that the PWAC had gone ahead and held the urohs competition as part of the Women's Day festivities. Photos of women proudly displaying their urohs were posted on my Facebook page with captions that read "Pohnpei women council promotion on "PNI Locally made skirt" special dedication to Ms. Emelihter Kihleng" (Bernolina Hedson, 10 March 2013). Another photo of a wehi urohs that I was tagged in read "for our Emelihter Kihleng" (Lululeen Santos, 10 March 2013). It tickled me to be remembered for my small role in promoting urohs en Pohnpei with lien PWAC, and even though I couldn't be there for that special day, I felt connected. That is what urohs en Pohnpei are all about.



Figure 7.1. International Women's Day, Pohnpei, 2013; lien Pohnpei display their urohs in the urohs competition, PWAC photos via Facebook.

I had initially titled my thesis, *Chasing Skirts: a poetic ethnography of urohs en Pohnpei*, however, after completing my research and writing for several months, I realized that my thesis was about so much more than “following the thing” (Marcus 1998) and writing poems about it. I did indeed “chase skirts,” but the chasing took me to another destination. Women who know urohs en Pohnpei know that it’s the sohn deidei’s menginpeh, her handwriting, which is most important; it’s what sells the urohs. Like the nting that kedin nting “wrote” into Pohnpeian skins that was an older form of menginpehn lih, deidei or sewing constitutes another, newer form of “handiwork” that continues a legacy of writing that gets worn on the body as a “second skin” (Küchler and Were 2014). A skilled sohn deidei’s menginpeh is easily recognized and this gives her power. It also empowers the lien pisines who sell urohs with distinctive menginpeh just as it makes the consumer and wearer feel and look beautiful. Menginpehn lih can describe other aspects of doadoak en lih, including making mwaramwar, crocheting suwain, weaving dohr, making koahl, and sewing sheets and pillowcases. My thesis aims to acknowledge urohs as part of this larger work of lien Pohnpei from the past to the present, as a vital, if unacknowledged part of the FSM economy, and, most importantly,

as a highly valued form of female labour and dress that threads Pohnpeian society together. Despite no longer producing “inalienable possessions” (Weiner 1992), the textile art of urohs en Pohnpei has become women’s wealth, or *dipwisou kesempwal* (“valued things”). In Chapter 4, I describe how today, urohs as prestige items have replaced *sehu* as the *sakau* of women, which is artistically expressed through the popular *ngarangar mwahi* often machine embroidered on urohs.

My new title, *Menginpehn Lien Pohnpei: a poetic ethnography of urohs (Pohnpeian skirts)*, reflects what my thesis does—it gives voice to Pohnpeian women that was so strongly expressed through my oral history interviews; it reveals the complex, multilayered lives of *lien Pohnpei*, and how we are intimately entangled with urohs through my “ethnography of the familiar” (Simpson 2007, 69) in Pohnpei and on Guam; and it allows me as a Pohnpeian woman scholar and poet to creatively, sensually and reflexively interpret the ethnographic in response to urohs in all of their dynamic magnificence while also perpetuating our *menginpehn lih*. The thesis represents a genealogy of women’s writing, appliquéd and articulated, linking skin (using an *ihnentek* and natural ink), fabric (needle and thread) and paper (pen, ink and computer), all of which require “fine-hands” (Māhina-Tuai and Māhina 2011, 25) and quick minds. *Lien Pohnpei* are also connected outside the home island to the migrant community on Guam, in a home away from home, through urohs where women’s lives and identities are similarly stitched to these skirts, but in complicated and often ambivalent ways. Our treasured urohs allow us to feel at home, but can also cause discomfort and unease in their wearing making us feel “unhomed” (Bhabha 1994). Most of all, my research has shown that Pohnpeian women’s experiences of and relationships with urohs are diverse and highly textured, but full of *limpoak* (love) for this precious textile that we all consider “ours.”

In a *Kaselehlie Press* article about Pohnpei’s 2013 International Women’s Day, Marstella Jack and Leah Briones write:

“The annual celebrations of International Women’s Day this year was again organized by the Pohnpei Women Council and was kicked off with the first ever Urohs en Pohnpei (Pohnpeian skirt) competition...Up to 2012, the competitions centered on cleaning and beautification of the different communities’ home villages. This year the Council decided to showcase the display of “*menginpehn lih en*”

Pohnpei” (indigenous talents of Pohnpeian women¹)”
(<http://www.kpress.info/index.php/site-map/448-international-women-s-day-march-8-2013>).

The fact that the women chose menginpehn lien Pohnpei to describe the different women’s groups’ displays of urohs, locally grown produce, plants, and flowers, woven textiles and other handicrafts (Jack and Briones 2013) reconfirmed what my research illustrates. It is critical that PWAC and other women’s organizations are beginning to publically recognize and promote urohs as kesempwal, a symbol of lien Pohnpei and our distinctive menginpeh and the identities these embody. Various urohs competitions have developed since Women’s Day 2013, which I mentioned in Chapter 4, facilitating greater innovation on the part of the sohn deidei who compete to create the most unique wehi (see Figure 4.12) or poake/pako mwahi depending on the organization sponsoring the competition. During the first urohs fashion show that took place at last year’s International Women’s Day, a new mwahi was debuted, that of the elinpwur (see Figure 4.11), which became all the rage with lien Pohnpei throughout 2014 (see <http://www.kpress.info/index.php/site-map/912-pohnpei-women-celebrate-international-women-s-day>). It is through showcasing such imaginative and colorful mwahi, and recognizing the hard work, creativity and skill of sohn deidei that urohs will live on and continue to be female wealth, as well as important commodities for Pohnpeians.

I chose to study urohs because of my own love of these skirts, and the ways this textile art creates a social fabric that connects lien Pohnpei at home and in the diaspora. As seen in the proceeding chapters, in Pohnpei urohs are everywhere—in shop windows, hanging from the rafters of nahs during bingo nights and worn by women of different shapes, ages and sizes. These skirts thread women together through time and space (and even cyberspace). Inherently visual given their extraordinarily vibrant colors and intricate designs, urohs even link women on social media—many of us “liking” the same urohs photographs on Facebook, lien pisines in Pohnpei, like Kiomy Albert, posting the latest styles for lien Pohnpei in Tennessee and Hawai’i to see, and women living away from home proudly posting photos of the urohs they receive as gifts from their relatives

¹ The handiwork of Pohnpeian women often are “indigenous talents,” however, this is not an accurate definition of the term.

back in Pohnpei. People posting in an endless newsfeed that connects to what seems like every Pohnpeian woman and a few Chuukese women too, all wanting to show off their new possession and demonstrating their envy and desire for that new mwahi, that soan mwahi, that one-of-a-kind mwahi. I find urohs and their circulation fascinating, and tracing their social lives felt not only natural, but necessary when I embarked on this research project.

As a poet who was learning (and “unlearning”) how to be an ethnographer, composing poetry and scholarly writing about textiles that are creative and artistic in the interdisciplinary field of Pacific Studies, I sought out literature that would make my project feel “at home.” After all, I had gone home to Guam and Pohnpei to do my multi-sited homework with Pohnpeian women. As I’ve illustrated throughout my thesis, the notion of home and “homework,” as influenced by Bhabha (1994), Clifford (1994), Visweswaran (1994), K. Teaiwa (2004), Sandhu (2007) and Golparian (2012) is significant. From the start, my project was personal and the borders between the researcher and researched were already blurred, as I am an indigenous scholar working with my fellow Pohnpeians. I sought to “loosen boundaries” (Bochner and Ellis 1996) not only by being reflexive and acknowledging my “shared narratives” (Kisliuk 1997) with many of the women who participated in my research that I grew up with, am related to, and lived with long before I began my ethnographic project, but also through moving back and forth between the critical and the creative in my writing. I write vulnerably (Behar 1996), sensually and poetically to convey the *beingthereness* (Behar 2009) so central to ethnographic poetry, description and analysis. The “multisensoriality” (Pink 2007) of “artful-science” (Brady 2004), as expressed through ethnographic writing, poetry and my photographs of urohs, and the women who make, sell, gift and wear them, is what makes the field experience come to life.

Another means by which I worked to make my research feel “at home” was by visualizing my thesis as an urohs while writing—the mwahi symbolizing my poetry, appliquéd and/or embroidered to the likou or academic writing, sewn together with the misihn en deidei, theory and methodology, into an urohs thesis. Like other Pacific Islander scholars who I write about in Chapter 2, I sought to indigenize my research project and make it Pohnpeian-centric. The oral history and ethnographic interviews I

conducted with lien Pohnpei and one Pohnpeian man gave voice to my project. As a Pohnpeian speaker whose interviews and koasoai were almost entirely in Pohnpeian, I wished for my thesis to reflect this and be bilingual. Writing in Pohnpeian alongside English, particularly when quoting from my interviewees privileges their voices and worldviews. The interviews and koasoai sessions grounded my work and situated it within a Pohnpeian, indigenous framework.

Pacific Studies scholars, artists and creative writers have presented, talked and written about the necessity of drawing critically from creativity and scholarship in an effort to accurately represent, give voice, indigenize and decolonize Pacific Studies. Paraphrasing from Albert Wendt (1983), yet again, we need to be able to recognize ourselves in our films, our novels, our scholarship, and our dress or else I ask, whom are we “creating” for? It is important to me that not only scholars and students of Pacific Studies, anthropology, material culture, Pacific literature and creative writing read and “get” my work, but that mehn Pohnpei, especially lien Pohnpei, also see themselves in this thesis. If they can appreciate my efforts, then I will be pleased.

I ended most of my interviews by asking women whether they thought urohs would ever stop being popular among lien Pohnpei. Most women said that urohs would always be popular and important to Pohnpeian women, and if not to us, then to other Micronesian women and even to other ethnic groups. Despite their belief that urohs will remain popular, most of these women also acknowledged younger women’s disinterest in wearing urohs. Some said they think serepein who don’t wear urohs now will eventually grow up, have children, and start wearing them. While this might be the case for some young women, particularly those who said in the surveys they want to look like their mothers, I also think that many won’t wear urohs, like the young ni-Vanuatu women in Cummings’ study (2013). It is adult women, mostly over the age of 30, who are keeping urohs alive and popular today at home and away. I asked this question because I was curious to know what other women thought, and whether they might also be concerned that one day lien Pohnpei might no longer wear urohs. Most of the women appeared to have never pondered the notion; perhaps urohs are taken for granted as a form of dress that will always be made and worn by lien Pohnpei, although as my thesis reveals, urohs are a relatively new form of clothing.

I personally don't know whether *lien Pohnpei* will continue to wear *urohs*, and my research cannot predict the future, but I can speculate. If many women under 30 are not wearing *urohs* on a regular basis, and twenty years from now, most still are not, then *lih laud* will be the ones wearing *urohs*. Perhaps one day *sohn deidei* will only be sewing *urohs* for Chuukese women to wear. Maybe one day my great grandchildren will be looking at an *urohs* in a display case in a museum with a label that reads "urohs en Pohnpei, Pohnpeian skirt, made in 2010, once worn by Pohnpeian women." Another scenario, as is the case with the Japanese kimono, *urohs* could become ceremonial costumes worn only on special occasions (see Banerjee and Miller 2003). I certainly don't want any of these speculations to become reality, but only time will tell. However, I do think efforts like the competitions and fashion show, which promote and celebrate *urohs*, are essential to keeping the skirts alive and thriving in this globalized world we live in. It's challenging to get *serepein* who love watching American music videos and movies to see the value of wearing *urohs*. In my opinion, it is us *lih* who need to actively encourage our little sisters, daughters, nieces and students to wear *urohs en Pohnpei*. We need to show by example through wearing *urohs*, and feeling proud because these textiles are "ours." Feeling and looking beautiful is about being comfortable and attractive in our own skins, not in imitation; *lien Pohnpei* make *urohs kaselel*.

Banerjee and Miller "ask what the sari [or *urohs*] can teach us about alternative ways of being modern" (2003, 7), something I've pondered before I even started my PhD programme. For some Pohnpeians, Western clothing is what is perceived as modern, sophisticated, and sometimes in opposition to *urohs*. This thesis concludes with the question: how can we change this and how can *lien Pohnpei* be "modern" in *urohs*? I am not talking about how to make *urohs* modern, something I discussed with one of my interviewees, Janet Panuelo, by adding zippers and making it fitted to our bodies. But, how can we as Pohnpeian women grow with our *urohs*? This thesis demonstrates how *urohs* are dynamic in their ever shifting *mwahi* and social functions, however, I have yet to fully explore how these skirts can accommodate the ways that we as *lien Pohnpei* are changing in today's world.

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