

## RESEARCH PAPER

# The 2014 Ngolog Mitmit: A Case Study Examining Public and Private Heritage in Yap State, FSM

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This article provides an ethnographic case study of heritage processes in action that were observed and recorded during fieldwork in 2013 and 2014 on the Main Islands of Yap State—the westernmost state of the Federated States of Micronesia. A description will be provided of a historic traditional gathering known as a *mitmit* which from the day it was decided upon activated the transmission of cultural heritage knowledge and practices throughout Yap’s Main Islands. By examining the *mitmit*, the event’s significance for Yapese stakeholders, and how the U.S. National Park Service was indirectly involved, several findings emerge. It is found that the planning, organization and performance of the *mitmit* assisted in preserving elements of Yapese cultural heritage that local stakeholders identified as most valuable and in need of safeguarding. The case study also supports the continuing utility of Chambers’ (2006) public and private heritage constructs, especially when evaluating heritage practices within indigenous contexts where the preservation of intangible cultural heritage is often a more critical concern. The analysis suggests that more attention should be devoted to identifying how public heritage interventions can activate private heritage practices, thereby mitigating the hegemonic effects of Smith’s (2004) authorized heritage discourse (AHD).

## Introduction

### Background

Island societies throughout the Pacific struggle with preserving what they can of their rich cultural heritage that has rapidly been altered, forgotten or destroyed since the early days of colonial expansion. For the Pacific Islanders of what is now the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), factors leading to cultural loss varied depending on the level of contact with outsiders but generally included severe depopulation due to introduced diseases, impacts from successive transfers of colonial power, the introduction of a cash economy, missionary activities, and the wide-ranging destructive impacts of World War II. Today, the loss of cultural heritage continues at a rapid pace as Pacific Islanders everywhere are becoming more and more connected to global flows of power, money and information. It is important to note that as with many island societies (Techera 2011), the more concerning impacts for Micronesians involve the loss of *intangible* elements of their cultural heritage given the limited *tangible*, durable and lasting structures<sup>1</sup> that are typically found in built environments elsewhere.

Given the limited resources to initiate cultural heritage preservation interventions on their own, the FSM is largely reliant on outside assistance to help them with their historic and heritage preservation interests. For Pacific Islanders living in areas once part of the post WWII, U.S.

administered Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (today this includes the FSM, Republic of Palau, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands [CNMI], Republic of the Marshall Islands [RMI], Guam and American Samoa), most of this assistance derives from the U.S. Department of Interior (DOI) and the National Park Service (NPS). This is because each island group is now either a territory (Guam and American Samoa) or commonwealth (CNMI) of the U.S. or, as with the FSM, RMI and Palau, have chosen sovereignty and instead entered a Compact of Free Association (COFA) with the U.S. Under their individual COFA’s, each island nation receives substantial assistance in exchange for military exclusivity for the United States throughout its waters and territory and oversight authority over how its financial assistance is used. Notably, the COFA does not provide the funds that NPS uses to assist the FSM Historic Preservation Offices (HPOs) operations; this funding comes from the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) which provides \$150 million per year to all U.S. States, the District of Columbia, and each of the Pacific Islands mentioned above (State, Tribal, And Local Plans and Grants 2016a). Along with U.S. assistance, the FSM has more recently received support from UNESCO’s World Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) programs as well. Additionally, several smaller heritage related NGO’s are active in supporting cultural preservation, as are numerous donor nations who provide various grants supporting heritage-related projects and activities.

The potential drawback that comes with a dependence on foreign aid for heritage preservation is that the FSM (and others in a similar situation) is required to forfeit a

good deal of autonomy in managing their heritage interests. This is because in order to receive outside assistance, they most often must agree to use it on activities that are approved by foreign donors. With the NPS, for instance, since all the HPO's receive their funding from the HPF, they each must comply with requirements set forth in the HPF Manual which also includes compliance with the "Standards" set by the Secretary of the Interior (State, Tribal, And Local Plans and Grants 2016b). Accordingly, "The primary duties of all historic preservation offices include *survey, inventory, evaluation, registration, and preservation*" (Look 2001: 3, emphasis added). Ultimately, these top-down regulations constitute an "authorized heritage discourse" (AHD) (Smith 2004) that focuses primarily on tangible and historic resources, not the intangible cultural heritage that is more important for Pacific Islanders (AUTHOR 2016; Techera 2011). Given UNESCO's separate program that deals specifically with safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, its assistance has advantages for island nations such as the FSM. Despite critiques of UNESCO's ICH program (e.g., Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004; Smith 2015), (AUTHOR) found that relative to the NPS standards and requirements, UNESCO's ICH discourse and the way the guidelines are applied allow a great deal of flexibility for stakeholders (2016: 224). It is the NPS discourse that will be more relevant below, however, given its dominance in the FSM and the institutional power of the HPO's they oversee.

The heritage preservation challenges for stakeholders in places such as the FSM are made more difficult with the tensions between external heritage discourses and the locally produced views and values toward cultural preservation that are often quite different. This fact indeed supports Smith's (2004) critiques of the AHD. The present case study, however, aims to demonstrate an indirect way the top-down AHD led to a bottom-up, locally initiated example of private heritage (Chambers 2006) in action. The presentation and analysis of a Yapese *mitmit* that follows will ultimately argue for more critical attention devoted to identifying how public heritage interventions can activate private heritage practices, thereby mitigating the hegemonic effects of the AHD.

#### **Authorized, public heritage & living, private heritage**

Laurajane Smith's (2006) well-known work is critical of institutions such as NPS and the top-down, authoritative power they have in deciding what heritage is and how it should be managed. Smith persuasively argues the existence of an "authorized heritage discourse" (AHD) that is effectively exposed as a form Western hegemony. As she notes, discourses are "knowledges that are collected into different disciplines [in Foucault's sense here], and deal with the construction and representation of knowledge" (Smith 2004: 63). The idea of a "World Heritage" where heritage sites are valorized based on a sense of "outstanding universal value" is a good example of the AHD's power. It can critically be viewed as a hegemonic process that essentially globalizes the same heritage practices and discourses that have been implicated in supporting nationalistic narratives. The discursive field here also rises above all else by becoming a global self-authorizing and

self-referential statement of fact of whether a heritage site is valuable or not. Similarly, as Krause (2016) observed, the discursive power of NPS's standards and guidelines (c.f., State, Tribal, and Local Plans and Grants 2016b; Secretary's Standards—Identification 2016) to largely ignore intangible cultural heritage in favor of tangible heritage such as sites, objects, surveys and documents is an example of how the AHD can especially dominate over the actual heritage interests of local stakeholders that are different or unique in places such as Yap.

Along with the ways heritage views and values are produced and shaped within discursive fields of power, it is also useful to examine how cultural heritage values are contingent upon the political economy of societies and the material realities of stakeholders. Heritage on display for tourists, for example, influences the production of views and values towards one's culture as elements of cultural heritage become commodified. Dean MacCannell's, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (1976) provided scholars with a conceptual tool to examine this process with his insights on cultural performances that take place on a "front stage" versus the authentic cultural processes found "back stage" and out of view to outsiders. MacCannell drew on Marx's notions of alienation to suggest that tourism partly derives from a resistance to modernity in the West and a predisposition to escape to more traditional and authentic experiences. The irony is that outside demand for these seemingly authentic experiences produces inauthentic displays during the exchange as host communities transform how they *live* their culture into forms they can *deliver* for sale.

The "front stage" versus "back stage" metaphor helps us with thinking about issues such as authenticity and commodification; especially within the area of tourism. But the fine distinctions between heritage that is institutionally preserved (and protected for display, documentation, or study) and cultural heritage that remains an elemental part of the daily lives of stakeholders are not so easily identified. Chambers (2006) therefore suggests a useful way for thinking about these different forms of heritage by distinguishing between "public heritage" and "private heritage." Public heritage primarily refers to the forms of heritage that are identified (mostly by public agencies, organizations or institutions) as valuable for restoration or preservation since they "democratize and broaden our sense of the past" by celebrating "the diversity of cultural themes and the diversity of natural things and places" (Chambers 2006: 2). Private heritage, on the other hand, "encourages us to focus on the ways in which the past is dynamically linked to the present, with heritage values identified and interpreted by community members rather than by outsiders" (Chambers 2006: 3). A significant distinction between these two forms of heritage is that public heritage imparts a view that the past holds value "because it is perceived (and presented) to be different from the present," whereas the concept of private heritage allows us to see "heritage not as lessons taught us by duly recognized keepers of the past but as heritable obligations, responsibilities, and privileges that are experienced and repeated in the culture of everyday life, generally in such a way as to subsume the past in the present so thoroughly as to leave

unrecognized any significant differences between the two" (Chambers 2006: 3). In a general sense then, "Chambers associates public heritage with history and private heritage with culture on a metaphorical level" (Conway 2014: 146). It is easy to see how Chambers' public heritage construct is also the domain in which Smith's top-down AHD operates when he observes that public heritage is "taught" to us by "duly recognized keepers of the past."

Not long before Chambers formulated his public/private heritage constructs, heritage scholars and professionals also began to put more effort into articulating the distinctions between tangible and intangible cultural heritage. One of the many critiques of UNESCO's World Heritage program, for instance, was its emphasis on the "universal significance" of the "outstanding examples" on its celebrated lists of sites. Observers critical of this approach pointed out that it projects Western value-systems into non-Western contexts and often discounts the value placed on intangible cultural heritage in the process. In turn, "Following issues raised by a range of non-Western delegates at UNESCO sponsored meetings, and a questionnaire sent out to Member States in 1979, UNESCO initiated a sequence of measures to address the safeguarding of intangible heritage" (Smith 2006: 106). The result of these measures led to two developments that helped to incorporate non-material cultural heritage into UNESCO's frameworks. The first program initiated in 1993 was the Living Human Treasures Programme. This global initiative sought to identify "bearers of intangible cultural skills, techniques and knowledge, and to provide opportunities for those bearers to practise their skills and knowledge and to transmit it to younger generations" (Smith 2006: 107). A few years later UNESCO introduced the Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity which provided a wider scope of protections beyond the individual culture bearers by focusing on the preservation of actual elements of intangible cultural heritage. This program effectively became the "advance guard of the 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*" (Logan et al. 2010: 7) which continues to be a significant international effort to identify and support traditions, customs, skills, knowledge and many other valuable cultural resources around the world that are at risk of disappearing. Again, much of this work began as efforts to address concerns of non-Western societies that were not offered the same protections since they lacked the monumental structures or well-known historic sites valued from the Western perspective. Techera (2011) even points out that Pacific Island stakeholders were leaders in these efforts.

As Jackson states, "Intangible cultural heritage is dynamic vs static; experienced vs curated; and moments vs monuments" (2014: 3). Like culture, intangible cultural heritage is thus "much more fluid [than tangible heritage] and raises even more questions about the value of conserving a particular form of the heritage over time when the cultural context in which it is produced has changed" (Conway 2014: 146). Perceiving heritage as fluid and dynamic problematizes its objective nature and is one reason why Chambers laments, "heritage is a concept that on its surface appears to be perfectly obvious in its meaning,

but that begins to unravel before our eyes when we try to associate it with any degree of particularity" (2006: 1). It is also a reason Smith (2015) concludes *all* heritage is intangible. The AHD of the NPS with its object-oriented, tangible and historic focus naturally has difficulty with adapting its approaches to these more recent understandings of heritage. The NPS is, after all, a large bureaucracy and therefore resistance to fundamental changes to its mission. Furthermore, the standards and procedures of the NPS were developed to address the needs of stakeholders in the U.S. and not those of Pacific Islanders which are obviously very different. As the dominant heritage discourse on these islands, how then can the NPS address the true interests of island stakeholders? Put another way, how can the NPS and the HPO's follow their standards (which have a mandated focus on tangible resources and history) and at the same time address the interests of Pacific Islanders who require assistance with their private, intangible cultural heritage? One possible answer is to critically evaluate ways in which public heritage projects can activate private heritage practices. The present case study on a private heritage event in Yap known as the *mitmit* attempts to do this.

## Research Methods

The data and analysis for this case study is based on over two years of fieldwork in the FSM between 2013 and 2014 where the author served as the nation's staff cultural anthropologist working with the FSM national and Yap State HPO's. Along with the professional duties undertaken working on numerous projects supported by NPS and UNESCO, the author also conducted ethnographic research as a doctoral student of applied anthropology at the University of South Florida. Academic research was conducted after work-hours and on weekends and included participating and observing Yapese culture and holding formal and informal interviews with dozens of participants to gather data on the heritage interests of Yapese stakeholders. Much of the data that was specifically used for the present case study was gathered when the author was a member of a participating village that attended the 2014 Ngolog *mitmit* and in subsequent interviews with participants. Further data was recorded throughout the time in the field as both an employee for the FSM and as a longtime resident in Wachelob village, Yap.

Much of the discussion on the *mitmit* below has been reproduced and modified from the author's 2016 dissertation entitled, *The Production of Cultural Heritage Discourses: Political Economy and the Intersections of Public and Private Heritage in Yap State, Federated States of Micronesia* (Krause 2016).

## Case Study: The Yapese *Mitmit* Setting

Yap State, the westernmost of four states within the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), is located roughly 525 miles southwest of Guam and, according to the 2010 Census, is home to 11,377 residents in total. This includes 7,370 residents from Yap's Main Islands<sup>2</sup> which together are approximately 16 miles long and between 1 and 6 miles wide. The remaining 4,007 residents in

the state reside among the many smaller low-lying Outer Islands that extend hundreds of miles eastward from the central, high-island group. Despite strong historic interrelationships, Yap's Outer Islanders are in fact linguistically and culturally distinct from the "Yapese" Main Island cultural group whose heritage will be considered here.

It is estimated that approximately 2000 years ago the first migrations of seafaring Austronesian settlers arrived on Yap (Carson 2013: 36). The high number of stone platforms and foundations that mark prehistoric village sites throughout the Main Islands have suggested that at one point in Yap's ancient past the Main Islands had a dense population of residents with estimates ranging as high as 50,000 people (Hunt et al. 1949). Others suggest that it peaked around 30,000 (Labby 1976) and Hunter-Anderson (1983) revises Yap's maximum pre-contact population even lower to 26,240 people. The archaeological evidence therefore suggests Yap had somewhere between three and six times as many people than today at one point. When one considers Yapese Main Island cultural heritage, it is easy to see how customs, protocols and traditions still present today likely originated as vital adaptations during prior periods when a larger population faced far greater subsistence challenges.

As is common with indigenous island societies, land is a focal element in shaping Yapese culture.<sup>3</sup> When populations were much higher, resources were much more limited on the islands and Yapese society most likely integrated its fundamental focus on land and its productive power into the complex patterns of relations and sociopolitical organization that still persist in many ways today. As Throop notes, "It cannot be stressed enough that in Yap it is the land, and never the individual(s) associated with the land, that is imbued with rank, position, and authority. It is the land, as a material accretion of particular histories of labor-based exchange between successive generations who each once held title to that land, which is recognized as the source of power and authority" (2010: 43). For this reason, many Yapese are quick to point out that chiefs (representatives of high-ranking estates) do not have any power themselves and are simply the *lung* or "voice" of the land (Krause 2016).

In Krause 2016 study, it was found that Yapese Main Islanders desire to preserve enduring traditional processes that maintain the knowledge and values defined within *yalen u Wa'ab* (roughly translated as the "Yapese Way"). The traditional sociopolitical system based in relationships between land, people and clan are the threads of significance running through the web of culture they call *yalen u Wa'ab*. These threads are first spun through families which are anchored in their lands. The webs of significance then radiate out through the village and into the rest of the traditional political system. Turning to the case of a historic Yapese private heritage event known as the *mitmit*, it will be argued that this ceremony and all it encompassed was an important activation of private heritage that facilitated the production, display and transmission of *yalen u Wa'ab*, thus successfully keeping alive the elements of intangible cultural heritage that stakeholders reported as being most valuable to preserve.

### Yapese Mitmits

A Yapese *mitmit* is a general term referring to one of several ceremonial gatherings where formal traditional exchanges occur on the Yap's Main Islands. Lingenfelter (1975: 178) identifies marriages, funerals for chiefs, when a chief is installed or "anchored" in his village, and also when village community houses first open as occasions for *mitmit*; the latter three being larger village ceremonies that are also called *guyuwol*. He explains this term as "meaning literally to 'see the palm of the hand' or the fortune of the village" (1975: 178–179). In the past, the grandest of *mitmit* involving high-ranking villages could "last as long as two or three months and involve the whole of Yap" (Lingenfelter 1975: 179). *Mitmit* this large have not occurred in living memory for most Yapese. Indeed, it was observed that contemporary marriages are no longer subsumed into this larger ceremonial practice either. It was noted, however, that a few in recent years that were held to commemorate the death of a chief. The most commonly understood form of *mitmit* today refers to the larger political ones between villages which, prior to 2014, had not occurred in many decades.

Lingenfelter explains that "the marriage *mitmit* was seen as an exercise in family leadership, solidarity, support, and interfamily competition to demonstrate relative wealth and strength. The village *mitmit* performs somewhat the same functions for villages" (1975: 177). In other words, even though they were held for one of a few specific occasions, village *mitmit* also had a broader significance within Yapese sociopolitical organization. As Egan noted, "*Mitmit* of all kinds have long celebrated the initiation or maintenance of political relations between landed units, be they *tabinaw*<sup>4</sup> linked by marriage, allied villages, or even entire networks of allied villages" (2004: 35). In many ways then, *mitmit* serve as rites of solidarity (Harris 1983) through the affirmation of ties, the establishment of reciprocal relationships between villages, and especially the heightened sense of community that occurs as all come together for the sake of their villages. The following analysis of the 2014 *mitmit* in Ngolog demonstrates the many ways these private heritage events can activate and re-energize *yalen u Wa'ab* for Yapese stakeholders who are struggling to preserve their rich cultural heritage.

### The 2014 Ngolog Mitmit

As one of the three higher ranking *bulce*<sup>5</sup> villages in Yap (Lingenfelter 1975: 122), Ngolog in the municipality of Rull has strong traditional ties with many other villages throughout the state. In 2013 and early 2014, the NPS supported restorations to the Ngolog *peebay* (community house) were finally nearing completion and traditional leaders from the village made a decision to host a *guyuwol* form of *mitmit* to commemorate the official opening of the highly significant village building. This was an unexpected development since it had been possibly over 100 years since a *mitmit* had been held at this location and many years since one this large occurred anywhere in Yap. The decision to hold the expensive and extravagant *mitmit* was made instead by traditional leaders invoking the protocols of *yalen u Wa'ab*, not by heritage professionals invoking best practices according to the AHD.

Lingenfelter notes that in *mitmit* such as these, “The first phase of the occasion is called the *m’ug*, in which allied chiefs, hearing of the completion of the men’s house or clubhouse, come with shell money for the unveiling. When these ritual visits are completed the chiefs of the village send out word that the village will prepare a *mitmit* in celebration of completion of the community house” (1975: 178). Sending word out, however, was no simple procedure. In Yap’s traditional sociopolitical system, official communications between villages must follow strict protocols that have to do with village rankings and relative positions within the *bulce* and *ulun* political affiliations. There are also specific estates that have the roles of messengers for these communications and it is only the specific representatives from those estates who should be carrying the message. And so when word was officially sent out from Ngolog, all of these messengers were called upon to do their duty in notifying the villages. It was reported that this extremely complex network of communications (known as *tha’a*) had not been activated in quite some time. In conversations with friends and colleagues after work, much of the discussion around this time was about who was supposed to contact who, and the orders in which the word was supposed to travel as it made its way through all the villages.

My village, Wachelob, was close to the end of one line of connections and once our chief received official word of the *mitmit*, he began leading preparations for participation. These preparations included gathering *yar* (shell money) to be exchanged, collecting money for purchasing cases of beer to be given to Ngolog for redistribution, and also to notify the men of the village of their duty to attend the traditional ceremony. On the day of the *mitmit*, our procession of men from our village was met by the one further down the line and spent an hour or so listening to our chief explain the protocols expected of us. Once this was done, both villages proceeded with our tribute to the next village above us in order. Here, we again spent an hour or so within this village’s community house as their chief provided more information about our roles in the ceremony. When ready, the three villages then proceeded to Colonia where we met with additional villages and discussed protocols once more before finally driving to the large *mitmit* in Ngolog.

Upon arrival in Ngolog, everyone was shown the specific places where they should sit before the ceremony officially started (**Figure 1**). An estimated one to two hundred men, women, and children in attendance filled the village and eventually found their specific areas to sit on the large newly restored *wunbay* (stone platform). I was



**Figure 1:** Attendees gather for the historic Ngolog *mitmit* in 2014. (Photo taken by author).

very humbled and fortunate to be asked to join a work colleague within the new *peebay* (**Figure 2**) among chiefs and other men from the affiliated villages participating. As we awaited the commencement of traditional activities, many men dressed in customary attire circulated through the crowds handing out water, sodas, and beer. Besides myself, there were only a few non-Yapese in the large gathering. The *mitmit* it was not an event open to the public and tourists would not be welcome; only members from the traditionally affiliated villages with ties to Ngolog were allowed. Within the *peebay*, we all sat in the spaces between the wooden support beams on the outer edge of the structure, leaving an open passage in the middle where men from select villages had the role of passing around branches full of betel nut and pepper leaf, beer, *tuba*, and pre-prepared “local” lunches. At the northern head of the *peebay*, the three high-chiefs in attendance sat quietly and were joined by several other ranked men who at times spoke for them.

From where I sat, I could not see nor hear the formal communications from chiefs at the head of the *peebay*, but I was told several opening statements were made by the hosting chief acknowledging the presence of the other high chiefs in attendance and also recognizing

the authority of the “three pillars” (*dalip pi nguchol*). Following these formal pronouncements, there were other traditional greetings by the chiefs where I was told stone money (*rail*) that had previously been placed on the *wunbay* nearby (**Figure 2**) was verbally exchanged. Soon after all formal opening announcements were completed, several processions of customarily adorned men entered the ceremonial area in a single-file line holding aloft *yar* as they slowly marched through the crowd along the dancing grounds. Each procession represented an affiliated village and slowly made its way in through the back of the *peebay* and through to the front to ceremonially pay tribute to the chiefs. One-by-one, the men holding the shell money respectfully offered their tribute to the receiving chiefs whose spokesperson formally acknowledged the tribute in a voice loud enough for all to hear (**Figure 3**).

Once all the exchanges were complete, columns of dancers from affiliated villages then entered the *mala*<sup>6</sup> and one after the other performed several dances for all in attendance. The exchanges of stone and shell money and dances lasted several hours and when all was completed, the chiefs made additional announcements calling the *mitmit* to a close. After a short while, the men from various villages regrouped and exited Ngolog returning to their villages via the same routes



**Figure 2:** Newly restored peebay and wunbay in Ngolog village, Rull—site of 2014 *mitmit*. (Photo taken by author).



**Figure 3:** Tribute exchange during 2014 *mitmit* in Ngolog village, Rull. (Photo taken by author).

they came. For us, we returned first to the meeting place in Colonia and then to the same higher ranked village along our route as before. At the *mitmit*, several cases of beer were redistributed to the affiliated high-ranking villages, as were three large sea-turtles. At our stop, the turtle that was given to our affiliated village was roasted in an open pit and redistributed along with the beer to everyone. When the time came, our village and the one who first joined us made our way back to our meeting point, met briefly, and then parted ways to our individual villages and homes.

### Discussion

Jackson's insights on the value of intangible cultural heritage for an African American community in Nicodemus, Kansas demonstrated "the dominant role that the living community plays in cultural heritage preservation through *active recognition and demonstration of kinship ties...and maintenance of kinship connections through land ownership from one generation to the next*—a key cultural resource and an invaluable link to the past" (2014: 3, emphasis added). In Yap, there was a strikingly similar finding. As the case study shows, the living communities on Yap's Main Islands value their heritage in a very similar way and the *mitmit*

gave stakeholders a medium through which to recognize, demonstrate and maintain social connections that are ultimately based on connections to their land. Private heritage practices and processes in Yap start within households and villages and center on important Yapese values and the key knowledge concerning the relationships between people, land and clans (Krause 2016). And while practices that organically transmit cultural heritage are disappearing or gone already, many stakeholders still hold much of this knowledge despite it being called upon less often. For this reason, the Ngolog *mitmit* was an extremely valuable private heritage ritual for several reasons that will now be discussed.

### Activating Networks

One of the clear benefits the *mitmit* had for stakeholders was that it became an occasion to revive knowledge that had long lain dormant for many. For those villages and its members that were participating, they were obligated to remember information that has not been needed in a long time. All around the Main Islands, conversations were occurring about which villages needed to pass messages to others and how these communications were to proceed according to traditional protocols. As Steven<sup>7</sup> (49, Fanif) recalled:

One thing that I learned and I think it was very good about the Ngolog [*mitmit*] is the connections. When before, before the *mitmit*, everybody that I met on the road was discussing it in the village. That's what they were discussing: 'What was our relationship with that guy and how are we going to do this?' So I knew that after the *mitmit*, everybody learned something from that *mitmit*. It was a learning process. Not only the men but the women too. Because they were curious, they knew there was something but they didn't actually know what it was. They were asking, everybody is asking everybody.

The *mitmit* thus became the catalyst for activating knowledge through practice. The knowledge of these connections that map out their complex traditional sociopolitical hierarchy is one of the most valuable elements of Yapese private heritage according to stakeholders. The *mitmit*, just by being announced, forced everyone around the islands to engage with others and remember their roles and position within the traditional system.

#### Solidifying Sociopolitical Order

The connections and bonds so important to *yalen u Wa'ab*, once recalled and activated, also became reified through this rite of solidarity. Passing word and then physically moving through the proper channels within the network of ranked villages (*th'a*) allows this knowledge to become embodied in those participating. These connections and relationships between people and their villages were further affirmed during the public ritual as chiefs announced their positions and ties to each other and also when valuable traditional items were exchanged and acknowledged. As Leo (55, Maap) put it, "That is when we recognize the chiefs. Because usually when the people with the money go, the chief is taking the lead, 'Oh that chief is still from Maap.' And that is how people get to see the chief. And that is good for the chief and good for the people."

Because of the highly localized nature of Yapese society where landed estate and village identities are primary modes of being, knowledge is fragmented and the complexities of the entire Yapese sociopolitical organization are impossible for one person to fully apprehend. Yet for the system to function, it is vital that village members know their own specific connections along the line of linkages within their political side (*bulche* or *ulun*) and within whichever of the three highest-ranking "pillar" estates they are aligned with. Some of this knowledge is tested and affirmed prior to the *mitmit* as networks are activated. It is then extended more as it is encoded during the ceremony when participants and witnesses mediate the exchanges and connect further dots along their networks. Throop noted in a conversation with a Yapese elder that "this is perhaps one of the reasons why these events were traditionally called *mitmit* (literally, getting stuck again and again)<sup>8</sup> since people were continually trying to work out the details of their mutual understanding of the relationship" (2009: 185).

These recognitions of the sociopolitical order became collectively witnessed and thus publicly authorized by attendees as the knowledge is imprinted into both the

objects of exchange and into the memories of eyewitnesses. As an important element constituting *yalen u Wa'ab*, the activation and confirmation of connections between people, land and clan through the practice of *mitmit* demonstrates private heritage preservation in action. As Paul (49, Dalipebinaw) noted, "I will say almost every single person that came learned from each other that day... I will admit, I learned a lot that day. Things that I didn't know."

#### Reaffirming Values and Establishing Reciprocating Exchange

The *mitmit* also activated core values associated with *yalen u Wa'ab* for the villages attending. As arguably the most significant formal inter-village gathering in decades, the *mitmit* became an occasion for villages to display themselves among other affiliated villages and demonstrate these values to all, or as Lingenfelter said, to "see the palm of the hand" or the fortune of the village" (1975: 178–179). In the social field of Yapese inter-village dynamics, values such as productivity, respect, reliability, and generosity are all significant because when demonstrated they can, among other things, help increase a village's overall value as an ally to other villages. Village status in this regard becomes a primary concern for all members, and they always work to elevate their villages within this social field.

Configured within these values, wealth also communicates the worth of villages to allies. As Throop notes when discussing *mitmit* and other exchange events, "the amount of wealth generated for such exchanges—be it wealth in the form of fish, taro, stone money, shell money, woven textiles, or more recently alcohol and tobacco—is an indication of the eternal cohesiveness of the estate presenting that wealth" (2010: 85). The show of wealth at the *mitmit* provides an opportunity for villages to present evidence that they are stable and reliable and not "plagued by infighting, conflict, and poor leadership" (Throop 2010: 85). Furthermore, the social field in which these values produce symbolic power is also reiterative and dynamic as each village mediates their relative status vis-à-vis ongoing histories of reciprocal exchange. Because one of the rules of the game in this social field is that reciprocations be slightly more in value than what was received (or as one study participant noted, keeping the relationship "on the odd," and never "even"), the dialectic of exchange crystallizes into a form of one-upmanship between villages:

Steven (49, Fanif): That is what makes the *mitmit* big. Because it's a competition thing. Everybody is competing and trying to go out and out do what somebody else does. Yeah, it is a part of why the chief has everybody in the community working really hard so our village can move up.

Paul (49, Dalipebinaw): A lot of valuable money and treasure were exchanged during that day. But like they say, they give it away for one day to come back. Because I am sure the next side of the island when they do something, that is when those things start coming back. Some of those things that were exchanged I haven't seen, those are big and beauti-

ful shell money that are very, very valuable. And they were displayed.

The uneven reciprocation of wealth and presentations facilitates the regeneration of *yalen u Wa'ab* as values are continually re-activated and called upon to maintain alliances. While the *mitmit* may have ended, the game is never over. The ball is now in the court of the other allied villages who are obligated through *yalen* (traditions and customs) to reciprocate and leave it "on the odd" once more.

#### Engaging Villages in Practice

*Mitmit* are grand affairs that take great effort to organize and pull off properly. They are tremendous burdens for hosting villages that must ensure that the entire event is impressive enough to hopefully raise their status among their allied villages. In the days leading up to the ritual, the hosting village must enlist the assistance of villages directly below that are called upon to work on a myriad of preparations. Throughout all these villages, men, women and children are thus engaged in traditional activities such as gardening, preparing foods according to custom, "cutting" *tuba*, collecting betel-nut, catching fish and turtles, creating or repairing traditional attire, cleaning and preparing the *mitmit* grounds, learning chants and dances, collecting *yar* (shell money) and other *maachef* (valuables) to be displayed and exchanged, and importantly, learning from elders the protocols required of them during the event.

Other affiliated villages were also hard at work with traditional preparatory activities of their own. Hundreds of locals throughout the islands (many who were not among the invited villages) were thus engaging *yalen u Wa'ab* through practice all because of their respect to tradition and custom and the value of solidarity to their village. Participation in village activities is a crucial element of learning *yalen* because these activities are performed in a localized context and driven by local values toward labor and fealty to estates and villages. These values and the village practices they support are elements of their private heritage that in this case were activated in the service of sociopolitical demands. Starting from the top and working its way down through and to the villages, and finally to the families and individuals, obligations and duties were defined and called upon in successive order to support the overall structures of *yalen u Wa'ab*.

#### Presenting the Value of Private Heritage to New Generations

Study participants and others noted that they were extremely happy that the *mitmit* was revived because it allowed their children an opportunity to see things that they themselves have not even seen in their lifetimes. Several noted that even their parents never got to attend a *mitmit* of this scale and significance. Parents and children alike were thus able to witness elements of their private heritage that had long remained dormant and would likely never have been activated were it not for this historic event. Children sat in awe as throngs of traditionally adorned men formally walked through holding *yar* up high for all to see (assuredly the most *yar* ever presented

in recent memory). Dances and other ceremonial practices also must have been new for many children and youth who sat on the *wunbay* observing while being taught by parents the significance of what they were seeing. Indeed, the entire structure of the *mitmit*—the protocols, the ordering of traditional activities and performances, the chiefly communications, the proper arrangements of villages, the food, everything—came together in a way that was new but still recognized as the way it has always been done.<sup>9</sup>

The *mitmit* was talked about all over the Main Islands long after it was finished. It certainly appeared as though those who were able to attend and participate felt proud to be a part of Yapese history. Observations and conversations with many indicate that it also gave them a heightened sense of cultural awareness and an increased understanding of the value in preserving their *yalen u Wa'ab*. The enthusiasm for their traditional way of life was evident, for instance, with Paul (49, Dalipebinaw) as we sat reminiscing about the event. He was particularly proud to see certain villages come together for the first time in memory. For him the *mitmit* was a rite of solidarity with historic significance. This significance was evident as he joyously reminisced what it meant for him:

So all of them were there. The whole island, they have seven *bulche* [villages] and all of them were in the house that day. All of these seven *bulche* doesn't get around. From the history in Yap, that was one day in my life time that I get to witness the seven *bulche* sit in that house and have a ceremony without war. And get to speak about it and call it a very beautiful day...So yes it was history in the making and I think I appreciate what Ngolog did. Because then the rest of us get to remember what it could've been like and how much we appreciate the culture and customs.

#### A Role for Public Heritage Practice in Preserving Private Heritage

Paul also noted how the *mitmit* made their culture come alive again. Of *yalen* he said, "It was like asleep. It was like it was sleeping and just because of that project it triggered everything. Because you cannot let it go. You have a responsibility and you have a role to play in it." This statement succinctly articulates one of the key arguments in the present study: the 2014 Ngolog *mitmit* illustrates a clear case for how public heritage interventions can effectively assist in private heritage preservation.

As noted, *yalen u Wa'ab* dictates that *mitmit* are called for in cases of marriage, "anchoring" a chief in his new village, commemorating the passing of a chief, and to celebrate the opening of village community houses (*peebay*). The impetus for Ngolog's *mitmit* was the NPS supported restoration of its *peebay* and surrounding *wunbay*. It was therefore the NPS focus on tangible, public heritage that was the catalyst for the grand *mitmit* and all the benefits the ritual provided as *yalen* was activated and energized around the Main Islands. Although NPS did not have in mind that a *mitmit* like this would occur when it authorized the support for the restoration, it does demonstrate how future public heritage practices can be designed in

ways that support the extant values and practices found in a community's private heritage.

## Conclusion

In cases such as the FSM where indigenous cultures are struggling mightily to maintain the valuable knowledge, traditions and customs handed down to them by their ancestors, heritage practitioners should do more to recognize the possible shortcomings of dominant heritage discourses that fail to address the true interests of stakeholder communities. In Yap, it was determined that the dominant NPS discourse was indeed incongruent with the actual reported preservation interests of indigenous Yapese residents on the main islands. For these stakeholders, it was intangible elements of their private heritage that was most important to address, not the tangible, historic aspects that must be the focus for NPS financial support. The preceding case study of the 2014 Ngolog *mitmit* has demonstrated an alternative model of successful private heritage practices for these stakeholders. With the case of the *mitmit* it was also shown that public heritage practices that are supported by NPS can indirectly activate the intangible, private heritage valued by stakeholders.

A few closing statements can now summarize the potential contribution for critical heritage studies that has been provided here. First, it has hopefully been made clear that in cases such as the FSM where the dominant heritage discourse channels resources away from the true preservation needs and interests of the communities, practitioners on the ground have opportunities to do more to better address these local interests. Beginning with ethnographic research identifying the actual heritage interests of stakeholders, scholars and practitioners can work to identify examples of customary practices where enculturation and cultural transmission occur and activate private heritage the way the *mitmit* has done for Yapese stakeholders. Once forms of private heritage in action have been identified, the last important step would be to creatively develop strategies that are able to channel public heritage resources towards the activation of these private heritage practices. In the case of the *mitmit*, for example, the Yap State HPO could collaborate with traditional leaders to explore the efficacy of prioritizing the restoration of *pee-bay* in communities where custom and tradition dictate a *mitmit* would most likely be held next. Of course, this is just one very specific example of how this can work in Yap. But ultimately it shows how it is possible and worth considering how meaningful, intangible private forms of heritage can be supported through public heritage strategies elsewhere.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> There are, of course, exceptions with several well-known monolithic structures such as Nan Madol in Pohnpei, Lelu in Kosrae, and the latte stone sites in Guam and the Marianna islands to name a few. Indeed, Yap's famous stone money and the *malals* (stone money banks) are also "tangible" resources. However, according to AUTHOR (2016), Yapese stakeholder report that they are less concerned with preserving

or restoring sites than they are with preserving their intangible cultural heritage.

- <sup>2</sup> Together, this tight group of four islands makes up what is commonly referred to as "Yap proper". I prefer instead to use the term 'Yap's Main Islands'. This is because of conversations I had with Outer Islanders who jokingly wondered if this term meant that Main Islanders were somehow more "proper" than themselves.
- <sup>3</sup> I do not have space here to fully unpack the complexities of how Yapese cultural logics of land are woven so tightly into their social and political organization. For thorough attention to this see Schneider (1949), Lingenfelter (1975), Labby (1976) and Egan (2004).
- <sup>4</sup> The Yapese term *tabinaw* refers here to "estates" which contain specific connections between people and land that are configured around the titled authority embodied in *daef*. The Yapese term *daef* refers to the specific plots of land where house foundations have been placed and are said to be home to the spirits of the ancestors. These parcels of land are the anchors of power and authority on the Main Islands and those who have title to them are representatives of this authority.
- <sup>5</sup> The complex Yapese sociopolitical organization includes two "political" affiliations known as *bulce* and *ulun* with which each village is aligned. There is little space here to describe the Yapese system with much detail. Readers are encouraged to see Lingenfelter (1975) for one of the most complete accounts of the Yapese sociopolitical organization.
- <sup>6</sup> *Malal* are the path-like spaces between *wunbay*. Colloquially in English they are also called "dancing grounds" (since this is the sacred space for dances) or "stone money banks" (since rai line the edges of the platforms).
- <sup>7</sup> All names of study participants are pseudonyms. The information following the name include the participant's age and home village.
- <sup>8</sup> This is an alternate interpretation of the term based on Jensen's (1977) dictionary terms.
- <sup>9</sup> Although, it must be added that several of those I spoke with contested certain key elements of the *mitmit* such as where it was held, the order in which the communications went out, and even the presence of specific high estates. Despite this, those who expressed these reservations felt that these discrepancies were understandable given the length of time it had been since a *mitmit* like this had been held.

## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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