

## A CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE PONAPEAN INDEPENDENCE VOTE IN THE 1983 PLEBISCITE

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When in my Prague apartment Milan Kundera held forth on the possibility of the Czech nation disappearing into the Russian empire, we both knew that the idea, though legitimate, went beyond us and that we were speaking of the *inconceivable*. Even though man is mortal he cannot conceive of the end of space or time, of history or a nation: he lives in an illusory infinity.

People fascinated by the idea of progress never suspect that every step forward is also a step on the way to the end and that beyond all the joyous 'onward and upward' slogans lurks the lascivious voice of death urging us to make haste.

. . . we must never allow the future to collapse under the burden of memory.

Milan Kundera  
*The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*

On 21 June 1983, the Federated States of Micronesia (consisting of the Eastern and Central Caroline Islands) conducted a plebiscite. In most of these islands a "Compact of Free Association" with the United States, slated to replace American Trusteeship over Micronesia, was approved by an approximate 90 percent majority. The people of Ponape and the surrounding islands included in Ponape State voted against Free Association, however, and called instead for independence. While the

margin of defeat was narrow in Ponape State as a whole (4,414 "No" votes, 4,116 "Yes" votes), the rural people of Ponape island proper (that is, the people of Madolenihmw, Uh, Kiti, and Net paramount chiefdoms, who make up the greater portion of the State's population) were strongly opposed to Free Association, defeating it by a two-thirds majority. Even in Kolonia town and the outer islands, where the measure was approved, the margin was much smaller than in the FSM as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

Free Association's unpopularity on Ponape contrasts sharply with the reception it received in the rest of Micronesia, and the Ponapeans drew criticism from other Micronesians, American observers, and even a few of their own leaders. They were accused of arrogance, ignorance, and selfishness. Yet the Ponapean call for independence, as singular as it may have been in its local context, forces us to confront the fact that it is the *Micronesian* vote that is peculiar in the wider context of the Pacific islands community of nations, where the quest for independence has been the norm and a vote to prolong colonialism, though certainly not unknown, the oddity. Indeed, the Ponapean vote should be seen as a proclamation in favor of independence, not as an opposition response. This said, we are still faced with the question of why Ponape sought to resist American demands for continued control of Micronesia.

Attempts to explore, and perhaps to explain, the Ponapean vote for independence must take a host of circumstances into account. Major topics that must be addressed are Ponapean relations with and attitudes toward the U.S., Ponapean interactions with the rest of the FSM, and--the subject of this paper--the attitudes, perceptions, and desires that have grown out of autochthonous Ponapean social and cultural experiences. In an earlier paper, "Ponape's Body Politic" (1984a), I examined certain aspects of traditional Ponapean culture and politics that shape contemporary Ponapean participation in state and national political systems. In this paper I intend to deal specifically with the ways in which Ponapeans' understandings of their own culture and cultural-historical experiences led them finally to insist upon independence. I will address Ponapean-FSM and Ponapean-American aspects of the plebiscite elsewhere.

The body of this paper has four parts. I begin with a discussion of Ponapean historical consciousness, and illustrate the characteristic habits of skepticism and analysis that shaped the Ponapean's critical approach to the plebiscite. Next, I examine relevant elements of Ponapean culture, showing how a set of specific values was applied to the analysis of Free Association. I then describe the context of the vote itself,

explaining how the *conduct* of the plebiscite served to confirm Ponapean doubts about what Free Association was likely to hold in store for them. Finally, I offer an interpretation of what Ponapeans saw themselves in favor of--the way of life they quite consciously want to maintain a degree of control over. My intention is to demonstrate that the Ponapean vote was not an example of spur-of-the-moment opposition to the FSM or the U.S., but grew, rather, out of the course of the Ponapean's history and their awareness of it.

In the lines from *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* that preface this paper, Milan Kundera, an expatriate Czech, expresses ambivalence about the virtues of memory. I do not know whether he has come upon some general truth, nor do I really mean to take issue with him, except to suggest that even though Ponapeans are in some degree fascinated by the idea of progress, they most assuredly do "suspect that every step forward is also a step on the way to the end." It is memory, above all else, that the Ponapeans have chosen as their guide on the suspect route toward that end. This is not to suggest that the Ponapeans live in the past, but to argue that they reflect upon their past as they contemplate their future.

Kundera has also written that "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting." Ponapeans have forgotten very little. Specifically, they have not lost sight of the meaningfulness of their own lives. They interpreted the plebiscite--what it asked of them and the way that it was conducted--as something intended both to deny the existence of and wrench away that meaningfulness from them. The people of Ponape permitted me to sit with them in the weeks preceding and following the plebiscite, as they discussed it among themselves. I have, over the course of the past ten years, come to understand something of the context in which Ponapean discussions take place. What I report here is based on careful consideration of the contexts in which it was learned. It seems proper to note as well that when I describe what I believe are Ponapean analyses of events, I am doing so with the help of men and women who have read or who have had explained to them what it is that I write about their lives; they are my teachers and I hope I do them justice.

### **Ponapean Historical Consciousness**

Ponapeans live in what appears at first glance to be a relatively homogenous society. The non-Ponapean immigrants on the island come from the surrounding atolls, and most speak Ponapean or related dia-

lects as their first language.<sup>2</sup> Ponapeans, however, perceive a wealth of diversity on their island. In addition to differences between themselves and outer-islanders, they perceive quite significant variations among communities and especially among the five paramount chiefdoms (Ponapean *wehi*). While there is a notion of a shared Ponapean way or culture (*tiahk en Pohnpei*), Ponapeans are also quick to stress differences in the customs, habits, and attitudes characteristic of the various chiefdoms. John Fischer has suggested that in precontact Ponape “somehow the same concepts were used but . . . were given different emphasis in different groups” (in Bascom 1965:v); and David Hanlon (personal communication, 1983) notes their insistence that “*Pohnpei sohte ehu*,” “Ponape is not one.” This diversity does not merely exist; it is celebrated. Ponapean emphasis on hierarchy is continually counterbalanced by an overriding theme of individual autonomy; the stress placed on diversity is critical to this process. Small but ubiquitous variations allow individuals and communities to assert their distinctiveness without threatening consensus, and as the uses of matrilineal clanship have grown circumscribed and lines of descent less remarked upon (Petersen 1982b), it may well be that territorial distinctions become increasingly emphasized.

Some of the distinctions between the chiefdoms that were seemingly on the wane during the colonial period have begun to reassert themselves. Disputes over borders flared up when attempts were made to map and finalize them. In the course of the Ponapean Constitutional Convention, meeting in 1983, one of the thorniest disputes had to do with the status of the island’s only town. Kolonia was carved off from the Net chiefdom in the late nineteenth century and it now has the status of a chartered municipality. Ponapeans employ the same term, *wehi*, for both paramount chiefdom and municipality (they also use the term in referring to independent nations and other political divisions), and as the Ponape State Constitution is drafted the term’s use has come into question. Because in Ponapean eyes the traditional chiefdoms are sovereign and imbued with spiritual, moral, and social qualities, it was decided that granting Kolonia (erected on territory that is historically part of Net) *wehi* status would effectively cleave it off from Net, something that the framers of the Constitution felt neither inclined nor empowered to do. The chiefdoms’ sovereignty and singularity remain fundamental to the Ponapeans’ understanding of their world.

Indeed, Ponapean accounts of their own history seem to emphasize distinctions in space over temporal chronology. Individuals, events, and changes seem to be linked together by variations in spatial organization.

Events are marked by where they occurred, and epochs are known by names that usually refer to particular groupings of places rather than periods. Ponapean historical vision is enormously fluid--nothing is still, nothing permanent--but it is motion in space more than in time.<sup>3</sup> It is only the recent past, the colonial era, that shows a real emphasis on chronology. Ponapeans now speak of the Spanish, German, Japanese, and American eras. But even this episodic perspective focuses on externally generated cues--colonial regimes. Ponapeans continue to conceptualize events in terms of where they take place, and thus remain acutely aware of local variations in historical process.

Observing that different parts of the island have experienced the impact of colonialism with differing intensities and consequences, some Ponapeans have become keen students of the processes of history. We might say that they have a well-honed historical consciousness. The most immediate example of historical interpretation entailed in the 1983 plebiscite is Ponapean understanding of Sokehs chiefdom's 1910 rebellion against the Germans. The Sokehs Rebellion has been written about a number of times (Ehrlich 1978; Hempenstall 1978; Bascom 1950). My purpose here is not to recount it but to examine the meaning it held for Ponapeans voting in the plebiscite.

At the time of the plebiscite a visitor to Ponape was surprised, and somewhat dismayed, to learn that the gravesite of the rebellion's executed leaders is untended and overgrown, and that Sokehs chiefdom is now ranked last in the ritual ordering of Ponapean paramount chiefdoms. By Ponapean standards the chiefdom did not exist during the Sokehs people's exile in Palau and thus it is the most recently established chiefdom. Ponapeans explain that even though the Sokehs Rebellion is reckoned an important event in recent Ponapean history, it is not thought of as a Ponapean struggle, but as an uprising of the Sokehs people. Sokehs had been acting as an independent, sovereign entity. The rebels, who are perceived as having acted in the finest tradition of the Ponapean warrior ethic, still command great respect, but it was their own fight, modern Ponapeans say, and they are not national heroes. It was this visitor's naive question about the rebels' modern status, however, that called forth from two older Ponapeans an incisive analysis of the rebellion, a discussion that an ethnographer comfortably acquainted with the facts of the event might not have otherwise heard.

As with any historical tradition, many interpretations of the Sokehs Rebellion exist. The version these two students of Ponapean history put forward is but one more in a long chain. According to their rendering, Sokehs rose, while the rest of Ponape did not, because of factors quite

specific to Sokehs and its relations with the Germans. At the time of the rebellion, they claim, only Sokehs had entered into a copra-production contract with the Germans. Demands for copra ran counter to the domestic needs of the Sokehs people, and their leaders found themselves in an untenable position. The rebellion was sparked in reaction to these conditions, with which only the Sokehs people were confronted. This account illustrates the facility with which contemporary Ponapeans observe the variable and idiosyncratic course of history. The people of Sokehs, not the Ponapeans as a general category, had specific pressures placed upon them by the Germans. In the absence of these pressures the rest of Ponape behaved one way, while Sokehs acted in response to its own circumstances.

The Ponapeans' tendency to view their past in spatial terms means that in effect they engage in the study of comparative history. They do not see history as unintelligible, nor as incomprehensible fate. What occurs in one place does not necessarily occur elsewhere, and what happens to the rest of Micronesia may not happen to Ponape.

Indeed, interpretations of the Sokehs Rebellion offer us a concrete example of historical revisionism--the attempt to give to events in the past more current meanings. Accounts of the rebellion recorded in 1946 by William Bascom (1950) suggested that clan revenge for a beating inflicted by the Germans lay at the heart of the rebellion. Paul Ehrlich's (1978) richly detailed study in the early 1970s found that factionalism among the leaders of the paramount chiefdoms had served to isolate Sokehs and edge it toward confrontation. In 1983 the rebellion was more often a topic of conversation than at any time in the preceding decade, and its implications for the Ponapean vote were manifest: Ponape must respond to current political and economic pressures with the decisiveness shown by the valiant warriors of Sokehs.

As I noted in "Ponape's Body Politic" (1984a:114-115), the Sokehs Rebellion marked a singular turning point in the Ponapeans' relationship to their own island. Not until the Germans forcefully put down the rebellion did Ponapeans find themselves no longer masters of their homeland. I have suggested elsewhere (1984b:351) that at this point Ponapeans realized that violent resistance was no longer an option open to them, and that their response was to adopt an explicitly nonviolent, informal means of preserving their autonomy. I call this response "cultural resistance." Similar methods have been described elsewhere as "everyday forms of peasant resistance" (Scott 1983). It is important to keep this history in mind while considering the Ponapean vote in the 1983 plebiscite, because the Ponapeans who voted against Free Associa-

tion were drawing upon cultural and historical themes as they prepared to vote. The votes of many were framed as a form of resistance.

Perhaps the most powerful example of the Sokehs Rebellion's relevance to the plebiscite appeared at the annual gathering of Ponape's Roman Catholic sodality. Held a few days after the plebiscite, the meeting's focal point was a full day of songs, dances, and sketches performed by various local Catholic congregations. One of the highlights was a production of the near-epic song and dance that relate the history of the Sokehs Rebellion. Evocatively performed by a congregation of Sokehs people descended from the rebels, they both celebrated their forebears' audacity and mourned Sokeh's sad fate.

While fragments of the song are occasionally heard, one rarely has an opportunity to witness a full-length performance of the dance. This one was done with gusto and skill, evidence of the dancers' months of preparation. They had in fact been rehearsing throughout the period preceding the plebiscite. The audience responded with thunderous acclamation. There had been a general sense of pride in the days following the plebiscite and the Sokehs dance simultaneously basked in and stirred up more of that exultation.

### **Ponapean Cultural Elements in the Plebiscite Vote**

In *One Man Cannot Rule a Thousand* (1982a:122-123) I discuss complementary pulls between concepts of honor and humility in Ponapean culture. Both played roles in shaping Ponapean attitudes toward the plebiscite. Honor was the more visible and powerful of the values, but I shall begin this part of the discussion by examining Ponapean humility.

A critical part of the entire complex of Ponapean respect behaviors depends upon self-abnegation and self-denigration. To decline a gift or portion of food by protesting that one is unworthy of it or to offer a gift with accompanying disclaimers about its inadequacy are basic aspects of Ponapean etiquette. Self-criticism is commonplace, and Ponapeans are frankly critical about the self-aggrandizing aspects of this self-criticism. Ponapeans laugh continually at themselves and their own shortcomings.

This ready self-criticism gives the Ponapeans a sharp perspective on their own responses to historical circumstance. Their historical sense is overwhelmingly ironic. They laugh, for instance, at the cupidity of the nineteenth-century Ponapean who, according to both traditional and written accounts, exhumed the body of a European sailor in order to obtain his machine-made clothing, thereby setting loose a devastating

smallpox epidemic. They laugh at the story of the Lepen Net, a nineteenth-century chief, who signed away to a trader a large portion of territory in exchange for a few empty glass bottles. A legislator tells me, tongue-in-cheek, that the only way to foster economic development on Ponape would be to chop down all the breadfruit trees, thus forcing people to work for a living. Someone else says that Ponape's troubles with development stem from not having suffered enough: just look at the Filipinos, he says. Because of their islands' tribulations they have learned skills that provide them with good employment when they come to Ponape.

A proverb, "*Mwengki alasang kepin*," "The monkey imitates the captain," may best summarize the Ponapeans' bemused perspective on the dangers of culture change. The proverb derives from an apocryphal story about a monkey who watches a sea captain shave. The captain spies the monkey and decides to play a dastardly trick upon him. As he finishes shaving he subtly flips the straight-edge razor over and runs its blunt side across his jugular vein. Then the captain sets the razor down and leaves. The monkey leaps from its perch in the trees, scampers over to the shaving kit, and grasps the razor. Fiddling before the mirror, the monkey mimics the captain's shave, then runs the razor across its throat. End of tale.

The story is a rather morbid commentary on the hazards of adopting habits of being that are not really suitable, and the monkey-mimicry epigram is used as a cautionary comment interjected into discussions about changes that are being contemplated. Many Americans who encounter change on Ponape, or who hear Ponapeans politely praising American customs, are prone to believe that Ponapeans want to become just like Americans. But Ponapeans are not Americans, Ponapeans say, and any attempt at such a transformation could be fatal.

Many Ponapeans ceaselessly examine changes taking place in their lives. When speaking publicly, chiefs invariably exhort the people to reclaim virtues that are thought to be disappearing. The plebiscite was in fact seen as a rare opportunity for Ponapeans to transform their concern about what they were allowing to happen to themselves into concrete action. Most Ponapeans do not think of themselves as mere pawns caught up in these unfortunate changes, but as responsible actors with decisions to make. Their ability to discern patterns and causes in history and to be critical of what they have done led them to approach the plebiscite as an event that would have profound consequences. Their self-critical predilections became analytical skills; their perceptions of how



they had responded to earlier circumstances guided their visions of the future.

The facility with which Ponapeans analyzed the plebiscite and the likely consequences of Free Association was aided in part by the presence of the FSM capital on Ponape: their propinquity gives them ready access to gossip, rumor, and unpublicized facts about their national government. The impact of this access is enormously enhanced by another fundamental aspect of Ponapean culture, the daily, communal kava (*sakau*) rituals. Participation in kava rituals is flexible, and the continually varying composition of the groups serves to transmit information rapidly and thoroughly. Little transpires on Ponape that does not become a topic of discussion at kava.

In "Ponape's Body Politic" (1984a) I emphasized the importance Ponapeans place upon being able to exercise direct oversight in their political affairs. The kava ritual is a fundamental part of this oversight. Determined not to be governed by a distant polity, and to take self-government seriously, Ponapeans strove to make good use of their proximity to the seat of authority. They examined the Compact of Free Association not merely as something that was going to be done to Ponape but as a proposition calling for analysis and response.

Ponapean analysis of the Compact was, of course, phrased in Ponapean terms. Two concepts, in particular, were central to discussions of their relationship with the U.S.: *kopwel* and *manaman*. In the following pages, I explore the meanings of these two concepts in detail, and demonstrate the thoroughly Ponapean interpretations the Ponapeans placed upon their participation in the plebiscite.

One of the basic points of departure for the Ponapean analysis of the Compact was the concept *kopwel*. There is no simple way to translate *kopwel*--its connotations resonate with the full complexity of Ponapean culture. A very rough gloss would be "to take care of," and it is often used as a reflexive, that is, "to take care of oneself." The concept is imbued with pride and a sense of propriety: Ponapeans deem it proper to expect that a person, family, or community be able to take care of him-, her-, or itself. To suggest otherwise may be construed as an insult. Thus an offer of assistance delivered, or perceived as being delivered, in a patronizing manner would be met with the statement, "*Se kopwelikin kiht*," "We *kopwel* ourselves." "We can take care of ourselves, thank you," might serve as a free translation.

*Kopwel* can also connote "to protect, guard jealously, or cherish," as in the phrase "*kopwelikin tiahk*," meaning to protect or cherish Pona-

pean custom or culture, to guard the Ponapean way of being from the harmful pressures impinging upon it. I first encountered the concept in an explicit reference to the Free Association. On the day of the plebiscite, a group of people preparing kava had begun discussing what each thought the notion of Free Association implied. One man said it meant that the U.S. was trying to *kopwel* the Ponapeans, to take care of them. "Yes," interjected someone else, "that's exactly what the U.S. is telling us. It's humiliating (*mwamwahliki*) us, insulting us, by suggesting that we cannot take care of ourselves, that we must be looked after." Said a third, "If a foreign nation offered to take care of the U.S., it would be terribly insulted; it would interpret it as a suggestion that *it* wasn't capable of looking after its own affairs." "Why should we be any less upset by the suggestion that the U.S. has to oversee our lives and affairs?" asked another.

Personal autonomy and independence are themes that appear again and again in an analysis of Ponapean culture, and *kopwel* is an aspect of these themes. Free Association was not judged as a purely bureaucratic arrangement--which is how most Americans seem to conceptualize it--but as a moral and philosophical issue.<sup>4</sup> Were the Ponapeans to agree to Free Association, many argued, they would effectively be denying personal and communal responsibilities, and thus lose their claim to *mana-man*, a concept often translated as "power" but in this case meaning something much more like sovereignty.

One of the most thoroughgoing Ponapean analyses of their relationship with the U.S. came in just this context of autonomy and sovereignty. In a later section of this paper, I address some of the constraints that limit discussion of public events. At this point I simply note one consequence of these constraints: Ponapean etiquette (Ponapean notions about smoothing the flow of interpersonal relations) does not sanction a great deal of frank expression. Much commentary is oblique, and straightforward statements are likely to be distrusted or even discounted. Kedrus, whose comments I am about to recount, is unusual in his outspokenness, in the strength of the opinions he voices, and in his willingness to be iconoclastic. In spite of, or perhaps because of, these qualities, his opinions are founded upon his own deep feelings about the quality of Ponapean culture and its rightful place in contemporary Ponapean life.

When Kedrus was a young boy, he said, his father was the hardest working man on Ponape. But his father was like *mwein America*, the "American era (on Ponape)." "*Mwein America*," as he called his father, provided for Kedrus and his brothers and, as they grew and married,

for their families. He fed them, clothed them, gave them a home. Kedrus spent his days sleeping and his evenings drinking kava with his friends. Then, Kedrus said, between the births of his third and fourth children he was struck by the realization that if "*mwein America*" died, so would he, his wife, and his children. He saw that he was quite incapable of supporting himself or a family.

Kedrus moved his family to another community, where he had access to unplanted land, and began farming there. For the first few years, before his tree crops began to bear, he had to work night and day, farming and fishing, in order to feed his family. As time went on, however, and his efforts succeeded, he began producing the surpluses necessary for full participation in the political economy. Then his father began sending his brothers to him, to ask for food, a pig, a kava plant, or money. Others in the community likewise started making requests. This, Kedrus said, is when he became a real man, this is when he became independent. But in order to become independent, he continued, one must suffer as he suffered; it hurts when one takes on responsibility for oneself.

This is precisely the relationship contemporary Ponape has with the actual *mwein America*, he maintains. As long as the U.S. is supporting the Ponapeans they are not truly adults, they are children. (Many Ponapeans take pride in the number of mouths they can feed, and it is thus easy to understand why Kedrus's father was so willing to feed his grown sons and their families.)

In Kedrus's account the U.S. occupies a position identical to the father who keeps his children dependent. After he spoke of his father as "*mwein America*," Kedrus explicitly contrasted American rule in Micronesia with the other colonial regimes the islands have known. "Those other rulers were hard on us, but we Ponapeans thrived under that harshness. We had to take care of ourselves." He pointed to the Sokehs Rebellion as an example. The Germans disciplined the Sokehs people and the people fought back. If their rebellion was ultimately unsuccessful, it was nevertheless a powerful reaffirmation of Ponapean dignity. In the American period, by contrast, everything is free and easy. The Americans seem to make few demands and to give the Micronesians whatever they want. As a consequence, the U.S. is systematically sapping the Micronesians' strength.

Then Kedrus delivered his coup de grâce. "Of all the colonial powers that have ruled Micronesia," he said, "the U.S. has been the most perfidious. The other regimes made no bones about it: their interest in Micronesia was self-interest and their policies were openly formulated

to serve those interests. The Ponapeans thrived in opposition to them. The U.S. has steadfastly maintained that its primary concern is the Micronesians' welfare, while doing everything in its power to destroy the vitality of the Micronesian people."

"As for me," Kedrus concluded, "I would prefer an honest tyrant to this treachery any day." His moving oratory notwithstanding, Kedrus was, finally, pessimistic. It was too late, he felt, for the Micronesians to reclaim their independence. The U.S. had succeeded in turning them into a permanently dependent people. While Ponapeans like to speak about independence, Kedrus argued, they won't bring themselves to vote for it. He was surprised when Ponape rejected Free Association in favor of independence, but he saw himself vindicated when it became clear that Ponape was the only state to defeat Free Association and would be carried into it by the majority vote of the FSM.

Kedrus's narrative neatly binds together the notion of *kopwel*--the Ponapeans' insistence upon taking care of themselves--with its complement, the concept of *manaman*. Even more than *kopwel*, *manaman* was at the center of the Ponapean debate about Free Association.

Like *kopwel*, the cultural meanings--and relevance to the issue--of *manaman* are entirely too complex for any single English-language term to bear. Etymologically, *manaman* shares its roots with the Polynesian *mana*, a concept fundamental to cultural anthropological theory. I shall discuss its Ponapean meanings in the contexts in which it was primarily used. People asked, "Is there *manaman* in Free Association?" "Will the Ponapeans have *manaman* under Free Association?" "Does the plebiscite on Free Association recognize the Ponapeans' *manaman*?" These questions were raised repeatedly during Ponapean discussions of political philosophy. In general, the Ponapeans' answer to them, echoed in their plebiscite vote, was a resounding "no."

As Raymond Firth long ago pointed out, it is wrong to assume that the "mana-concept," though it may be found throughout the Pacific islands, has identical connotations wherever it occurs ([1940]1967:177). Nor did Firth try to find a single suitable translation for the term, instead illustrating its usage in a variety of contexts. My analysis of *manaman* here will be limited to the contexts of Free Association and the plebiscite. Before proceeding, however, it should be pointed out that both the Compact of Free Association and the plebiscite are grounded in the very specific political philosophy set out in the United Nations Charter and related documents. Article 6 of the Trusteeship Agreement specifies that the "U.S. shall promote the development of the inhabitants . . . toward self-government or independence, as may be appro-

priate to the particular circumstances of the trust territory and the freely expressed wishes of the people.” General Assembly Resolution 1541 urges independence or free association as a “result of a free and voluntary choice.” The notion of “self-determination” appears repeatedly in documents dealing with decolonization (see McHenry 1975:31-52). Free choice and self-determination are aspects of the Compact of Free Association that were of central concern whenever Ponapeans discussed it.

Ponapeans asked, “Is there *manaman* in Free Association?” raising questions about its official legal status. Would FSM be a truly sovereign state, its nationhood genuine, its independence real, its authority final? After nearly forty years of U.S. rule, many Ponapeans seem convinced that the version of Free Association finally approved by the U.S. negotiators does not have *manaman*.

One man described the agreement’s financial arrangements, including provisions for health care, education, and road building, as being no more than “sugarcoating” meant to discreetly mask America’s determination to ensure its own longterm control of Micronesia. Many argued that the U.S. would continue to hold the *manaman*--the control--just as it has under trusteeship.

A young man in his mid-twenties, discussing the issue with other young men, offered an apposite metaphor. What if, he asked his friends, you were a powerful sorcerer (*sounwinahni*), with the most *manaman* in the land, and another sorcerer asked you to share your sorcery with him? By sharing your sorcery you would (as Ponapeans see it) be diluting your own *manaman* while strengthening that of your rival. Would you share your sorcery with your rival? Of course not. And of course the U.S. will not share its *manaman* with Micronesia, it will not relinquish it; Micronesia will have no *manaman* under Free Association.

On a number of separate occasions I heard people speak of a more profound disillusion. The U.S. is not to be believed under any circumstances, it was suggested. It will do as it wishes. The Compact has no *manaman*, no inherent authority, in the face of American policy. The U.S. will ignore it if it is in its interests to do so. As a document, then, the Compact was seen by many as being impotent and in a sense unreal and untrue. It struck them as an essentially empty facade, devoid of the spiritual vitality that is one aspect of *manaman*.

In Ponapean cultural terms, this lack of *manaman* meant that the Compact would command no respect, had no rank, and did not meet their expectations of hierarchical status. Paradoxically, but in complete

keeping with the contradictory character of Ponapean culture, the Compact's perceived lack of hierarchical status offended Ponapean attitudes about egalitarianism and personal autonomy. Under the terms of Free Association, people told me, Ponapeans would still not be self-governing: without true national status they would continue to have no status.

One of the most adamant discourses made just this point. Ponapeans should rule themselves, a middle-aged man told me. It is right that all peoples should govern themselves. He recited a Ponapean aphorism, "*Ke sohte kak mihmi pahn ohl*," "You can't be beneath another man." Then, drawing upon the same kind of example people used when explaining why Ponapeans had to *kopwel*, "take care of," themselves (that is, that Americans would be insulted if someone suggested that they needed to be taken care of), he said that if Americans were ruled by a foreign power they would feel just as Ponapeans do.

Shortly after the plebiscite, a man reflecting upon the large majorities with which approval of the Compact had carried the other FSM states said, "We Ponapeans voted for *manaman*. The rest of Micronesia voted for USDA." He was referring to the surplus food distributed in some parts of Micronesia by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Ponape long ago refused to accept the free food. To have taken it would have been to fail to *kopwel*. Ponape voted for autonomy, for control of itself, for *manaman*--not for assistance, for food, or for the embarrassing admission that it could not take care of itself.

Finally, the notion of *manaman* was raised in reference to the plebiscite itself. "Does the plebiscite on Free Association recognize the Ponapeans' *manaman*?" people asked. While other questions about *manaman* mirror U.N. concerns about the issues of self-government and independence, this question evokes U.N. stipulations regarding "the freely expressed wishes of the people" and "self-determination." It is also a deeply philosophical question about the relationship between the manner in which the Compact was drafted and its ultimate value and meaning. Firth notes that for the Tikopia the *mana*-concept frequently equates "the end product . . . with the means whereby that product is obtained" (1976:191). The Ponapeans judged the Compact (the end) on the basis of the negotiations (the means) that produced it.

Ponapeans have been colonial subjects for a century now and they have few illusions about the nature of colonialism. Many are dubious about the entire context in which Micronesia's future political status negotiations with the U.S. have taken place. They did not need to read

the classified National Security Action Memoranda and the “Solomon Report” in order to understand that the U.S. had no intention of negotiating away its control over Micronesia (McHenry 1975:15-19, 231-239). They thus confronted the plebiscite, which asked them to confirm the product of those negotiations, with grave doubts about its *manaman*.

“The plebiscite has no *manaman*,” I was told. “In our relations with the U.S., we Micronesians have no *manaman*--we are not sovereign--and so we cannot negotiate for what we want. We have to take what the U.S. will give us.” If the U.S. Congress decides that it will not approve the Compact (and at the time of the plebiscite there were certainly no assurances that it would), it was explained to me, “then we Micronesians are back where we started: a Trust Territory. How can these negotiations have *manaman* if we are not recognized as having an inherent right to freedom; how can this *manaman*--this inherent right--be recognized if we are subject, ultimately, to the decisions of the U.S. Congress?” Asserted someone else, “The U.S. continues to have the *manaman*. It is in control of everything. It shapes the form and the content of the negotiations. It has made the plebiscite suit its own needs, meet its own requirements. We Ponapeans have not established the terms--we have no *manaman*.” Another continued, “We have not been able to negotiate as we wish to because we do not have the *manaman*--we are not sovereign. Our inherent right to independence has never been recognized and so the negotiations themselves have no *manaman*--no authority; they are not between equals.”

In order to demonstrate this lack of *manaman*, Ponapeans pointed repeatedly to the “Referendum on Future Political Status” held in 1975. At that time Ponape District (now Ponape State) voted 3,496 for independence, 2,386 for Free Association.<sup>5</sup> This is a 60 percent majority for independence. The rural Ponapeans (as distinct from the residents of Kolonia and the outer islands) voted 2,645 for independence, 926 for Free Association. This is a 75 percent majority for independence. The districts that eventually became the FSM voted 6,866 for independence, 5,445 for Free Association. This is a 56 percent majority for independence (Petersen 1979). What impact, what meaning, what *manaman* could the *plebiscite* have, Ponapeans asked, if their 1975 vote in favor of independence had been so disregarded that in 1983 they were being asked--or told--to vote for Free Association?

Many people linked the 1975 and 1983 votes. One said, “It seems to me that there have been many votes. None of them has accomplished much and we can only conclude that these previous votes had no *mana-*

*man*. We are thus inclined to be skeptical about this one, too. Why should we think that *it* will have any *manaman*?"

"What happened to our vote for independence in 1975?" asked another man. "We voted heavily, even overwhelmingly, for independence, and what do we get? Free Association. What more demonstration do you want that the U.S. runs everything here just as it pleases, including the negotiations and this so-called plebiscite?"

A sense of continuity with the 1975 independence vote was especially apparent after the plebiscite, when many people were clearly proud of the way Ponape had voted. While few Ponapeans had been willing to discuss their intentions before the plebiscite, some spoke afterward. Those who said they had voted "no" on Free Association frequently recalled the 1975 referendum and how they had then voted for independence. Nothing had happened in the interim, they said, to make them change their minds.

Having established contexts for the ways in which Ponapeans used the *manaman* concept in their deliberations about the plebiscite, I will now consider the translations offered in Kenneth Rehg's and Damian Sohl's *Ponapean-English Dictionary* (1979:56). "1. adjective. Magical, mysterious, spiritual; official. 2. noun. Magic, mysterious or spiritual power; miracle; authority." The contexts in which the term was used make it clear that of these glosses "official" and "authority" are the most immediate, along with "spiritual power," if this is understood in the sense of moral power, the power of a symbol, or the power ascribed to an official status. I refrained from giving the dictionary's translations first for the same reason that I chose to include references to both U.N. documents and the 1975 referendum. Though Rehg and Sohl gloss magical, mysterious, magic, and mysterious power before the other alternatives, it must be understood from the contexts of these discussions that the Ponapeans were not speaking about anything that would ordinarily be considered magical or mysterious. The *manaman* that concerned them differs little from the concepts addressed by the U.N. and their interpretation of the negotiations' *manaman* is as thoroughly rooted in an evaluation of the impact their vote in the 1975 referendum had on those negotiations as it is in their own political culture.

In these contexts *manaman* variously meant official, authority, power, control, sovereignty, and rights. There is as well an underlying concept of inherent, which is roughly equivalent to the mysterious or spiritual characterization offered by Rehg and Sohl. Raymond Firth's "empirical" analysis, in which he proceeded by first considering the contexts where *mana* is used, established that for the Tikopia the con-



cept can connote both means and end, cause and effect. Ponapeans used *mamaman*, in this case, in essentially the same fashion: the negotiations were the means, the Compact the end, and the plebiscite the point at which actions turned into substance. Because the negotiations did not recognize Ponapean *manaman*, they had no *manaman*. Because the negotiations had no *manaman*, the Compact of Free Association has no *manaman*. Because the Compact has no *manaman*, the FSM and Ponape will have no *manaman*.

The Ponapeans' analysis was, in spite of its concreteness, equally spiritual and symbolic. The Ponapeans are under no delusions about their material power or their political and economic place in the world. They are capable of seeing themselves as the small and isolated entity that the world perceives them to be. Their concern lies instead with what English-speakers would call inherent or inalienable rights, not unlike those heralded in the American Declaration of Independence, which asserts that all men are endowed with "certain unalienable rights." America's actions, many Ponapeans maintain, demonstrate that the U.S. does not respect Micronesia's inherent or inalienable right to sovereignty, American claims to the contrary notwithstanding. If the negotiations are not in good faith, then there cannot be any spiritual or moral power--any real meaning--in the documents. The Compact does not "officially" recognize their own ultimate authority.

Some Ponapeans point to Article X of the Compact's annexed "Agreement . . . Regarding Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Security," which stipulates that provisions of the Compact concerning U.S. military control of the region "shall remain in full force and effect until terminated or otherwise amended by mutual agreement." As Ponapeans (and indeed most Micronesians) interpret this clause, the Compact specifies that the U.S. retains military control until it decides otherwise. The history and nuances of this clause are subjects that must be discussed elsewhere, but it remains that Ponapeans interpret the clause as a denial and rejection of their *manaman*.

In the sense that the Ponapeans were more concerned with the official import of the Compact itself than with their material or realpolitik status, the issue might be cast as one of legitimacy, and is thoroughly grounded in traditional or native Ponapean political theory. In *One Man Cannot Rule a Thousand* I describe a Ponapean chiefdom, Upper Awak, in the process of splitting apart in order to form a new chiefdom. I stressed that for the Upper Awak people the greatest problem was not the fissioning process itself but the crisis of legitimacy touched off by a challenge to the genealogical status of their chief. Ponapean politics are

as pragmatic as any, yet that pragmatism is supported by a backbone of genealogical principle. A chief's reign depends upon his personal acumen and political skills, but his *manaman*--as differentiated from acumen and skill--comes from his ancestors and his genealogical position with respect to them. For Ponapeans, genealogy is not an agreed upon, well-established biological fact. It is tenuous, fluid, and subject to argument, interpretation, and historical revision. Genealogy remains, nonetheless, as the source of legitimacy, and its highly flexible character is verification of its importance. If genealogy were rigidly interpreted, either the polity would be a shambles or claims of descent would have no meaning within it. Rivals for political titles each assert their genealogical primacy; the winner rests his argument on the fact of his victory. His genealogy is *the* genealogy--and the source of *manaman*--while he reigns. Approval of the Compact was interpreted as a victory for the U.S. and affirmation of its *manaman*; its corollary was denial of Ponapean *manaman*.

It must be understood, however, that this metaphysical interpretation of the Compact's force did not obscure the Ponapeans' practical analysis of what it holds in store for them. Just before the plebiscite, with timing that was not coincidental, the Ponapeans found themselves confronted with yet another matter to ponder, one that highlighted the dilemma upon which they had already focused their attention. A group of Hong Kong Chinese, worried about the forthcoming end of Britain's lease on the Crown Colony and thinking to take advantage of Free Association's American immigration provisions, offered \$10 million to Ponape for land and citizenship there.

The Ponapeans greeted the proposal with mixed curiosity and humor, but in analyzing it they displayed their marked talent for self-critical reflection and their historical perspective. One wag argued that the Chinese are the only people on earth with a higher birthrate than the Ponapeans, and conjured up a scene of an agitated Ponapean husband urging his wife to bear children more and more quickly so that the Ponapeans would not be outnumbered on their own island. His joke reveals the Ponapean fear, never far from consciousness, of outsiders taking over their land.

Much opposition to the Hong Kong proposal, which was nearly universal, focused upon Ponapean attitudes toward what they speak of as their own irresponsibility. While current law makes it difficult to become an FSM citizen and prohibits noncitizens from owning land, the Hong Kong proposal included the stipulation that the Chinese would become FSM citizens. Whenever the proposal was discussed,

essentially the same predictions were repeated. The Chinese, it was argued,, would immediately begin buying land and votes. Soon they would own most of the island and control the Legislature. The Ponapeans would find themselves living under the same conditions they experienced during the era of Japanese rule on the island. Many Ponapeans claim that they simply do not trust themselves, or their compatriots, to act responsibly. They are frequently critical of the few who have sold land and of their own dependence on cash. Their response to the Hong Kong proposal was rather uniform: given their own perceived shortcomings, the safest course was to avoid temptation by rejecting the proposal. The proposal was rejected by Ponape's governor, after broad consultations (as nearly as I can determine), following genuine historical analysis of the likelihood that too many Ponapeans would choose short-term gains and suffer long-term consequences.

Ponapeans can be, as I have said, quite critical of their own past. The *kopwel* and *manaman* concepts do not function in a historical vacuum. They were asserted so forcefully, I believe, precisely because people saw them threatened. The Hong Kong incident is especially instructive because of the way in which the proposal was seized upon as a means of demonstrating both the lack of *manaman* in Micronesia's relations with the U.S. and the consequences that flowed from its absence. In the course of a discussion about the proposal, among a group of men and women drinking kava, it was suggested, sardonically, that an auction be held. Ponape would go to the highest bidder: the U.S., Hong Kong, or any other interested party. The response was immediate. It came from one of the most consistently thoughtful members of the group. "That is precisely the point. We could not auction Ponape off even if we wished to. We cannot negotiate freely among the nations that might be willing to help us. The U.S. controls us utterly and there is nothing we can do about it. The negotiations have never recognized our *manaman*--our right to choose--and the Compact was, in effect, imposed upon us. It cannot have any more *manaman* than Trusteeship. In fact, its only benefit is that it ends Trusteeship; we will no longer be beholden to the U.N. as well as to the U.S. One master is better than two."

### **Ponapean Reactions to the Plebiscite Campaign**

Ponapeans prepared themselves for the plebiscite and Free Association at length, reflecting painstakingly upon their own history and culture, and then made carefully considered decisions. But their decisions were based upon more than the simple fact of the plebiscite and its por-

tents. The Ponapeans' concern was not only with their relationship to the U.S.; they were also interacting with the national government. While the FSM government is Micronesian, it is not Ponapean. (This is not to argue that it is Trukese or any other *specific* non-Ponapean culture, it is merely to state that Ponapeans do not view it as Ponapean, a point to which I shall return.) This truism is worth noting for at least two reasons, 1) Simply because it is not Ponapean, the FSM government's plebiscite campaign overstepped certain elemental Ponapean notions of propriety, and in doing so managed to provoke some unintended consequences, 2) Because the structure of the FSM government is quite similar to that of the U.S. government--even though in its operations it works quite differently--there were in the entire concept and process of the plebiscite important elements that expected the Ponapeans to make critical political choices in a fashion that had only slight relevance to the character of Ponapean politics.

A plebiscite is not an especially peculiar thing in and of itself. The U.N. has supervised a number of them, some in other Pacific island groups.<sup>6</sup> A majority vote is something that can be empirically verified with relative ease and it serves, to some degree, to bridge the cultural gaps between ruler and ruled, so that there can be some agreement about what is taking place. Though Ponapeans are no strangers to the electoral process, and take voting at least as seriously as most Americans, I am not at all convinced that the plebiscite was a truly Ponapean or Micronesian way of reaching a decision. And this plebiscite, in particular, was not conducted in a fashion that Ponapeans felt comfortable with. At least a few of the negative votes on Free Association may be attributable to the character of the plebiscite--rather than the issues--and the campaign that accompanied it.

It is useful to consider for a moment the etymology of the term plebiscite: what is it we are talking about? According to the *American Heritage Dictionary* (First edition, 1975), the Latin *plebiscitum* is literally "people's decree," but *scitum*, from the past participle *scitus*, has as its meanings "to approve, decree, 'to seek to know' " and is derived from *scire*, "to know," "to separate one thing from another," and "discern." Science derives from this same root.

The term devised to translate plebiscite into Ponapean, *repen kupwur*, is remarkably faithful to the English term's Latin origins. *Repen* is glossed by Rehg and Sohl as "to search" and *kupwur* as an honorific term for "wish, intention, plan, decision, desire, heart." The root of plebiscite means both people's decree and to seek to know. *Repen kupwur* stresses the search for the people's wishes or intentions. The

Ponapeans were told in their own language that the purpose of the plebiscite was to find out what they wanted.

We would do well to recall that as they prepared to vote in the plebiscite many Ponapeans spoke of the 1975 referendum in which they had voted rather unequivocally in favor of independence. They were once again being asked--according to the *repen kupwur* translation--to state their preference. In bold contrast to this stands the FSM portrayal of the plebiscite's purpose: to ratify the Compact of Free Association. Because it is not my intention to analyze the dynamics of Ponape- FSM and Ponape-U.S. relations in this article, I shall not focus upon the reasons for the disparity between Ponapean and FSM views about the aim of the plebiscite. Rather, I wish to consider the ways in which this contradiction served to exacerbate already existing objections for essentially cultural reasons.

I stress that the underlying reasons for Ponapean misgivings about Free Association were multiple and complex, and that the following discussion deals with only one facet of that resistance. It was widely argued in the FSM, post facto, that the Ponapean vote was directly the result of the plebiscite's timing, and I do not want to see my analysis used to bolster that shortsighted interpretation.

After the June 21 date for the plebiscite had been announced during the preceding winter, the Ponape State Legislature passed a resolution asking the FSM president to postpone the plebiscite until people had had more time in which to consider the issues. The plebiscite was not postponed, according to several FSM government officials, for a number of reasons: the U.S. was pressuring FSM and the Marshall Islands to hold their plebiscites as soon as possible after the Palauan plebiscite, which had been held in February; the FSM government wanted to see the Compact approved by the U.S. Congress before the 1984 U.S. presidential elections, in hopes of not having to renegotiate the Compact with a new administration; and there was a palpable fear in the FSM that the Trust Territory bureaucracy, which had been severely limited by the transfer of responsibilities to the Micronesian governments, was trying to reclaim some of its former authority. Though there had been at the outset roughly four months in which to prepare for the plebiscite, the Ponape Legislature's request for postponement and the delays it entailed meant that on Ponape the "education program" that preceded the plebiscite was only about two months long.

When I arrived on Ponape, nine days before the plebiscite, the Ponapeans' dilemma was manifest. Though it was typical of their customary humility that they should claim in response to a direct question that

they do not understand an issue or have an opinion on it, the tone of the conversations and discussions touching upon the plebiscite ranged from indecision to outright confusion. I heard young college graduates with responsible bureaucratic jobs and old men who rarely left their farmsteads say much the same thing: their thoughts were churning, they did not have enough time, and they were not eager to make up their minds.

One elderly man, who had availed himself of every opportunity to hear the issues explained, despite the blindness that ordinarily keeps him from traveling about on Ponape's difficult trails, spoke to me with eloquence and great feeling about his confusion. "It seems," he said, "that every source of information I have turned to offers me a different explanation of what is entailed in this Compact with the United States. I don't know if it's more time that I need or more information, but I certainly don't think that I should have to make such an important decision right now." "What *are* the alternatives?" asked another man. "They haven't been made clear to us."

What was clear was that many people felt strongly about having more time and a more comprehensive education program to aid them in their preparations. On one of the outlying atolls, it was reported to me, people were outspoken in their unhappiness about having a government education team summarize fourteen years of negotiations in a three-day visit. Two expatriates who have long and intimate knowledge of several Ponapean communities that I do not know well gave me nearly identical accounts of local sentiments: throughout the island people were saying that the plebiscite was being held much too soon and that much fuller discussion about the meaning of the Compact was needed. Everywhere, people were saying that they were not happy with their understanding of the issues.

This expressed lack of understanding must be seen for what it was: an indication of the Ponapeans' intense interest in the issues. Most Ponapeans were treating the plebiscite as a matter of the utmost importance, and had begun to suspect that their interest in it was not widely shared in the rest of the FSM. Some went so far as to suggest that the national government wished to avoid serious debate about the Compact and its alternatives. Again, several expatriates with comprehensive knowledge of contemporary Micronesia commented that Ponape seemed to be the only place where there was real discussion of the issues. One remarked that not only were the Ponapeans alone in asking questions about the Compact, they were asking the *right* questions.

Indeed, the perplexity voiced by some of the people was belied by the questions they were asking. As one man put it, "This plebiscite really

must be important: everyone is talking about it!” What appeared as confusion was frequently an expression of concern or of a desire for more time and information. It often seemed that indecision and resolve existed simultaneously, for strong opinions were also voiced--not about how people should vote, but about interpretations of certain of the Compact’s provisions. People explained their understandings of the Compact to one another and as they did they spoke of their wishes for more and better information. Following the presentations of the teams sent out by the education program, it was common to see groups of people clustered around information sheets and Ponapean translations of the Compact. When the Ponapeans voted, it was clear that most had made good use of the materials available to them. They knew what they were doing.

The Ponape State Legislature, having had its request for a postponement rejected by the FSM government, then asked the U.N. Visiting Mission, there to observe the plebiscite, if it could not get the vote postponed. They were again rebuffed. John Margetson, President of the U.N. Trusteeship Council, said that “The issues have been in the air for many years,” and Trusteeship Council Vice President Paul Poudade added, “No one is expected to know the Compact by heart” (*Pacific Daily News*, 23 June 1983). Obviously, there was considerable divergence between the perspectives of the Ponapeans and the U.N. Trusteeship Council. In brief, the difference lies in Ponapean doubts about the level of their *manaman* under the Compact. Given general Micronesian resistance to the requirements for mutual U.S. and Micronesian agreement on termination of the “deniability” aspects of the Compact, and specific Ponapean fears about the rights of the U.S. military in the area, it should surprise no one that they felt they were being forced to vote before they were fully prepared to do so.<sup>7</sup>

The FSM position was most apparent in the days immediately preceding the plebiscite. FSM President Tosiwo Nakayama made radio and television<sup>8</sup> speeches urging voters to approve the Compact: “The Compact of Free Association provides us the vital financial resources necessary to assume this heavy responsibility with genuine promise of continued progress toward our country’s goal. It is time for us to end the trusteeship, assume full governmental responsibility, and to join the world’s community of nations.” Bailey Olter, FSM Vice President, also asked for a “yes” vote, praising in particular the Compact’s foreign affairs aspects and its provisions for “unilateral termination.”<sup>9</sup> Andon Amaraich, who chaired all the FSM negotiations with the U.S., said, “For the first time in all these years we have a chance to say what we

want. We have a very good deal under the Compact. . . . We have been working so hard all these years. I would hate to see it all lost" (*Pacific Daily News*, 19, 23 June 1983).

On the eve of the plebiscite Ponape's radio station opened its broadcast studio to anyone wishing to speak about the following day's vote. Edwel Santos, Speaker of the Ponape State Legislature, made a brief statement over the air. He said that while he thought the "general principle" of Free Association was "well founded," "what bothers me is what I see of our so-called leaders, the propounders of the compact who were buoyed up with false hopes of deliverance, based on the predictions of fanatics and imposters." He went on to note the dissimilarity of the Micronesian islands' traditions and cultures, concluding that "the slogan of unity is and ought to be in this form:

"United we fall (our languages, customs and traditions and concepts in life are different) and like our forefathers who displaced no other men on this sacred altar *Pohn Pehi*, divided or separated we stand."<sup>10</sup>

Though most Ponapeans did not hear Santos's broadcast, it was widely discussed. And it drew an immediate response from the FSM leadership. A number of officials rushed to the radio station and delivered speeches in favor of the Compact. Given the Ponape Legislature's request for a postponement and Santos's known unhappiness with the timing of the plebiscite, it is perhaps not surprising that his speech was interpreted by some as opposing the Compact. Yet his remarks merely referred to the "false hopes" of those who "propounded" the Compact and suggested that these were based upon the predictions of nameless "fanatics and imposters."

These are strong words for Ponapean oratory, to be sure, but all that Santos actually said was that his support for the principle of Free Association was tempered by doubts about "deliverance." He did not say how he was going to vote, nor did he suggest how others should vote. His remarks were, in fact, deliberately vague, and had little, if any, direct effect on the Ponapean vote; he seems to have intended primarily to remind Ponapeans of the divergence between their aspirations and those of the national government. It is ironic that his brief statement drew such pointed response. The ensuing speeches in favor of the Compact served only to validate Ponapean feelings about the official FSM government position and to exacerbate the Ponapeans' growing sense of alienation from the plebiscite. They confirmed the Ponapeans' suspicions that rather than being asked their opinions they were being told how they should vote.

There was a widespread perception on Ponape, expressed by many



Ponapeans and by several expatriates sensitive to the climate of opinion, that every official pronouncement on Free Association was meant to place it in the most favorable possible light. One FSM government official told me that when he asked the head of the FSM's Plebiscite Commission (the body charged with preparing for and conducting the vote) to have the Compact's drawbacks explained to him he was informed that it had none; this, he said, was precisely the way the Compact was presented to the public. An outer-islander reported that his people were insulted when they were visited by the education team sent to prepare them for the vote. "The education team's attitude was that we should simply take the government's word that the Compact was the best arrangement we could get. They didn't want to discuss it with us."

The government's education teams seem to have been widely distrusted. The feeling stemmed in part from a perception that there was little or nothing being said about alternatives to Free Association, or about the arrangement's negative aspects. An expatriate advisor to the FSM government explained that since the plebiscite was about Free Association, there was no need to provide information about other statuses, and argued that even though all the presentations were distinctly neutral, the Ponapeans insisted on interpreting them as pro-Free Association.<sup>11</sup> (In light of the independence vote in the 1975 referendum, the Ponapeans' desire for a discussion of the alternatives was certainly understandable.) Perhaps an even more important factor in the Ponapeans' distrust, however, was the simple fact that most of those serving on the education teams were government employees, drawing--and depending upon--government salaries. Many suggested that the government education program was focused entirely on how much money FSM would be receiving from the U.S. "When so much money is at stake, how can we give complete trust to those whose salaries will be paid with that money?"

It was at this point that informal accusations of interference in the political process were made against the Catholic Church. The Bishop felt obliged to clarify the Church's position by recirculating a pastoral letter which had simply urged people to give the issue serious study; contrary to claims made against it, the letter did not suggest how Catholics should vote. Brother Henry Schwalbenberg, S.J., who had been writing a series of analyses of the Compact and alternative statuses for the Micronesian Seminar in Truk, was in fact brought to Ponape to help prepare government education teams there. But then the local Catholic Church began an education program, sending out its own education teams. These were widely perceived as being relatively free of the

implied restraints on the government teams, and as offering a great deal more information about alternative political statuses.

Antagonisms between the Protestant (Congregationalist) and Catholic communities on Ponape occasionally flare up, though their differences ordinarily remain low-key. Tension increased in the context of the plebiscite. The Catholic Church on Ponape has in recent years taken on a good deal of responsibility for effective political education and there was nothing out of character about its involvement in voter education for the plebiscite. The participants, and the impetus, were entirely Ponapean. The Catholic education teams presented an unbiased set of materials and, to my knowledge, strove to lead unbiased discussions. It was suggested, however, that a few of the more thoughtful and articulate discussion-leaders had difficulty hiding all traces of personal opinion over the course of several hours of give-and-take. Though never directly speaking their minds, several seem to have given some inkling of their unhappiness with aspects of the Compact. If people perceived doubts about the Compact among participants in these Catholic education teams, it is likely that they were sensing support among participants in the government's teams. Everywhere Ponapeans turned, it seems, they found the FSM pushing for approval of the Compact.

I have described the context of the plebiscite itself at such length because it is crucial to an understanding of the Ponapean reaction to it. Evidence suggests that the Ponapeans had ample reason for believing that they were being told how to vote. While FSM support for the Compact may explain the large majorities that approved it in other states, this same support, I think, helps explain Ponapean opposition to Free Association. The emphasis placed on individual autonomy within the fabric of Ponapean social and cultural life is a part of the explanation, one to which I will return. But I wish first to point to a much more direct way in which Ponapean custom (*tiuhk en Pohnpei*)--so vividly affirmed in Edwel Santos's speech--was contradicted by FSM pressures for approval of the Compact.

A very specific and fundamental thread running through all of Ponapean culture is *kanengamah*. I find it one of the most difficult to translate of all Ponapean terms. (I devote several pages of the Epilogue in *One Man Cannot Rule a Thousand* to my own misinterpretations of it.) The Rehg and Sohl dictionary glosses it as "patient," which is only one of its many meanings. The term is compounded of *kanenge*, "substance; inside of something, contents," and *mah*, "old, aged; ripe." It bears, then, the connotation that the self--the substance of the self--is mature, but this begs the question in a sense, because *kanengamah*, or

the ability to *kanengamah*, is that which is expected of a mature person. In some ways its closest approximation in English might be “face,” in the sense of “saving face.”

*Kanengamah* is a quality of being. It parallels *manaman* in its importance as a cause of behavior or a means to an end, but it seems to be an acquired, or learned, quality rather than inherent or ascribed. I have heard it described as the *poahsoan*, the “core” or “base,” of a person. It can also be an action--a person can *kanengamah*--but when it is used in this way it is essentially an intransitive verb. The concept of *mahk*, which has its own multiplicity of meanings, sometimes serves, albeit loosely, as a sort of transitive form of *kanengamah*.

One of *kanengamah*'s meanings is akin to “fortitude.” It allows one to endure, to bear up under unfortunate circumstances without expressing one's anguish. But it also means, in the context of daily life, simply not expressing one's sentiments, feelings, or beliefs. It can mean, as I have heard it put, constructing and keeping a blank countenance.

The importance of *kanengamah* in the present context derives from this deeply engrained habit of being. It is fundamental to Ponapean culture and to Ponapeans' expectations of proper social behavior. In the course of the many discussions about the plebiscite, in the days leading up to it, only once or twice did I hear someone say how they would vote. In a matter of such great importance, a direct expression of opinion comes only in exceptional circumstances.<sup>12</sup> As with so many other aspects of Ponapean culture, the role played by *kanengamah* in the Ponapean plebiscite vote is intricate and complex.

Unwillingness to express an opinion, about the vote in this case, is at its most manifest level simply an element of courtesy. “What if you were to favor one candidate,” I was told, “while someone else favored another? If you speak about your position, how you're going to vote, then you'll offend the other fellow and he'll feel bad. It would be the same if he were to speak his mind.” Expatriates sometimes misunderstand this element of Ponapean etiquette. Several spoke of how Ponapeans, when asked how they were planning to vote, would respond by asking for the expatriate's opinion. This was mistakenly interpreted as an indication of how easily the Ponapeans could be swayed, how blindly they followed the opinions of leaders.

At a deeper level, *kanengamah* reflects another aspect of Ponapean courtesy. Any attempt to *directly* influence another adult's behavior is perceived as improper deportment. “I don't like to give the impression that I am telling others what they should do. So I would never tell anyone how I am going to vote: it might be interpreted as a suggestion that

that is how I think they should vote. That would be embarrassing both to them and to me." In this *sense kanengamah* is related to *kopwel* and *manaman*. One should never imply that another cannot care for himself, or that another is not or cannot be autonomous.

*Kanengamah* holds an even more profound meaning in the context of the plebiscite. It was set before me in a discussion with a Ponapean philosopher who was teaching me about the *kanengamah* concept in general. "What if there is a man who helps me, takes care of me, has given me--over the years--food, clothing, money, help of various kinds, and now his brother is a candidate [for political office]? If I should be asked how I'm going to vote when I am in fact planning not to vote for this man's brother, and I say that I'm not going to vote for the brother, I will hurt the feelings of this man who's done so much for me. So I *mahk*, I say nothing," (In this *case mahk* can be understood as the transitive form of *kanengamah*.)

I confess that when I first recorded this conversation it did not occur to me that I had just been given a commentary on the plebiscite. In retrospect, however, his choice of example coincides with a host of examples people employed at the time of the vote. The plebiscite was on people's minds; when they spoke, the topic often managed to express itself. Here is a thoroughly polite, properly *kanengamah* Ponapean gentleman, speaking to an American he does not know well. The Ponapean chooses to illustrate *kanengamah* with a pleasantly ambiguous parable about the provision of food, clothing, money, and help of various kinds, and the expectation of a favorable vote. How should courteous Ponapeans respond in such a situation? *Kanengamah*, of course!

If we now consider the speeches given by the FSM leaders and the general Ponapean perception of the FSM position, we can see that preparations for the plebiscite, though conducted by Micronesians, were not carried out in a fashion culturally acceptable to the Ponapeans. Though this may strike some as trivial, it was of the utmost significance to the Ponapeans because it turned the entire plebiscite process into a symbol of precisely the kind of politics the Ponapeans saw themselves opposing.

I have, of course, no direct evidence of how any individual Ponapean voted in the plebiscite, so I cannot verify what individual Ponapeans said about their reactions to the conduct of the plebiscite. But relatively few people in the areas where I gathered most of my information voted for Free Association, and I have no explicit reasons for doubting those who told me, after the fact, that they had voted "no." Some Ponapeans said that they were quite disturbed, even insulted, by the radio speeches made in favor of Free Association.

Sitting among a group of kava-drinkers on the day of the plebiscite, when (discussion of the vote was particularly intense, a man explained to his companions why he had been so angered by the preceding night's speeches. He said that the speakers were "*kampainih*"--that is, "campaigning" (obviously an English loan word)--in favor of the Compact. "Those men were silent all through the period preceding the plebiscite, and then spoke only at the last minute. They did not care to engage in discussion with us, and help us get at the real meaning of the Compact by explaining their interpretations of it. The only purpose of such a tactic was to swing the vote in favor of the Compact. They were trying to influence those who hadn't yet made a decision or were irresolute. They were campaigning, just as if they were running for office [that is, they were making empty promises]. How can we ever trust these men again, after they have behaved in this fashion?"

A few weeks later, in another part of the island, I was speaking with an old acquaintance for the first time since the plebiscite. The matter of the radio speeches surfaced. "Those speeches really upset me, you know. They were like political campaign speeches. They just weren't Ponapean; they were improper and unsettling. They should not have been made. In fact, they may have worked just the opposite of the way they were intended; they may have had negative effects. We Ponapeans *mahngki* [*mahk*, again in the sense of a transitive form of *kanengamah*] our intentions, especially when it comes to such a public issue as a vote. We don't say what we're going to do--we hold it in. If you let your thoughts and your feelings out or if you tell people what you're going to do, you disturb them and they may well respond in unpredictable or directly contrary ways.

"I had been thinking that I would vote in favor of Free Association. Then I heard all these speeches telling me to vote 'yes.' I was so indignant, I went and voted 'no,' just to spite them. And I know that there were others around here who did just the same."

As with the allegory about the generous man whose brother becomes a candidate, my initial understanding of this commentary was quite literal. Again, when I see it placed in the context of all I heard at the time, I am inclined to perceive something a bit deeper. In the course of this short narrative my acquaintance says that he changed his vote to spite those who did last-minute campaigning in favor of the Compact, but there is a broader meaning in what he says. This is not a challenge to his veracity but an interpretation of his rationale.

Ponapeans analyzed the Compact of Free Association through terms of reference derived directly from their own cultural and historical

experiences. Concepts like *manaman*, *kopwel*, *kanengamah* and *mahk*, and *repen kupwur* expressed for them fundamental issues that English-speakers might formulate as dignity, sovereignty, and self-determination. They experienced the plebiscite, as well as Free Association, as a direct refutation of these fundamental categories. The very way in which the issues were set before them--that is, as a *fait accompli* to which they were to give formal approval--seemed to confirm all their misgivings about the nature of Free Association. As the majority of Ponapeans understood the plebiscite and FSM preparations for it, they were being told *how* to vote, despite the fact that the Ponapean translation of plebiscite accurately described it as a search for their opinions and desires.

By the time the Ponapeans voted, then, they had experienced a number of things that disturbed them. Their doubts about Free Association were aggravated rather than assuaged. The FSM approach to the plebiscite backfired: instead of satisfying Ponapean aspirations for true self-government, the plebiscite thwarted them. Most non-Ponapeans concerned with the vote, Micronesian and expatriate alike, did not understand this.

It is ironic that the generally accepted interpretation of Ponape's vote is that it was a protest against the short duration of the education program or the national government, and that it was orchestrated by the opposition of Ponapean leaders. This shows little comprehension of the vote's underlying meaning. The vote's implications for Ponapean relations with the FSM national government are manifold and I address them elsewhere (Petersen 1985), but as I have demonstrated here, the Ponapeans are deeply concerned about self-determination; to the extent that they perceived their national government acting as part of the political process keeping them from it, their vote can be interpreted as a protest against certain of the national government's policies. But any interpretation that stresses the Ponapeans' vote as largely or primarily a vote against the FSM government is both unfortunate and mistaken.

In the days and weeks following the plebiscite it quickly became the received truth that Ponapeans voted against the Compact because the education program had failed. There were three schools of thought about this, not mutually exclusive. The first was that the education program had started too late and that there simply had not been enough time in which to convince the Ponapeans of the Compact's value. The second held that the education program or the members of the education teams were in fact biased against the Compact and had persuaded the Ponapeans to oppose it. The third was that the Ponapeans were too

arrogant and lazy to learn from the education program and voted against the Compact out of willful ignorance.

The first and third of these propositions share the assumption that the purpose of the education program was to convince the Ponapeans that they should vote in favor of the Compact. Had there been ample time for the program to be effective, it is argued, or had the Ponapeans paid more attention to it, they would have voted as FSM wished. The second interpretation focuses the blame upon Ponapeans who may have strayed from the FSM's pro-Compact position. In each case we are confronted with a straightforward denial of, or obliviousness to, the great care with which Ponapeans prepared themselves for the plebiscite. Thus the Ponapean perception that FSM was telling them what to do, rather than asking them what they wanted, was unconsciously shared by the national government and the expatriate advisers and observers.

The peculiar notion that the education program was biased against the Compact clashes jarringly with the widespread Ponapean sentiment that the government's program did little but praise the Compact. There were charges that Ponapean leaders opposed the Compact and that that opposition had filtered into the education program. As I have pointed out, however, most Ponapean leaders took great care to avoid any semblance of open partisanship. From the Ponapeans themselves and the handful of expatriates who speak Ponapean and listened to the education programs, came strong assurances that the leaders of the programs had not spoken against the Compact.

Few Ponapeans gave credence to claims that the brevity of the education program was responsible for their "no" vote. Given that the request to have the plebiscite postponed was made explicitly in order to permit more study of the Compact, it is significant that after the plebiscite only a few Ponapeans thought it likely that their decisions would have been changed by more education. The education programs and the national government's refusal to postpone the vote had simply verified their own suspicions about what the Compact held in store for them. The confusion that people expressed was resolved, finally, by their interpretation not only of the Compact but of the way in which the vote on it was presented to them.

Ponapean leadership is highly responsive to community opinion. I believe that it is a grave misunderstanding of Ponapean society to attribute the defeat of the Compact to the opposition of the island's leaders. The evidence suggests that a two-thirds majority of rural Ponapeans voted against Free Association because they judged it inferior to independence. The manner in which the FSM presented the issue

merely confirmed that judgment. Indeed, the very notion of a plebiscite runs against Ponapean (and Micronesian) sensibility. The Ponapeans found themselves forced into what they perceived as the most profound decision they had ever had to make; they were asked to vote in an election that essentially ignored their own sensibilities about the nature of decision making. As I suggested in "Ponape's Body Politic" (1984a:126-127), Ponapeans regard legal decisions as perpetually negotiable. Contexts and conditions change, and as they do, so must decisions.

Plebiscites, which grow out of Western European tradition and its colonial history, take for granted that there is some single most acceptable answer to a vexed sort of question. Euro-American sensibilities may be comfortable with such solutions, but one wonders if there is anything inherently "democratic" about a process that obscures more complex perspectives on means of resolving dilemmas. The FSM plebiscite may have satisfied U.S. and U.N. proprieties, but it hardly reflected the careful, consensus-achieving, eternally flexible kind of processes that characterize the Ponapean body politic. In a sense the Ponapean "no" vote can be interpreted as a vote against the plebiscite itself.

### **What Ponapeans Were Voting For**

Throughout the summer of 1983 Ponapeans expressed deep concern about the quality of their culture and its future. Confronted with a plebiscite, they responded with historical reflection, cultural analysis, and political courage. In drawing this paper to a close, I wish to consider the Ponapeans' commentary on their own culture, as it exists in 1983, and the ways in which that commentary represents the Ponapean vision of the future they saw themselves charting with their votes.

It seems necessary to note a common-sense fact that is easily lost sight of in an analysis such as this. Ponapeans are, like any other people, a diverse group: some are more committed to the political dimensions of life than others, some are more articulate, and some more impetuous. There are Ponapean cynics and skeptics and, perhaps, a few fools and innocents. Since most of what I have recorded comes from conversations among Ponapeans and not from responses to questions posed by me, it is possible that I am reporting the sentiments of a slightly more loquacious subset of the generally taciturn Ponapean population. There are of course some people with whom I have more contact than others and of whom I have more knowledge. Of this group two men admitted to me that they had not been paying much attention to the education programs. One of them said, "This plebiscite really must be important:



everyone is talking about it!" I know that neither of these men participates in the communal politics of their chiefdoms with much enthusiasm and that both are occasionally chided for their relative indolence. Their interest in the plebiscite was consistent with their involvement in politics in general. The pair stood out in contrast to their neighbors.

Among those I know well there are also a few men and women who have been able, or cared, to express their thoughts in more detail than most. I cannot say if this is because they are more articulate or simply because of our greater intimacy. I have tested the ideas they helped me formulate and found that they seem to ring true to other Ponapeans. It is worth repeating that much of what follows comes from people I have known for ten years and who have a good understanding of what it is that I do while I am on Ponape.

It should also be noted that I did encounter Ponapeans whose opinions differed from those I analyze here. Some argued that despite its drawbacks, Free Association would bring a swift end to Trusteeship and that this should be Micronesia's first priority. (This seemed, in fact, to be the unofficial FSM government position on the plebiscite.) I heard a handful of Ponapeans speak positively about Free Association, but many of those who voted in favor of the Compact claim that they did so only in order to rid Micronesia of American Trusteeship. The vote in favor of Free Association, which was heavy in Kolonia and on the outer islands, deserves full consideration but it must be addressed elsewhere.

Near the beginning of this paper I discussed Ponapean historical awareness and self-criticism in order to show that Ponapeans viewed their participation in the plebiscite as a historical act with both antecedents and consequences. Throughout the body of this work I have tried to illustrate the ways in which Ponapeans analyzed the social and political pressures bearing in upon them: they employed their own cultural terms to ensure that the decisions they arrived at would help them preserve their culture.<sup>13</sup> It is one thing for a scholar to set forth such arguments, another to show that it was truly the Ponapeans--and not the scholar--who were engaged in this reflection and analysis. It is now my intention to illuminate the quality of the cultural analysis Ponapeans applied to the 1983 plebiscite.

Several specific aspects of Ponapean culture were less directly connected to the plebiscite issues than the concepts of *kopwel*, *manaman*, and *kanengamah*, but still had great impact on the Ponapean vote. One of these was the identification of generosity as a--perhaps the--central element in Ponapean *tiahk*, "culture" or "custom." A second was the role this deep-seated generosity played in creating a sense of trust within

communities. And a third was the resiliency of Ponapean culture--its depth and strength and the qualities of endurance it has shown. Ponapeans contrast these aspects of their lives with what they know of the ways of American culture, and their vote in the plebiscite was at least in part meant as a reaffirmation of Ponapean culture.

I have described elsewhere (1984b:352-353) the continuity that the Ponapeans' active involvement in cultivating their land gives to their culture. Agricultural produce and the work that goes into processing it remain important cultural symbols. During the weeks surrounding the plebiscite, I heard several people speak of their land as the Ponapean equivalent of Americans' *mwohni kohl*--"gold money" or "hard currency." One man explained how the American paper currency in circulation, upon which people have come to place so much reliance, is backed up by gold that is not on Ponape or in Micronesia but in the United States. Even under Free Association, he observed, the bullion symbolized by the currency will remain in the U.S. "My gold is [in] my land. The money here is American and the gold that it stands for is in America. Ponape's gold is here: it is our land."

The Ponapean term for land, in this context, is *sahpw*, and as a cultural concept it of course has connotations that differ from "land" as an English-language term. Ponapeans plant much of their land--in many parts of the island, all of it--in permanent tree crops. The Ponapean staple, breadfruit, grows on enormous trees that bear for scores of years. While *sahpw* is used as a term for land in opposition to the sea or the sky, for a particular piece of land or farmstead, it also means planted land, land that feeds people, in opposition to *wehe* or *nanwel*, the "jungle." The Ponapean word for land connotes the place where people live, from whence they derive their livelihood, the crops that surround their homes. To have land is to have crops, to have food, and to therefore be a member of a community.

The phrase *lopkupwu*, "to cut down the food-basket," was another recurring image. Ponapeans store food in baskets hung from roof beams. When a guest arrives, the order is given to *lopkupwu*, cut down the baskets and feed the guest. (Cf. Paul Dahlquist's dissertation [1972], which is entitled "Kohdo mwenge," a Ponapean greeting which means literally "Come eat.") *Lopkupwu* connotes more than merely cutting down the basket and offering the food, however. The phrase refers, in a broad sense, to the Ponapean concepts of hospitality and generosity, and even more broadly to the whole notion of Ponapean *tiahk*, "culture."

There are really two kinds of *tiahk*, some Ponapeans say. One is *tiahk en wahu*, the *tiahk* of "honor" or "respect." This form might best be

translated as “custom.” It refers to ritual proprieties, for example, the way a feast is to be conducted, and is the sort of thing that one learns as one becomes a mature person involved in the formal life of the community. The second *tiahk*, a friend explained to me, is *tiahk en Pohnpei*, literally “Ponapean culture.” Used in this latter sense, *tiahk* does not refer to formal behavior so much as it implies being Ponapean in values, attitudes, beliefs, and general behavior. And *lopkupwu*, “cutting down the basket,” is, my friend suggested, one of the central characteristics of this Ponapean culture. “Ponapean culture cannot be destroyed [*ohla*]. Some of the apparent aspects of it--the *tiahk en wahu*, the ritual and political formalities--will change, of course. These may become less dramatic than they are now and perhaps lose some of their importance. But the Ponapean way of being--the *tiahk en Pohnpei*--doesn't change very much. We still take care of each other.” Then in what is a Ponapean variation on the Socratic method, he made a seemingly absurd statement that forced me to put what he was telling me to use. “I am not Ponapean, how can I do [or act according to] Ponapean culture?”

I pondered this awhile and then asked if he was telling me that he was part Indonesian (his father's father came to Ponape from Indonesia or Malaya, no one seems quite sure). “Yes. I'm only part Ponapean.”

“But,” I responded, “blood doesn't matter. Your parents were born here, you were born here.”

“Which is important, then, blood or culture?”

“It seems to me that it's what little children learn as they grow.”

“Ah, so you do understand what I am saying about Ponapean culture. You see, that which is on the surface, that which is apparent, the ritual formalities we learn as adults, for example, those are the parts of culture that change, But what lies underneath this, making us Ponapeans--the real *tiahk*--that doesn't change. This is what we learn when we are children, as we become Ponapean. We may take on new things, like money, and on the surface it will appear that we have changed. But it's still Ponapeans who are using the money and the way that we use it is Ponapean. Ponapean culture can't be destroyed.”

At the heart of this resilient culture is generosity, hospitality, “taking care of each other,” “cutting down the food-basket.” And Ponapeans employ this deep-seated expectation of generalized benevolence in explaining other aspects of their culture. I used as an example of Ponapean self-criticism the ironic observation that little economic development would take place unless all the breadfruit trees were cut down. I first heard that in 1974. It was repeated to me in 1983, but in a very different context.

“Ponapeans resist changes. We try to keep foreign things at a distance, We work to preserve our *tiahk*, and I don’t mean the feasts and ritual formalities. I mean that we preserve our traditional ways of treating each other and taking care of each other. In fact, one of the reasons that so little seems to get accomplished here is that it’s so easy for us to go off on a visit. We can go anywhere and know that we’ll get fed, without any worries about whether we’ve gotten much work done. We can always depend upon *lopkupwu*--someone will cut down a basket for us. *This* is the nature of Ponapean culture; it is what we are trying to preserve.”

When a Catholic priest with a deeply empathic knowledge of Ponapean culture delivered a sermon centered on the New Testament story of Mary and Martha, the two sisters who quarreled over whether it was better to attend to the demands of hospitality or to sit and listen to Jesus preach, he spoke at length about Ponapean hospitality and the stress laid upon community service. “It is easy for you to get so caught up in the welcome [*kasumwoh*], that your responsibilities to your own families are set aside,” he warned. Someone commenting about the quality of the sermon, later that day, chortled about the references to Ponapean welcomes. “Yeah, that sure sounds like Ponapeans. We really like to give things away to other people--that’s what we think welcomes are for.”

There is in all of this the Ponapeans’ dramatic sense that their culture is distinct from the ways of other peoples, particularly Americans. Ponapeans have a degree of admiration for Western technology and the efficiencies of its social organization, but they quite specifically wish to avoid being swallowed up by them. They are dubious about the nature of progress. It was precisely this sort of historical and cultural reflection that characterized their analysis of the issues entailed in the plebiscite.

Ponapeans maintain a desire to keep the body politic small, so that communities may exercise direct oversight of their leaders. The internal organization of the Ponapean community emphasizes egalitarianism and generosity, the spirit of *lopkupwu*. Ponapeans perceive this habit of taking care of each other as fundamental to their culture, so much so that at times it actually seems counterproductive; this sense of being well taken care of is so complete that it is sometimes blamed for fostering irresponsibility. But this apparent irresponsibility is for Ponapeans the stuff of freedom. Generosity has two faces: that which is sometimes constricting, when demands must be met, is at other times liberating, when someone else has shouldered the burden.

Despite my attempts to place in their proper context the various concepts Ponapeans used in their analyses of Free Association, the very fact

of my analysis draws these concepts out of context. *Kopwel*, *manaman*, and *kanengamah* all exist within the broader context of Ponapean social life. Each in its own way is an aspect of the dignity with which so many Ponapeans try to conduct their lives. I have tried to show that most Ponapeans did not lose sight of this dignity as they made their decisions. The great emphasis they place upon responsibility to the community is but one face of a two-sided coin. The second is the community's freedom: both its inherent right to be self-governing and the right of every one of its members to have a part in governing it. Within the context of the Ponapean community, *kopwel* connotes responsibility, *manaman* connotes liberty, and *kanengamah* connotes respect for both the self and the other. Within this community of shared responsibility and respect, the Ponapeans find autonomy.

### Conclusion

This, then, was the context of the 1983 plebiscite on the Compact of Free Association. Ponapeans scrutinized the terms of the Compact, discussed them at length, analyzed the conditions under which they were being told to vote, and a majority decided that Free Association did not adequately fulfill their requirements for self-government. I have tried to demonstrate both that the Ponapeans' evaluation of those conditions was quite objective and thoroughgoing, and that their decision was made on the basis of their own values, not the preconceptions of those who drafted the Compact.

*The Honolulu Advertiser* (23 June 1983) pronounced Ponape's vote a "sour note." It is unfortunate that this brave attempt at self-determination should be so misunderstood, but the error may be acute testimony to our disenchantment with our own civilization. "People fascinated by the idea of progress," writes Milan Kundera, "never suspect that every step forward is also a step on the way to the end and that behind all the joyous 'onward and upward' slogans lurks the lascivious voice of death urging us to make haste." Perhaps it is just because the Ponapeans are only marginally fascinated by the idea of progress that they see it so clearly as the way to an end they do not seek.

### NOTES

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Ponape for their unceasing hospitality, friendship, and guidance. My wife, Victoria Garcia Petersen, has helped me with this work in more ways than I can hope to acknowledge.

Some readers may find my use of Ponapean commentaries in this paper verbose or redundant. I do not apologize. Recent events suggest that the people of Ponape will be afforded few opportunities to make themselves heard, and my garrulity is meant to provide them with at least one secure platform.

1. The ballot was in two parts. The first part asked whether the voter approved ("Yes") or disapproved ("No") the Compact of Free Association. The second part asked if, in the event of the Compact's defeat, the voter wished the FSM government to pursue independence or some other relationship with the U.S. In Ponape State there were 4,830 votes for independence on the second half of the ballot, 1,916 for some other relationship.

2. The exceptions are groups that speak Mortlockese (a Trukese dialect) and the Polynesian dialects of Nukuoro and Kapingamarangi atolls.

3. *The Book of Luellen* (Bernart 1977) is a Ponapean history of Ponape. While it has a chronological framework, its underlying emphasis is on places, not chronicity.

4. The expatriate American community in Ponape State, which consists almost entirely of government employees and their families, was largely of the opinion that differences between Free Association and independence are inconsequential.

5. These figures exclude the vote in Kosrae, which was still administered as part of Ponape District in 1975.

6. Unlike the other plebiscites in which it has played a part, the U.N. did not supervise the Micronesian plebiscites. It had only observer status. There is a difference of opinion about why this was so.

7. Opposition to long-term U.S. military control of Micronesia has been widespread in the FSM. As recently as July 1982, the U.N. Visiting Mission encountered it among the general population and at every level of government (Trusteeship Council 1983:7-11). While the issue is complex (even a member of the U.S. delegation to the U.N. misinterpreted the relevant parts of the Compact), Ponapean sentiments about it do not seem to have wavered.

8. Ponape had at that time a privately owned television station (the radio station is government owned and operated) that broadcast to about one hundred subscribers in Kolonia. It has subsequently ceased broadcasting.

9. This "unilateral termination" does not include the provisions for U.S. military control, i.e., "deniability." These can only be terminated by "mutual agreement" of both the FSM and the U.S.

10. Some of Santos's language is drawn from the Preamble to the FSM Constitution, which reads in part, "Our ancestors, who made their homes on these islands, displaced no other people." The Ponapeans' name for their island is Pohnpei, which refers to an account of their ancestors, who built the island "upon an altar" (*pohn pehi*) that had been raised atop a stone they found jutting out of the sea.

11. See note 1.

12. Only one Ponapean told me how he was going to vote before the plebiscite. He said that he would vote for Free Association and independence, on the two parts of the ballot,

in order to bring Trusteeship to a sooner, rather than later, end. I know him well enough to have doubts about whether he actually voted this way. Kedrus, who told me the story about “*mwein America*,” told me how he voted shortly after he had done so but before the polls had closed.

13. One of the first decisions made during the Ponapean Constitutional Convention in 1983 was to draft the Constitution in Ponapean. This was done expressly as a means of ensuring that the Ponapean Constitution serves Ponapean cultural needs.

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