## EDITOR'S FORUM

# PONAPE'S BODY POLITIC: ISLAND AND NATION

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This is a paper about politics and community on Ponape, in Micronesia's Eastern Caroline Islands, and an ethnographer's perceptions of the direction and rate of political change there. The people of Ponape have regular, often daily, interactions with their chiefs. Essential concepts of government--notions of a hierarchy of legitimate authority and a division of responsibility in community organization and action--are deeply embedded in Ponapean culture. Because of the island's rugged terrain and highly dispersed settlement pattern, it is more useful to conceptualize Ponapean communities in terms of families participating in joint activities than in simple territorial terms. These communities are simultaneously political units: they are the "sections" (Ponapean *kousapw*), the numerous, small, minor chiefdoms which in turn constitute Ponape's five paramount chiefdoms *(wehi).* Ponapean politics, which permeate every aspect of life on the island, are fundamentally communal. I am, in this paper, concerned with exploring the ways in which the communal, face-to-face nature of indigenous Ponapean politics determines Ponapean responses to both the American-instituted system of bourgeois democracy on Ponape itself and the developing federal system that is intended to bind Ponape to the other islands in the Central and Eastern Carolines as the semi-autonomous Federated States of Micronesia (FSM).

My thesis is that apparent turmoil in Ponapean and Micronesian governments belies a more deeply rooted process of adaptation that will gradually reshape the structure of the electoral/bureaucratic system in a fashion that allows it to respond to the flow of Ponapean culture and politics.[1] The Ponapeans' strong sense of self-government, inherent in the communal nature of their polity, should ensure a successful adaptation of this new political structure; but this same sense of face-to-face politics may pose substantial problems for *inter*island relations. The authority of Ponapean leadership is tested continually within the community and derives its effectiveness from the well of trust that the responses to these challenges create. Where such constant interactions are impossible, as be-

tween distant islands, leadership may be perceived as imposed and therefore to be resisted.

I shall first outline the traditional Ponapean political system both in terms of its formal structure and its place in social life. Then I shall describe the American-introduced political system. An analysis of the relationships between Ponapean culture and politics, in the context of Ponapean responses to the introduced system, will follow; and, finally, the integration of Ponape into the FSM will be considered.

## The Traditional Ponapean Polity

Ponape is by Micronesian standards a large island. It is roughly circular, with a diameter ranging from 10 to 12 miles and an area of about 130 square miles. Its central peaks rise to 2,500 feet and draw approximately 200 inches of rain a year. Ponape lies 7° north of the equator and about 2,500 miles west-southwest of Hawaii. It is lushly tropical and fertile. It was first settled perhaps two thousand years ago. Its population was reported as twenty-one thousand in the 1980 census, but I believe that this figure may be low by as much as 20 percent. The smaller figure was roughly the size of the island's population at first contact in the late 1820s. The introduction of new diseases, especially smallpox, reduced the population to about three thousand in 1900, by which time the decline appears to have halted.

Ponapean oral traditions suggest that the island's polity has always been in flux, oscillating between eras of centralization, when a few large paramount chiefdoms controlled the entire island, and fission, when the island was fragmented into a number of smaller, autonomous chiefdoms. A series of political struggles occurring just before and after the early contact period left the island divided into the five paramount chiefdoms that it now comprises. Each of these is in turn made up of fifteen to fifty sections--the minor chiefdoms--with populations ranging from about twenty-five to two hundred. The paramount chiefdoms are each ruled by two chiefs: the Nahnmwarki, who is the paramount, and the Nahnken, who might be likened to a prime minister or, in Pacific terms, a talking chief. The paramountcies are controlled by matrilineages and matrilineal clans, and men with hereditary claims to titles work their way upward through a ranked system of titles, their progress being determined by community service; age; genealogy; political acumen; personality; and general skill in such things as cultivation of certain prestige crops (especially yams and kava), accumulation of traditional knowledge, and oratory. The several Nahnken and the men in the ranked lines of titles below them are sons of

paramount chiefs or men in the ruling matrilineages; their political ascendancy is determined by what are essentially the same criteria. Though the sacred character of paramount chieftainship has declined in the course of 150 years of culture contact and a century of Christianity, these men are still reckoned to possess mana (Ponapean *manaman*), the supernatural force attributed to almost all Pacific island chiefs.

The sections are likewise ruled by two chiefs and their respective ranked lines of titles. Section chieftainships are generally controlled by matrilineages and have their own sources of mana. Advancement within the ranks of section titles works in much the same fashion as in the paramount chiefdoms. However, section politics operate on a more personal level and advancement within them is less predictable. Sections are the fundamental Ponapean communities, and most basic Ponapean social activities that reach beyond the level of individual families are organized within and through the sections. Ponapean social life is orchestrated by an unceasing round of feasting, and it is the presence of the section chiefs and other title-holders that bestows authenticity and legitimacy upon these events. Given the rapid pace of political, economic, and social change in contemporary Micronesia, it is easy to perceive traditional Ponapean politics as anachronistic and irrelevant, but my entire experience of Ponapean culture argues that it is this complex and multilayered system that continues to integrate and charge with meaning the lives of most Ponapeans.

## Colonial History

The current status of Ponapean chiefdoms is as much the product of the island's colonial history as it is of its autochthonous culture. While they appear at first glance quite unconnected to the modern political scene, the chiefdoms in fact apprise us of both the shape of Ponape's body politic and the general nature of politics in Ponapean life; the system of electoral and bureaucratic politics that has been developed during the past thirty-five years of American administration is, after all, being introduced among Ponapeans, and it is their response to it that will ultimately determine the system's success or failure.

During the course of almost half their contact history, Ponapeans dealt with Europeans as political equals. Ponapeans took an active role in trade and in their own conversion to Christianity. When the Spanish attempted to establish control over the island in 1886, the Ponapeans resisted them, with marked success. It was not until the coming of the Germans in 1899 and the ill-fated rebellion of Sokehs chiefdom against them

in 1910 that the Ponapeans found themselves no longer masters of their homeland. The Germans instituted coconut-planting schemes, corvée labor, and a system of land tenure that gave each adult male title to a plot of land, thereby depriving the chiefs of the single most important material manifestation of their power: their claim to land. The Japanese, who succeeded the Germans in 1914, began to develop Ponape as a plantation. Ponapeans were in a sense peripheral to this plan: most of the labor was provided by immigrant Japanese. In time the Ponapeans might have found themselves displaced (they certainly feared that this might be the case), but most Ponapean men received a Japanese education and some learned semiskilled trades. Japan's interest in its Micronesian territory was economically motivated enough to have resulted in substantial economic development of the islands even as the islanders themselves were relegated to marginal positions.

When the United States took control of what became the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, following World War II, economic development specialists urged that immediate steps be taken to revive Ponape's war-devastated economy. With a few minor exceptions, however, the islands were ignored for the next fifteen years, and the Ponapeans remained entirely subject to colonial rule. An islandwide legislature was established by the American administration in the early 1950s, ostensibly to begin the process of education for self-government specified in the United Nations Trusteeship Agreement. The quality of rule during this period depended largely on the personal qualities of the district administrators, who were able to govern quite arbitrarily. The United States wished to maintain the islands as a picket line across the Asian frontier, and its rule over them was tailored to this basic policy. While it is difficult for Americans to perceive their relations with small, foreign territories as anything but benign, it should be remembered that in 1950 there were many Ponapeans who had grown up in an essentially independent Ponape. The agonizingly slow pace of the negotiations for Micronesia's future political status and the entire tenor of America's attitude toward self-government throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s must be kept in this perspective. And the utterly inept course of economic development in the sixties and seventies can only be understood in light of the United States' reluctance to permit Micronesians to govern themselves.[2]

Following its 1963 decision to co-opt Micronesia into permanently binding itself to the United States, the administration initiated a program of social, political, and economic changes throughout Micronesia. This included large expenditures on public health, education, and public works. The Congress of Micronesia, with delegates from each of the territory's

six districts, was established in 1965. Large numbers of scholarships to American colleges and universities were made available to Micronesian students. A number of agricultural development programs were instituted. Most striking, however, were the budget increases, which leaped tenfold in a decade or so, pouring vast sums of cash into the territory, primarily in the form of salaries, and initiating import consumerism on a massive scale. By 1970, the United States felt that it had wrought enough changes in the Micronesian consciousness to put forward its plans for annexing the islands.

At the first round of the "Future Political Status Negotiations," held in Hawaii, a slightly rewritten version of Guam's "Organic Act"--the governance charter that spells out U.S. rule in Guam--was offered to the Micronesians. It was rejected, and the status negotiations evolved into a long-term consciousness-raising process. In 1975 the Micronesians held a constitutional convention, where they drafted a constitution for a united Micronesian nation. It was preceded by a year-long program called "Education for Self-Government," designed to provide the Micronesian people with some idea of the various status options they might pursue. A "referendum"--really an opinion poll--was held in July 1975. By this time it had become clear that it was highly unlikely that a single Micronesian nation would form. For a variety of reasons, too complex to go into here, the Trust Territory was on the brink of fragmenting into four polities, and the referendum demonstrated that there was no unified outlook on the future. Important in this context, however, is the Ponapean vote, which was overwhelmingly in favor of an independent, united Micronesian nation (Petersen 1975, 1979). Between 1975 and 1979, Ponape (and the other small islands in its vicinity) joined with Yap, Truk, and Kosrae districts to form the Federated States of Micronesia.[3] Ponape State was chosen for the FSM capital. Islanders now elect their own state governors, as well as legislators, and their representatives to the Congress of the FSM in turn elect the FSM president and vice-president. The Trust Territory's high commissioner, appointed by the U.S. president, retains veto power over all legislation; and the compact of "Free Association" with the United States, painstakingly developed over the course of many years, remains in limbo while the Reagan administration dawdles over its foreign policy formulations. Free association, which provides substantial internal autonomy, permits U.S. control of foreign and defense affairs in exchange for continued U.S. funding of the FSM economy. Given the massive infrastructure of education, public health, and public works establishments created in the last two decades and the complete absence of any export economy that might sustain them, the FSM finds itself critically depen-

dent on this external source of funding. The United States has managed--thus far at least--to create the economic dependency, if not the political subservience, it set out to foster in the early 1960s.[4]

This, then, is the historical context in which contemporary Micronesian politics evolve. The Ponapeans have at present what appear to be two entirely separate, parallel political structures, surmounted by a third. These are the traditional chiefly system, the electoral/bureaucratic system introduced by the United States and adapted by the Micronesians, and the U.S. government's ultimate control of the islands. The electoral/bureaucratic system both binds together the entire island, with its independent chiefdoms, and links the many islands of the Central and Eastern Carolines into the FSM.

It has been argued that the two parallel polities on Ponape are genuinely distinct, each calling for different political skills, techniques, and ideologies (Hughes 1970). I am not sure that this is so. As John Fischer (1974) has shown, the viability of the traditional chiefly system on Ponape has to some degree been ensured by the fact that the chiefs have not been placed between their people and the colonial administration. While U.S. administrators have always shown the chiefs some degree of respect, they have never been given any official governmental status as chiefs (though several have stood for elections) and have neither been able to enhance their status nor had it eroded by serving in a system of indirect rule. But this does not mean that the two political systems are truly separate and independent of each other. Both govern--in one fashion or another--Ponapeans, and both are responsive to Ponapean sensibilities. Both, then, entail Ponapean politics, and engagement in them is perceived in similar terms.

While the electoral/bureaucratic system is destined to survive in some form, since it is the system that binds Ponape together as a state and links the island to the FSM and the United States, from whence the island's income derives, it is not merely a new system imposed upon and replacing an older one. Because Ponapeans now have control over daily operations of this system, if not long-term, decision-making powers, it is Ponapean sensibilities that shape the operation of this government. That is, the system functions within Ponapean culture, not external to it. And Ponapean culture applies fundamentally the same values and expectations to this system of rule as it does to its precursor.

## The Culture of Ponapean Politics

It is my position in this paper that, for Ponapeans, politics entail a fundamentally different comprehension of the nature and exercising of

power and authority than that understood in the modern Western intellectual tradition. There is nothing original in this contention. It has roots at least as deep as the opposition of some of Greek philosophy to Platonic dualism and can be traced through what Isaiah Berlin (1976, 1980) calls the "Counter-Enlightenment" work of Vico and Herder. It certainly represents one current in the development of modern (post-eighteenth-century) anthropological thought. It is not my intention in this paper to argue this position from a philosophical or epistemological point of view, however. I am simply going to assert, on the basis of my two years' residence and participation in a Ponapean community (over the course of seven years), working as an ethnographer, that the fount of authority in a modern Ponapean community is the community itself, not a Machiavellian princeling, and that if one is to understand the operations of Ponapean politics one must understand how Ponapean culture establishes the contexts and forms in which individuals may tap and direct that power. I shall develop this theme in order to demonstrate how Ponapeans perceive and participate in the introduced electoral/bureaucratic system in their own terms, rather than in the political terms and categories of those from whom the system has been derived--that is, Americans. I am not, I should note, prepared to assert that what follows is the truth; it represents, rather, the direction in which six years of reflection on, analysis of, and continued questioning about the nature of Ponapean social life have taken me. I am aware of exceptions to what I say. Any attempt to generalize has to skip over particulars--particulars which survive and argue contrarily nonetheless.

There are two countervailing strains in Ponapean culture, as it is realized in individuals: one toward hierarchy and one toward individual autonomy. Ponapean chiefs are respected and revered; they are, as I have already pointed out, imbued with mana, which comes to them through the continuity of their matrilineages. Ponapean chiefs are also characterized by their *wahu*--their "honor." *Wahu* can be translated literally as "valley" and refers to the gulf that lies between chiefs and the other members of the community. Yet, as one section chief reminded his people at a feast held to reintegrate the community after some of its people had split away to form a new section, "Everyone has honor . . . honor inheres in one as a human and as a member of a community . . . honor is like a fair wind: if it blows for us then we shall succeed" (Petersen 1982). The chief's honor, then, is not power. As one Ponapean aphorism has it, "*Ohlmen sohte kak mihmi pahn emen*" ("A man cannot live under another"); a second one states, '*Ngehi me kin kaunda paliwarei*" ("I am master of my own self").

The entire shape of Ponapean culture and social life manifests these two interdependent pulls. Authority, though it draws upon rank, is by no means identical to it. Rather, individual authority derives from skill and ability and exists, in a sense, in its own negation. A politically effective man is characterized in most instances by humility. It is the wisdom or pragmatism of his suggestions, and not their force, that leads to action. The Ponapean language includes a complex honorific or respect form *(meing)* that is used in all formal settings. People of high rank are referred to and addressed in linguistic forms that exalt them, and all others are spoken of in humiliative forms. But in using this language, one always lowers oneself in self-reference; all speakers, even the paramount chiefs, refer to themselves in the humiliative form. In formal political situations--at feasts, for example--leaders do not assert themselves; the language does not allow for it. If orders are given, they are given by a lower ranking individual acting as the chief's representative, known as the *auwenwehi*--literally the "mouth of the chiefdom" (not "of the chief").

There is also a complex structure of secrecy woven into Ponapean social relations. Two of the cardinal virtues Ponapeans urge each other to practice are *kanengamah* and *mahk. Kanengamah* can be translated as "patience," but its meanings have to do with holding certain things back--in particular, emotions. *Mahk* may be translated as "reserve" or "self-containment," though it is ordinarily used in a transitive sense: "I will overlook your affront; I do not deign to have you see how this affects me" might be one way of describing how it is used. Both of these qualities concern the holding back of oneself, a major means of preserving autonomy. Because Ponapeans routinely refrain from divulging their sentiments, they have enormous individual freedom from any need to meet others' expectations of them.

Daily patterns of activity are also affected by this emphasis on secrecy. Competitive production of feast goods plays a leading role in political advancement, and an element of surprise is critical to successful participation in the feasting. Ponapeans do not ordinarily enter upon others' land (openly, at least) except along recognized trails. Nor do they inquire of others about their crops or possessions. Given that most Ponapeans spend their entire lives within small, homogenous, and highly endogamous communities and thus know a great deal about each other, there is also a remarkable lot that they do not know about each other. Again, this secrecy serves to reinforce and protect personal autonomy. While gossip plays a major social role--as it does in every society--there is an explicit notion that a man's affairs are his own. All this is reinforced by the dispersed settlement pattern, the rugged terrain, and the dense vegetation. Ponapeans

are physically as well as psychically separated from each other. Their lifestyle provides them with considerable interfamilial privacy.[5]

In response to these centrifugal forces is the ceaseless round of feasting that calls Ponapeans forth from their isolated farmsteads. Feasts are focused upon chiefs. Quantities of food and kava are brought together, possessed temporarily by the chief, prepared, and then redistributed. The symbolism of a feast has the chief at its center--sitting, ideally, on a raised platform and looking down upon the people working below him.[6] (So central is this raised position in Ponapean political symbolism that the general term for chiefs or high ranking people is *soupeidi*--"those-who-look-down.") The highest ranking chiefs may receive at these feasts considerable quantities of tribute which are not redistributed, though much--perhaps most--of what they retain is dispersed among their families, hangers-on, and the people who help them transport the goods home. It is not unusual for section chiefs, however, to contribute more to feasts than they retain in the redistribution.

One of my clearest recollections of my early encounters with the seeming contradictions of Ponapean political culture comes from a conversation I had with the wife of a man who was one of several eligible successors to a chief thought to be on his deathbed at the time. At one point in our talk she was praising the sensibility of American democratic politics. We, unlike the Ponapeans, she argued, did not foolishly have to give all that we possessed to greedy, demanding chiefs. A few minutes later she was maintaining that most of their community wanted her husband to be the next chief because of his generosity. She complained that her husband was an exceptionally generous man, who gave away all that the family possessed, and that Ponapeans expected great generosity of their chiefs. A bit more literal in those days than I am now, I attempted to show her the contradiction in her statements: chiefs who were on the one hand greedy, on the other generous. She did not understand my objection; nowadays, neither do I. Men who acquire, on Ponape, are equally men who distribute.

Because Ponapean chieftainship rests upon both achievement and ascription, there is a clear note of hierarchy even while there is continual economic leveling. Accumulation serves only as preparation for distribution And in the same fashion, the honor accorded to chiefs is merely a reflection of the community's esteem for itself. Feasts are the product of community effort and are in fact conducted in a surprisingly anarchic fashion. Few formal preparations or assignments are made in anticipation of a feast. Though there is a master of ceremonies, he is merely a coordinator, or conductor, who establishes the rhythm, rather than a super-

visor who assigns the tasks. At extremely large feasts, which draw hundreds of participants, many of whom are relative strangers, there may be more conscious efforts made at organization; but under ordinary circumstances feasts unfold by themselves. Each participant decides for himself or herself what to contribute and what tasks to undertake. And when, as is often the case, a family is holding a feast to mark a life crisis event--a death, a wedding, a journey, a graduation--it is the chief who must, by his obligatory attendance, serve his people as their figurehead. The chief's presence confers ritual status upon the event, though the ritual itself is not the chiefs doing but the People's.

The decision-making and -enforcing powers of the chiefs are of much the same quality as the roles they play in feasting. The near-century of colonial rule has undoubtedly affected their powers, but it is difficult to determine just what degree of control nineteenth-century chiefs had over their subjects. If one takes the divergence between what Ponapeans today say about the nature of their political institutions and what the ethnographer observes and applies it to written accounts from the past, it may well be that Ponapean chiefs never had especially centralized control of their communities, despite their enormous ritual status--or so I am inclined to believe. The authority of section chiefs seems exceptionally vulnerable today. They are continually obliged to tread a very fine line between demanding too much participation in community activities, thereby alienating their people, and calling for too little, thereby allowing the section to slip into torpor and disintegration. Sections can and do split apart as a result of population growth and disenchantment with the chiefs. In "One *Man Cannot Rule a Thousand*" (Petersen 1982) I treat this process at monograph length. Paramount chiefdoms have in recent years had their boundaries frozen by the charters that have made each a municipality within the state, the FSM, and the Trust Territory, and the paramount chiefs are less threatened by secession. In fact, they may at times actually encourage fissioning among the sections as a means of thwarting the rise of especially successful leaders or communities who might threaten their own hegemony.

Paramount chiefs in general rule through their section chiefs. There is not a great deal of ruling to be done, of course. Most aspects of Ponapean life are of a familiar and repetitive enough nature that tasks get done as part of the flow of life, rather than in response to a system of orders. Nevertheless, ritual events; celebrations, and the general structure of status are hinged upon the chiefs, and instructions and orders are sometimes given. Individuals may be told what they are expected to contribute to certain feasts or to community efforts of one sort or another. But chiefs only

occasionally make decisions on their own. Any sort of joint effort is preceded by discussions among holders of the highest titles. Some form of consensus--a reading of community opinion, in effect--is found. A formal announcement may sometimes be made: for example, each family is expected to contribute one pig, one kava plant, and one large yam to a specific feast. Or nothing formal will be said at all, since the decision is no more than a reflection of what community members sense is proper participation or a proper contribution and since a family's decision to participate is based on many factors.

Performance and participation cannot be directly enforced. Ponapean chiefs no longer have powers of coercion (if, indeed, they ever did). It is the system of titles--the formal, public manifestation of individual status--that ensures participation. In a general way, community service is rewarded by advancement in the title system; and the higher a man's title, the more that is expected of him. There are individuals who seem to have little interest in advancement and, while they generally participate in community activities, they do not contribute much. These people are, however, in a definite minority and are frequently the targets of mild teasing and derision. Failure to participate in or contribute to community events is the most frequent--in fact it is practically the only--explanation given for the removal of titles. If a man or a family does not meet the standards set by the chief or community, titles might be taken back. On occasion titles are removed as a result of personal conflicts, I know, but this is not usually acknowledged; inadequate participation or tribute is invariably given as the reason. A title, then, is to a large degree a statement of one's status within the community. There are occasional exceptions to this, as when a title is removed because of personal conflict between a chief and a community member; I know of cases where this has occurred, and the status of the man who lost his title was not seriously damaged. But this happens when an individual's status is so well founded within the community that an attack by the chief is not by itself sufficient to detract from the community's regard.

What this all means is that the true locus of authority in Ponapean communities is the community itself. An able chief is respected and listened to, but he founds his authority upon his own ability to listen. If pronouncements are made, they are liable to fall upon deaf ears or meet considerable disagreement. A generous chief can make demands and expect a degree of cooperation; having known no truly greedy chiefs, I cannot simply assert that they are inherently ineffective, but I assume that this is why they are not often encountered. Ponapeans continually complain about their chiefs, but they also admit freely that their complaints have

little significance: *"Pihl en pahn mweli,"* they say--"water under the boulders" which can be heard trickling but has no impact.

Ponapeans have, I believe, an enormous sense of controlling their own lives, precisely because there is no differentiated source of authority over them. They have a clear concept of hierarchy and speak of it often, but it is extremely difficult to find it embodied as authority. Ponapeans sometimes speak of things within their lives that cannot be located by an outside observer.

Recently, A. Bartlett Giamatti, president of Yale University, wrote that "the most practical part of the American soul is its ability to assert and live by principles" (1981). This strikes me as quite likely, since I often find myself bewildered by the Ponapeans' capacity to assert principles they do not live by--a trait which seems for them eminently practical. They assert principles of hierarchy and power, yet live with a high degree of personal autonomy. I would go so far as to suggest, speculatively and tangentially, that cognitive dissonance as it is known in American social psychology would be hard to discover on Ponape. It may well occur in other forms, but not as we know it, as a struggle to resolve variance between reality and principle.

## The Ponapean Electoral/Bureaucratic System

It is within this context--that is, the simultaneous acceptance and rejection of a hierarchy of authority--that the evolution of a new political structure on Ponape must be understood. The Ponapeans, and the other Micronesian peoples, have in part taken for themselves and in part had thrust upon them a political structure that reflects several millennia of cultural development in Europe and America. The functioning of western bourgeois democracy, with whatever degree of optimism or pessimism one views it, presupposes a number of cultural traits. Some of these grow out of a long and complex scholastic, philosophical tradition. Others derive from an important historical precondition: the absolute authority of the state, a hierarchy of power that is real and effective as well as apparent. With significantly varying degrees, modern democracies assume some popular control of government; but more critically, they assume governments that genuinely control the lives of the governed. Their religious, legal, economic, scientific, and artistic traditions all share this heritage in one fashion or another--a shared assumption of centralized, legitimate, and overarching authority and power. While earlier monarchy and autarchy have given way to bourgeois democracy, the quantum advances of modem technology have given contemporary governments far more con-

trol over individual lives than their predecessors ever had. It is a structure of government founded on such presuppositions that has been introduced in Micronesia, where very different cultural underpinnings have evolved.

There is today on Ponape a system of government modeled after that of the United States. Within the five paramount chiefdoms and the island's one town--the municipalities--there are elected executives (the chief magistrates), justices, and councils.[7] There is a state legislature with representatives elected from each of the municipalities, a state court, and an elected governor. And there is the FSM Congress, the FSM president, and an FSM supreme court. The American systems of municipal, state, and federal governments and executive, legislative, and judicial branches are faithfully replicated. Constitutions and charters have been carefully deliberated upon by Ponapean and Micronesian delegations, but they have been drawn up, finally, by American (and, in a few cases, American-trained Micronesian) attorneys. The memberships of the congress and legislatures are subdivided into committees; the executive branches are composed of a multiplicity of divisions, departments, bureaus, agencies, and authorities. At almost every level of government and in almost every branch, expatriate technical advisors and administrators can be found. But in the main, the governments of Micronesia are staffed and run by Micronesians.

Ponapeans, as I have explained, have notions of authority and government that differ fundamentally from those of the people who initially devised this form of government; and their performance within the government is significantly different than that of' the people who designed it. One hears on Ponape constant shrieks of rage from expatriates who are thoroughly frustrated by the Ponapean process of governing. From my perspective as ethnographer, it is easy to say, given my preceding arguments, that this is how it should be. I cannot deny the likelihood that, were I in an administrative or technical position in the Ponapean government, my own shrieks would be heard as well.

I am going to use two kinds of examples to illustrate the problems currently being encountered in Ponapean government. The first is the product of Micronesia's recent colonial history and presents immediate problems for the development of efficient, responsive government on Ponape. The second is of a much deeper nature and represents basic philosophical differences between Ponapean notions of action and American notions of principle. I will then go on to explore the wider implications these kinds of problems hold for the growth of an effective electoral/bureaucratic system of government and the ways in which I perceive the Ponapeans already at work adapting the actual functioning of their government to

their own system of politics. Finally, I address an issue that arises out of this very process--the problem of federation among far-flung islands.

Present-day Ponapean government, and apparently Micronesian government in general, is confronted with an immediate problem of organization that is directly attributable to the American administration's colonial legacy. American rule in Micronesia has been for the most part autocratic. I am not necessarily charging it with heavy-handedness but pointing, rather, to the very centralized powers held in their time by the high commissioners and their district administrators. The various island legislatures acted throughout most of their histories as forums for discussion; district administrators always held veto power over them. The Congress of Micronesia was likewise subject to the high commissioner's veto. Budgetary decisions were entirely executive functions: in the early days it was a process of allocating scarce resources, while in more recent times it was the almost frantic search for ways in which to channel the flood tide of funding. As Ponapean political consciousness grew throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Ponape District Legislature found itself at times functioning squarely in opposition to the administration. At other times it appears to have simply accepted its semi-impotent status and concerned itself primarily with internal matters. The legislature *was* in no way perceived by the administration as a partner in government.

At the same time, however, Ponapeans were entering the administration and learning executive tasks. By the early 1970s Ponape had its first Ponapean district administrator, and departments in both the Trust Territory and Ponape District governments were being headed by Ponapeans and other Micronesians. The training and experience they gained were in the administration's autocratic tradition. Governmental decisions came either from Washington, D.C., through the high commissioner's office in Saipan, or were made in the district administrator's office. These Ponapean administrators were, like their superiors, beholden to Saipan and Washington, not the legislature.

Today the Ponapean government is able to make many--perhaps most--of its own day-to-day decisions and has an important voice in long-term planning. But the government is staffed largely by men who were trained in the American colonial system and who continue to perceive government as essentially and primarily an executive operation. They have no experience in cooperating with a legislative body that is, technically, an equal partner. And the legislature, having a tradition only of opposition or irrelevance to the administration and receiving no sign or indication that the executive branch is interested in cooperation, continues to perceive itself as set against the governor's office and charged with

striking an independent course. At a time when the government has been restructured to permit the cooperative effort absolutely necessary to the achievement of the creative solutions Ponape's immediate future cries out for, it remains instead bogged down in the unfortunate struggle that is part of America's colonial legacy.

Now, such competition for preeminence is a fundamental part of any dynamic political system that is not monolithic; the traditional Ponapean polity depends on the ceaseless interplay between the two parallel lines of chiefly titles for its own vitality. But at present the Ponapean government is constrained by it. The ultimate solution to this dilemma lies, I think, not in a series of workshops to re-educate Ponapean politicians but in gradual absorption of the Ponapean *politique* into the relations among the various members of government, over the course of several elections. I shall return to this shortly.

The second example I offer is drawn from the experience of several American attorneys who have worked on Ponape in various capacities, including service as legal aid lawyers and legislative counsels. The American judicial system depends for its efficiency on several factors that lie beyond the immediate courtroom environs. Two of these are precedent and appellate procedures. In general, courts are guided in points of law by preceding decisions, as spelled out in opinions and catalogued in law libraries. When a particular decision is disagreed with, it can be appealed to a higher court. Inherent in the appeals system, however, is the notion that there is an ultimate decision and that it, like all other decisions, will be based on precedent (unless it is a rare and significant case of reversing precedent, as in the civil rights decision that "separate but equal" was an impossibility).

Attorneys who represent Ponapeans in litigation report that, while the judiciary is frequently employed to resolve disputes, neither precedent nor an ultimate appellate decision are generally understood. I believe that this is so for many of the same reasons that I used in explaining the communal nature of the Ponapean polity. Perceiving no specific locus for authority but seeing it instead as existing embedded among actual relations between people, Ponapeans view decisions as being conditional and temporary, subject to changes in the individuals concerned or the relations between them. While Ponapeans rely heavily on precedent in the conduct of traditional politics, there are so very many possible precedents for every situation that they are not seen as guides *to* action so much as explanations and justifications *for* it, after the fact. A decision is made on pragmatic grounds, then rationalized in terms of precedent. A legal decision that accepts the precedent as the *determining* factor does not make good

sense to Ponapeans. Similarly, because decisions are arrived at on pragmatic grounds that reflect the relations between the parties and between them and the adjudicator, there can really be no ultimate decision. As relations among the various parties and the conditions in which they exist shift, it is expected that the decision making itself must vary. Thus, losing a case on any given occasion does not logically imply that it might not be won on another occasion; and some Ponapeans return again and again to counsel, requesting that previously unsuccessful cases be taken up again. Law, like life, is expected to be flexible, to respond to immediate conditions, needs, and opportunities. A system of law, and of government, that asserts timeless principles is understood, but one that expects them to be lived by is not. Because authority is not alien, separate, or distinct but lies within the fabric of community life itself, Ponapeans at some level perceive themselves as being in control of their own lives; it is, I think, a sociocultural system that confers many individual freedoms yet works with great efficacy because this freedom depends on the well-being of the community.

It is for these reasons that Ponapeans can operate within the introduced electoral/bureaucratic system with the same notions of hierarchy and autonomy that characterize the traditional system. While the dynamics of Ponapean politics frequently entail intense competition and continual jockeying for position, so thoroughly communal is the Ponapean polity that individual success is understood in terms of the community's benefit. Unlike true peasants, who have known generations of subservience to feudal powers and understand gain as ultimately benefiting someone else (a lord, a landlord, a tax collector), Ponapeans do not share in what George Foster (1967) has described as "the image of limited good," in which one man's gain necessarily implies another's loss; this is known in game theory as a zero-sum game. Cross-cultural research on fear of success among students, though not conducted on Ponape, provides me with some verification of this perception.

Susan Locke (1981), a psychologist, has compared students' responses on projective tests that asked them to complete stories about young people who have been extremely successful in their schoolwork. Among students at a large, urban, public university, many of whom are immigrants and the majority of whom are the first of their families to attend college, she found a consistent pattern of fear. These students perceived that in American society academic and business success implies a frightening degree of alienation from family and community. To be successful, they believe, is also to be alone; career success comes only at tremendous personal cost. The same test applied to Senegalese students from mostly

rural backgrounds in Dakar, the capital city, provided strikingly different results. These students spoke instead of how their families and communities would celebrate their successes and imagined themselves as remaining well integrated in their societies. Locke's work expresses exactly the cultural context of competition and success that I perceive on Ponape. The communal nature of their political economy will in time, I think, shape the operation of the electoral/bureaucratic system and make it, eventually, a truly Ponapean system.

In the absence of an alienated or truly differentiated locus of authority, individual success does not come at the expense of other community members but rather includes them. Ponapeans perceive their chiefs as greedy because they are the focal points for the continual presentation of feast goods. But chiefs are, in general, men whose political advancement is in large measure determined by their contributions and who are expected, ultimately, to redistribute significant portions of what they have been given. In the traditional Ponapean political economy the items that confer prestige--yams, kava, pigs, and general community service--are not in scarce supply. Authority, then, does not come about by controlling access to these things but by producing and distributing them. Power cannot be obtained by cornering the market, as it were, because a leadership role exists only when members of the community see in it their own direct benefit. Status is accrued through skill and labor put to use for the community.

This is not meant to sound utopian. There are both important differences in status and in personal and family wealth in Ponapean communities. But the two exist in tandem in a fashion that differs fundamentally from the relation between the two in capitalist society. As Max Weber showed in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1952), and as is clearly demonstrated by the philosophy and policies of the Reagan administration, there is in capitalism a notion that worldly success and wealth are in themselves manifestations of underlying virtue, that affluence in and of itself confers status. (The older the wealth and the less obvious the earning of it, the greater the status it confers; see Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* [1953]). On Ponape, accumulation that is unaccompanied by distribution is not understood. *'Kaidehn kowe mehn wai"* ("You're not an American") is a common retort to instances of stinginess. The notion that status implies generosity has profound effects upon the process of government on Ponape today, as does the understanding that personal relations determine principle rather than the reverse.

## The Evolution of Ponapean Politics

As I have already stressed, most Ponapean social and political interaction takes place within the sections, the island's basic communities. Within the sections, the entire political process takes place on a face-to-face basis and authority is to be found within the group as a whole, represented but not controlled by the section chief. The sections are in turn bound together by the paramount chiefdoms. Prominent individuals within the chiefdoms--men with high titles--are well known not because of their titles but because of their participation in numerous feasts and other social activities. Their titles, though partly dependent on hereditary status, are more directly the product of political acumen and activity. Ponapean leaders occupy intensely public positions and they channel, rather than possess, the authority of the community.

Because political communities are genuine communities on Ponape, political actions are based on interpersonal relations rather than abstract principles. This is possible--indeed, highly effective--because members of the community are acutely aware of who benefits from any given action and how they benefit. Members can choose to participate in or refrain from the community's activities. Politicians in the electoral/bureaucratic system understand this, and their own actions are informed by and predicated on their membership in Ponapean communities and not on the principles that underlie the original formation of the system. The faceless "equality-before-the-law" character of bourgeois democracy allows the individual neither any control over his or her own participation in society nor access to the benefits accrued by others. The outrage of expatriates at what they perceive as inefficiency, irresponsibility, and misallocation of funds is certainly justified from the point of view of principle. Ponapeans concur in these judgments. But for anyone for whom politics are communal, these are not shortcomings but necessary, efficacious, and beneficial political acts. I am keenly aware of the likelihood that this will be construed as criticism; it is intended as praise. The faceless, principled quality of bourgeois democracy lends itself readily to manipulation, legalistic maneuvering, and irresponsibility on a scale so vast as to threaten the existence of society itself. Because the lacework of authority in Ponapean communities cannot be accumulated and converted into power, the system is not a threat to itself. The apparent administrative failures portend, I think, a government that will be in no way as efficient as those of industrial societies; but for precisely that reason it will be far more responsive to the needs of the entire community. I preach. Ponapeans, unlike Americans, perceive their existence as primarily social and behave accordingly.

They do not suppose that some invisible hand shall magically make things right and they are, consequently, an eminently more pragmatic people than we who, living in vast and faceless societies, cast our fates to the wind.

This unwillingness to have abstract principle determine the quality of one's relations with others, even as a political system that assumes it is being implemented, is paralleled by the issue of force--the use of force--in Ponapean society. While there have been occasional and apparently isolated incidents of violence on Ponape, there does not seem to have been organized use of force by Ponapeans since the end of the ill-fated Sokehs rebellion in 1910. The Ponapeans warred among themselves and against the Spanish as late as 1898, but the technology and discipline of the Germans seem to have intimidated them. The Japanese are invariably spoken of as harsh disciplinarians, and, though I have heard tales of minor harassment, I know of no organized resistance to them. The American period has seen the use of jail sentences and the development of an armed Ponapean police force. But for the last seventy years or so, there has been little or no application of legitimate force by Ponapeans against Ponapeans to implement government policy. Given the Ponapeans' emphasis on consensus and their enormous tolerance for deviance, this is not especially remarkable. One wonders, however, about the future. I am not prepared to attend fully to this issue in this context, but it is certainly relevant to the present discussion and demands some consideration.

There are a number of firearms in Ponapean hands today, despite gun-control laws. A few of these are light rifles used for deer hunting, but there are also handguns. I have no idea of their numbers or of the availability of ammunition for them. This is reminiscent of conditions early in the German administration. The Ponapeans in those days were heavily armed and the Germans were understandably concerned. Following a devastating typhoon in 1905 the island suffered a food shortage (one of the very few noted in Ponapean traditions) and the Germans offered to trade food for guns--a striking reversal of the dominant trade patterns on Ponape in the preceding century. The people of Sokehs chiefdom did not join the rest of the island in this exchange, and this in part explains the singularity of their revolt against the Germans five years later (Ehrlich 1978). Placed in this context, a gradual rearmament does not represent a departure from Ponapean tradition. If some Ponapean community or chiefdom or region were to object strongly to a government policy and refuse to comply, it is not at all clear how a Ponapean government would respond. In the long absence of a tradition of centrally implemented force, and given the strong pulls toward autonomy of individuals and

communities, one perceives the low-key operation of Ponapean government as a politically as well as culturally determined course.

There are at present two Ponapean polities (along with that of the United States). I have argued that they are both responsive to a Ponapean *politique,* a set of cultural assumptions about the nature of the body politic and proper political conduct. While they function at present as different spheres, they are neither entirely distinct nor separate and are gradually becoming less so. The differences between the two are important, and each is partly responsible for the shape and effectiveness of the other. Though neither imposes a great deal upon the other, there is a form of symbiosis between them.

The great continuity of the traditional system of chiefly and communal politics is in some measure possible because chiefs and communities have not been responsible for modernization. They have not had to shoulder the burden of developing public health, education, and works programs, nor have they been charged with creating an export economy to produce foreign exchange. The most striking discontinuities and disruptions of life have been instigated by foreigners; and while Ponapeans and Micronesians have begun seriously to consider the roles that they themselves play in social disturbances, their communities, at least beyond the borders of the town, remain well integrated.

The electoral/bureaucratic system has functioned rather smoothly thus far because it is funded externally and has not had to make demands directly on Ponapean communities. There has been no corvée, no conscription, no pillaging; and all but excise taxes are insignificant. The high level of wage employment has meant that young Ponapeans have had little reason to emigrate in search of work. The government has encountered little opposition not only because of its aura of colonial authority but because it has had to do little that has been construed as offensive.

Life in Ponapean communities has been significantly affected by changes in health care, education, communications, transportation, and economics. The same could be said, of course, of nineteenth-century Ponape. Ponapeans long ago became dependent on steel tools, machine-made cloth, kerosene lamps, and a host of other simple necessities of daily life and have lost none of their Ponapean-ness for it. I would argue that these newer changes will likewise see the Ponapeans retaining their own distinctive culture. As they continue to take over local government, and as funding for that government continues to decrease, substantial adaptations must be expected. These changes will reflect the matrix of Ponapean culture in which they take place and will be responsive to the communal nature of Ponapean politics. Status and resources will be allocated in

much the same fashion as they always have, or so I believe. But the very factors that hint at the strength and success of a Ponapean polity--that is, the face-to-face, communal quality of the island's politics--suggest problems for the federation of islands of which it is part.

## The FSM's Body Politic

In July of 1981 the FSM Congress held a special session on Moen, an island in the eastern part of Truk lagoon and seat of the Truk state government. It is worth noting that one of the reasons congress left its usual quarters on Ponape was the thoroughly unreliable power supply on Ponape, where the electric generators were continually breaking down (and were thus serving as a major target of expatriate invective against the local administration). Without the use of typewriters, copying machines, and air conditioners, government was frequently brought to a halt. During the congressional session in Truk a delegation from the islands in the western half of Truk lagoon, an area known as Faichuk, asked the legislators to establish a new and separate Faichuk State within the FSM. Congress acceded, voting unanimously in favor of creating a new state; and Toshiwo Nakayama, the FSM president, was faced with his first major dilemma. Elected as a representative from Truk (and thence by the congress to the presidency), Nakayama had to decide, in simplest terms, between alienating a large portion of his own constituency by vetoing the bill and presiding over what portended to be the first stage in the ensuing fragmentation of the Federation into a host of tiny island entities. Several regions, including the Mortlock Islands southeast of Truk, and the Central Carolines between Yap and Truk, had already indicated that they would demand similar status should Faichuk achieve statehood. Ponapeans, fearing that a second Trukese state within the Federation would give the Trukese a plurality in FSM politics, objected vociferously. Ponapeans were also quick to point out the direct economic consequences of such a political reorganization--consequences which were clearly at the root of the Faichuk move for regional autonomy. The FSM budget is divided, essentially, into four parts, to be spent in each of the four federated states, Kosrae, Ponape, Truk, and Yap. Each state is thus ensured funding for major capital projects such as hospitals, airports, power plants, water systems, harbor facilities, and roads. The Faichuk people saw the great bulk of Truk State's funding being directed to the state capital in Moen, in the eastern lagoon, and reasoned that statehood would obtain for them the development funding they felt themselves deprived of. The FSM legislation establishing Faichuk's statehood did nob decide whether funding for the

new state would simply be one-half of that currently received by Truk State or one-fifth of the entire FSM budget, an alternative that would substantially reduce the level of funding in the other states. The Faichuk statehood issue, then, was unpopular almost everywhere in the FSM; and the congress was widely perceived as having shirked its responsibility, sending a most critical and delicate matter on to a man for whom the decision would be even more awkward. Nakayama deliberated at length and consulted extensively with leaders throughout the FSM. In October he vetoed the Faichuk statehood bill, arguing that Faichuk lacked the economic and political infrastructure necessary to support statehood. In November he announced that Faichuk was to become "a showcase and an economic development model for the FSM" (*National Union,* Nov. 15, 1981).

The people of Ponape viewed these events with great interest. In discussing the looming crisis, during the months of July-September 1981, the Ponapeans repeatedly asserted two positions on which most seemed to agree. The first was that Ponapeans had no right to impose their own will on the Trukese: if the Trukese wished to divide their state in half, that was their concern. The second was that the consequences of such a move would be grave enough to force Ponape to seriously consider seceding from the FSM. In Awak, a large, formerly independent community in northeastern Ponape, now a part of the Uh paramount chiefdom, the matter was given a distinctly local interpretation. Since 1900, when the depopulation trend reversed itself, the Awak population has grown steadily and the local sections have twice subdivided, creating three Awak sections. In 1979 one of these sections again split and the entire community was thrown into turmoil that was still being settled in 1981. (My *"One Man Cannot Rule a Thousand": Fission in a Ponapean Chiefdom* is a case study of this event.) The Awak people interpreted the Faichuk events in terms of their own local political processes. They recognized, on the one hand, the understandable drive for autonomy that characterizes communal politics such as theirs. "One man cannot rule a thousand" is how a section chief explained to me the fissioning process among Awak sections. Acutely conscious of their own colonial heritage, however, these people asserted on the other hand that this fissioning, the repeated breaking down of larger political bodies, would weaken the unity and hence the strength of the FSM in just the same way that fragmentation among the Awak sections has prevented Awak from reasserting its traditional independence from the Uh paramount chiefdom.

It is not unusual--in fact, it is quite common--to hear Ponapeans speak critically of themselves. They are, I think, far more conscious of the work-

ings of their own polity than Americans are of theirs. This is not coincidence, of course, since Ponapeans are far more in control of theirs. But along with this wisdom comes a certain quality--I am not sure if it is skepticism or resignation or pessimism or realism--that recognizes what may be political shortcomings, given the modern world context. Entirely dependent on external funding at present, the Ponapeans, I believe, have an understanding of how federation holds out for them a better bargaining position in their negotiations with the United States. Their notions about hierarchy inform them that a central government, representing many people and regions, has more status and more clout than a series of tiny island entities. But their simultaneous insistence on autonomy makes the discipline and authority necessary to an even marginally effective central government hard to bear. As long as politics are conducted in a face-to-face, communal arena, leaders can be closely watched and the benefits of participation carefully adjudged. Decisions that must apply equally across hundreds or thousands of miles, however, are inherently abstract. How can one determine the equity of their implementation if it cannot be observed? How does one maintain a sense, at least, of control over a leader who lives on a distant island? Under such circumstances authority becomes of necessity differentiated and to some degree alienated--a separation, as it were, of mind and body. Ponapeans have grown ambivalent about federation. They have been criticized within the FSM for this, and they are themselves critical of their own attitudes. I cannot pretend to know the future, though I am hopeful that the Ponapeans will retain a strong enough sense of the long view to continue their early strong support for Micronesian unity. If, however, they do not, they should not be chastised, as they sometimes are, for not being politically generous enough to work with others. Ponape's body politic requires intense cooperation--authority exists for them only within a functioning community; it is the communal nature of Ponapeans' politics that makes them wary of governments of which they are not each equally a part.

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## NOTES

1. This paper is offered as an initial exploration of the topic, not as a set of final conclusions. I perceive it as part of a much larger work that seeks to encompass and describe Ponapean culture in its historical and social contexts in the late twentieth century; though

the work at hand is intended to stand on its own, it should be understood that a great deal of research and analysis not presented here underlies what does appear.

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2. An economic and political discussion of Ponapean contact history in general and of the early American period in particular can be found in Petersen (1976).

3. The United States permitted (and, I believe, encouraged) the Mariana, Belau (Palau), and Marshall Islands each to break away from the rest of Micronesia and negotiate independently with it. Belau and the Marshalls are forming republics, while the Marianas voted to become a commonwealth of--that is, to be annexed by--the United States.

4. The history of U.S. rule in Micronesia is described by a Micronesian in Heine (1974), a former member of the U.S. government in McHenry (1975), and an American dissident in Gale (1979).

5. A full description of Ponapean secrecy and a discussion of the role it plays in Ponapean social organization is in Petersen (1978).

6. The strains toward autonomy and humility in Ponapean culture occasionally lead chiefs to abandon their stations and take seats for themselves among those actually preparing the feast goods.

7. Ponape State also includes a number of smaller outlying islands, with autonomous traditions, that are also chartered as municipalities.

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