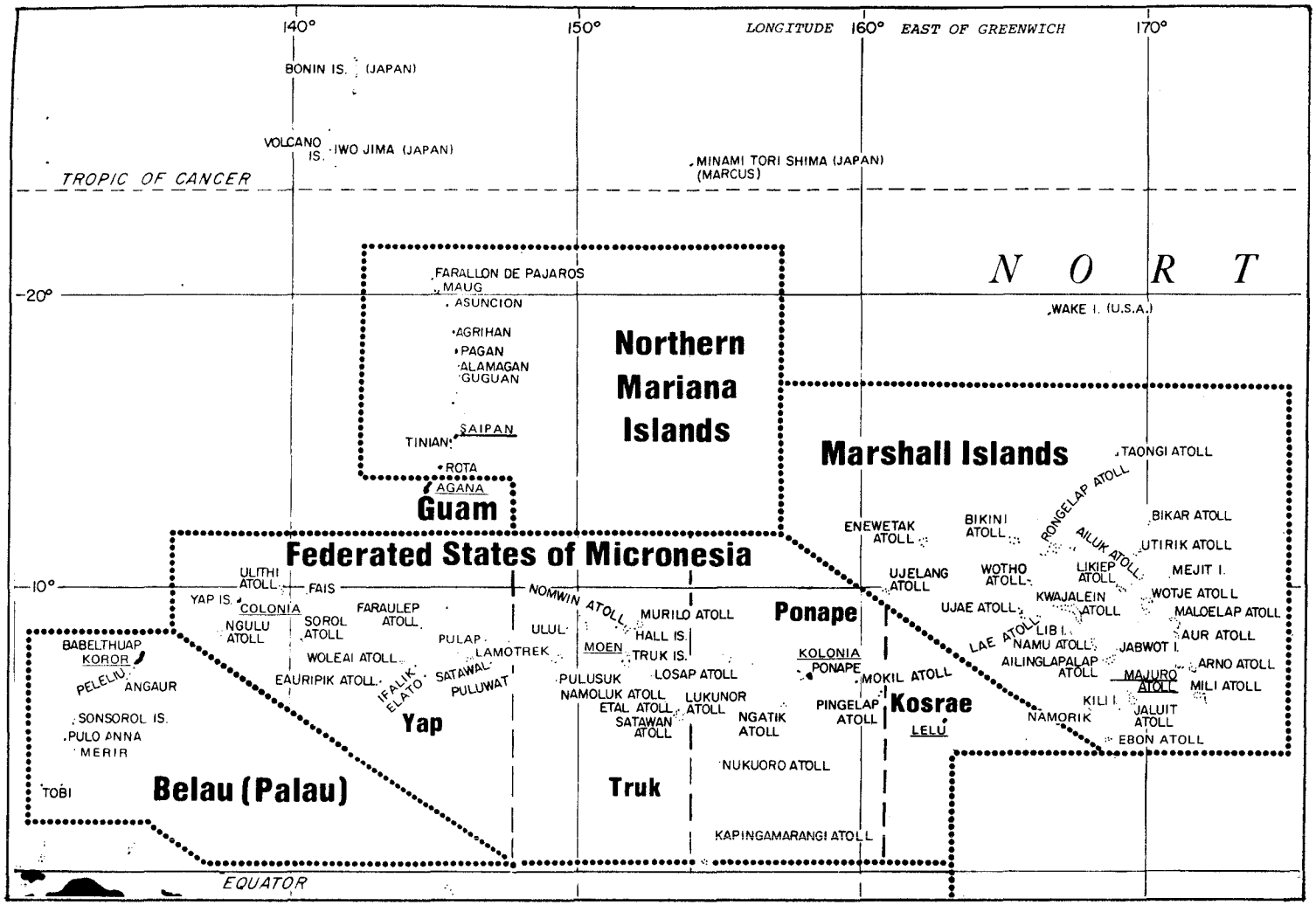

MAP OF MICRONESIA (Hawai'i Geographic Society, 1982)

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GROWING OLD IN CHANGING MICRONESIA

by Leonard Mason

Introduction

Older people in the scattered island communities of Micronesia have traditionally been held in high regard, almost in spiritual awe, by other members of the society. They have been accorded special respect and deference, both in language and in nonverbal behavior, by those who are younger. They have been sought out for their treasuries of age-old lore and for their years of accumulated wisdom and experience. They have exercised undisputed authority concerning the administration of land and other property belonging to the kin groups in which they held seniority. They have enjoyed the rights and perquisites accompanying their inherited responsibilities.

It is with sorrow and a feeling of emptiness that one must admit how the status of the aged in most Micronesian societies has declined in recent decades. Introduced forms of elective government and the priority given to formal education has led to a shift of authority and influence away from the elders to a rising generation of elitists schooled in the new ways. The traditional channels of communication between the older people and youth are falling into disuse. The migration of young and middle-aged folk to the urban centers and port towns for gainful employment has left many elders alone in their home villages and lacking in support for their day-to-day needs. In an increasingly cash economy, the older islanders have few opportunities to obtain money except for the modest sums they receive from relatives working in the urban centers. They must, of necessity, continue to depend on a subsistence way of life but without the security once guaranteed them by a fully functioning system of family and community cooperation and obligation.

Modernization of the traditional past in Micronesia has by no means been restricted to the period following World War II. The colonial regimes of Spain, Germany, Japan, and the United States had already significantly altered island cultures during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The transformations taking place today are simply more extensive and are paced so rapidly that islanders in general, as well as the older people, find it hard to accommodate without considerable confusion and disorientation. The critical issues which challenge the present leadership are how to direct that change and how to control its rate of speed so as not to unduly disrupt the stability of island communities and the security of Micronesians as individuals.

The needs of the elderly as a constituency to be serviced are not always easy to identify in Micronesia. Seniors voice their concern about being left out of contemporary affairs. While family support is often not available when most needed, the traditional pride felt by family and community causes resentment against outside aid for their elders. Many of the aged feel trapped between the past and the future. They have no clear signals about how to resolve the difficulties they are experiencing. Some observers regard the elderly as the principal casualties of the changing times. This may well be true, but the problems they face are not theirs alone. The answers to their dilemmas doubtless will be found ultimately in the solutions reached by members of the whole society.

On a more positive note, many traditional concepts such as the sharing of land rights and the extension of familial ties are still acknowledged as core values providing an essential foundation for a continuing island life-way. Changes in technology and innovations in social, economic, political, and religious practice may suggest to the casual observer that Micronesian traditions are dead. To the contrary, beneath that surface awareness, more careful observation will reveal a persistence of traditional orientations throughout most of the region. This is what island leaders have in mind today when they talk about “The Pacific Way,” which is a prideful recognition of the characteristic manner in which Pacific peoples, including the Micronesians, continue to perceive traditional relationships with their environment and with each other.

General Background

Micronesia, the regional focus of this paper, is regarded by most anthropologists and geographers as one of the three major divisions of Oceania. It is located in the westernmost Pacific and is almost entirely north of the equator. Of the other two regions, Melanesia is an arc of

large islands extending from Papua New Guinea in the west to Fiji in the east, all of them lying south of the equator. Polynesia is contained within a large triangle to the east and is marked at its outer limits by Hawaii, Easter Island, and New Zealand.

Geographically, Micronesia consists of four archipelagoes: (1) the Marianas in the northwest, (2) the Carolines in the west and central part, (3) the Marshalls in the east, and (4) the Gilberts (now the major part of Kiribati, a former British colony which became independent in 1979) in the southeast. Two isolated islands should also be included, Nauru and Ocean (Banaba) Islands which lie south of the equator and west of the Gilberts. The first three of the archipelagoes are administered by the United States. In this paper, discussion of the condition of the elderly will be limited to this area.

American Micronesia extends 2,800 miles from west to east and about 1,100 miles from south to north. It covers an ocean area of 3,000,000 square miles, the equivalent of the continental United States. However, the land area, composed of an estimated 2,200 islands, adds up to only 930 square miles. This is less than one-seventh of the land contained in the State of Hawaii. The general picture of Micronesia is one of many small islands scattered over a very wide expanse of the western Pacific.

Island topography is important for understanding the cultural attitudes of Micronesian communities in traditional terms as well as for options about development in modern times. It is customary to distinguish between “high” islands of volcanic origin and “low” coral islands or atolls. The former are found in all of the Marianas and in Palau, Yap, Truk, Ponape, and Kosrae in the Carolines. Guam, the largest of these, is 212 square miles in area and accounts for about one-fourth of all the land in American Micronesia.

The rest of the Carolines and all of the Marshalls are coralline in nature. Most of them are atolls consisting of a coral reef encircling a saltwater lagoon with a varying number of islets on the reef rising to no more than 20 feet above sea level. In the atolls, land is extremely scarce, soils are deficient, drinking water is in critical supply, and plant species are restricted by the harsher ecology. However, the lagoon and the deep sea beyond the reef provide an almost unlimited resource of marine food. Understandably, low islanders are more oriented toward the sea in their view of the world, while high islanders look more to the resources of the land, despite the relatively small compass of their domain.

Climate throughout most of the region is oceanic and tropical with high temperatures and humidity, although the prevailing tradewinds moderate living conditions. Annual rainfall ranges from 70 to 150 inches with

some seasonal variation. Typhoons usually originate in the central Carolines and then move west or north into the Marianas. They may cause extensive damage although regional warning systems now keep danger to human life to a minimum.

To compose a simple statement about Micronesian traditional life will do no justice to the richness and variety of the islanders' mores as these affect the lives and status of the elderly. Such an effort may also be misleading because "Micronesia" and "Micronesians" are terms coined by foreigners to identify artificial concepts. They imply a greater heterogeneity than has ever existed in the region. The diversity of traditional practices, most of which are still viable today, must be appreciated if the reader is to be sensitive to the implications for developing social services and social policy for the elderly.

Cultural differences within Micronesia have evolved over several millenia of relative isolation of island groups from each other. Scholars agree that ancestors of the Micronesians arrived as early as 3000 to 2000 B.C., sailing to the Marianas and western Carolines from the Philippines. They brought with them food plants, such as coconut, taro, breadfruit, and yam, along with a viable farming and fishing economy. Around 1500 B.C. central and eastern Micronesia began to be settled from the south by canoe parties originating in eastern Melanesia, about the same time that forebears of the Polynesians moved on to Tonga and Samoa from the same homeland. Comparative linguistic research has identified more than a dozen distinct languages in Micronesia, including Palauan, Yapese, Chamorro, Trukese, Ponapean, Kosraen, Marshallese, and others. Today, English is the single medium of communication among these disparate speech communities due to the operation of American schools throughout the territory.

As in language, there are comparable differences in the social, economic, and political sectors of culture which continue to characterize ethnic entities in Micronesia despite the common overlay of Western custom in historic times. The following summary attempts to generalize about certain features of the traditional culture important for understanding the contemporary scene, such as kinship groupings, social reciprocation, economic exchange, land tenure, status and rank, authority, and the supernatural.

Most island settlements outside the more urbanized centers of population are quite small and are dispersed along the shoreline. Growing up in the islands has generally meant to learn, by informal means, about the network of rights and obligations operating within the immediate family and household and, by extension, in the lineage, clan, and community.

Critical factors affecting the shape of these social configurations are age, sex, kinship, and residence. Taken together, these factors determine an individual's status and role within the larger society. The specific patterns of social organization vary in detail from one culture to the next. Adoption of children is quite common and generally involves close relatives. Adolescence in traditional Micronesia was not unduly stressful. Even today, premarital sex is condoned within limits defined by time-honored views about incest. Marriage was strongly influenced by familial needs and loyalties and has been affected only moderately by individual preferences in the context of acculturation. Death and funeral rites are ritualized to insure a clear passage of the deceased's spirit to the afterworld and to ease the adjustment of those who are bereaved.

Households consist generally of a nuclear family plus varying numbers of extended family members, such as, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, and function as the principal economic units in production and distribution of goods and services. The matrilineal principle of descent commonly prevails in the larger networks of social relationships. Land is shared and administered by a kin group, which most often is the lineage or clan. Land is the foundation of political power and authority as exercised by kin group heads. In some societies, paramount chiefs hold authority over more extensive territorial entities. Social class distinctions have been elaborated in most of Micronesia and depend largely on preemptive land rights and descent through the female line. However, males traditionally enjoy superiority over females, at least in the public view. Age contributes importantly to social status among individuals, with the advantage on the side of the elderly. Within the community, competition for social position by kin groups is conducted in a formal manner by excessive displays at public feasts where exchanges of food and other goods occur among rival parties. On certain occasions, tribute is rendered by individuals and their kinfolk who seek favors from the traditional chiefs.

Religion, in a formalistic sense, was never developed as much in Micronesia as it was in Polynesia and Melanesia. However, Micronesians responded actively (and many still do) to their perceived supernatural environment. Their concepts of ancestral ghosts, sorcery, spirit possession, illness, and healing continue to affect their physical and mental well-being, even as they seek medical aid from Western doctors and participate in Christian worship. A rich body of legend, myth, and folklore still enlivens the world-view of the older generation, and is being revitalized among younger Micronesians through bilingual and bicultural education in the public schools.

The islanders' attitudes about time focus on the present, except as social status or rank may be enhanced by reference to ancestral legacies. In that case, genealogies reaching into the past are valued to establish individual and family credentials. Micronesians express less concern about their future. Whatever lies ahead may be seen as continued growth along paths already charted. Or, the future may be accepted without question as "whatever will be, will be," an attitude which has sustained many island communities through times of scarcity and repression in the course of Micronesian history.

Magellan sighted the Marianas in 1521. It was not until 1668 that Spanish impact on local Chamorro society began in the guise of Catholic missionary and governmental punitive actions which by the end of the seventeenth century had reduced the native population to a fraction of its former numbers and had delivered a mortal blow to the indigenous culture. The next two centuries resulted in progressive hybridization (more specifically, hispanicization) of Chamorro culture and race as Spanish, Filipino, and Mexican forces altered the native heritage. Guam became a supply station for Spanish galleons sailing between Mexico and the Philippines. Meanwhile, during the early nineteenth century, several hundred Carolinians from the atolls between Yap and Truk had migrated to Saipan and laid the basis for a Carolinian minority in the Marianas north of Guam.

The Spanish-American War resulted in the annexation of Guam as a territory by the United States in 1898. The Navy Department had responsibility for maintaining a naval station on the island. Programs in public health and education were launched. In the ensuing years, Guamanians came to feel an intense loyalty to the United States.

Official policies by Germany, which succeeded Spain in the Marianas and the Carolines in 1899 and which had already established a protectorate in the Marshalls in 1885, emphasized commercial trade and production of copra. Administrators worked with island chieftains in a form of indirect rule regarding copra production, tax collection, and labor conscription for public works projects. The traditional powers of the chiefs were somewhat curtailed in areas of land tenure and social class privilege.

At the start of World War I, Japan met no resistance in taking over the German holdings in Micronesia. The League of Nations in 1920 confirmed Japan in retention of the islands as a mandated territory. Micronesian elders, who now are in their sixties, were born during this time. At first, Japanese interests predominated in commercial agriculture and fisheries to benefit the national economy at home. Most of the labor for these industries was provided by colonists from Okinawa who were relocated in

the islands to relieve population pressure in southern Japan. For the islanders, public health services improved and elementary schools stressed Japanese language and morals and vocational subjects. Traditional island authorities were superceded by the Japanese-controlled administration. Micronesians became a minority people in their own homeland.

By 1937, Japan's military interests had gained priority and were implemented in selected locations in Micronesia in anticipation of that nation's offensive against the United States and countries in the South Pacific and Southeast Asia. Guam was occupied by Japanese forces in 1941. Severe dislocations of the Guamanian population occurred, as also in Micronesia wherever Japan's military concerns prevailed.

In 1944, American invasion forces seized strategic island locations in the Marshalls, Palau, and Marianas. Guam was retaken, and extensive air and sea facilities were constructed in support of the final attack on Japan. Guamanians, with nearly a half century of exposure to Western culture under U.S. territorial administration, moved swiftly after World War II to identify more closely with the American way of life and to disassociate themselves from their less westernized neighbors in Micronesia.

The United Nations in 1947 approved the U.S. government to administer the region as the newly created Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI). The Navy Department was delegated responsibility for the islands until 1951 when the Department of the Interior was given that charge by the nation's president.

Meanwhile, on Guam, local pressures for self-government were recognized by the U.S. Congress in 1950 when the latter approved legislation to establish Guam as an organized territory. At the same time, Guamanians were granted U.S. citizenship. Federal administrative control of Guam passed from the Navy to the Interior Department.

In the Trust Territory, top priority went to development of schools and hospitals. Measures were also initiated by the administration to set up legislative bodies at municipal, district, and territorial levels with membership restricted to Micronesians who were elected by popular vote. Less attention was given to developing the islands' physical infrastructure and economic self-sufficiency. From the early 1960s, however, increasingly large sums of money were poured into the territory in support of a burgeoning bureaucracy headed by American appointees and staffed by Micronesians.

This had the effect of making the islanders more and more dependent on federal grants-in-aid to finance their rising expectations in consumerism. Hordes of Micronesians migrated from rural areas to the more urbanized district centers. They were attracted by the concentration of hospital

care, post-elementary education, administrative services, western forms of entertainment, businesses catering to increased consumer needs, and transit facilities which improved communication by sea and air with the outside world. This movement to the district centers created serious problems common to urbanization elsewhere in the world, and depleted the labor resources and personnel needed to maintain the more traditional social structures in outlying rural areas.

Negotiations between the territorial Congress of Micronesia and the U.S. government regarding a more permanent political relationship got underway in 1969. Before long, however, serious differences on this issue arose among the Micronesians. In 1978 the Northern Marianas separated from the rest of the territory to become a commonwealth within the United States system, with citizenship to be granted upon termination of the trusteeship. By 1979 the Marshall Islands had also elected to go their own way, seeking a freer association with the United States and rejecting US. citizenship. In that same year, the newly formed Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), a union of Yap, Truk, Ponape, and Kosrae states, followed a somewhat parallel course. Finally, in 1981, the Republic of Belau (Palau) was inaugurated in anticipation of a similar tie with the United States. Negotiations continued between each of the last three entities and the U.S. government regarding final details of the free association status, but by 1983 had not yet been concluded. The proposed relationship would provide financial aid and self-government to the new Micronesian states in return for guarantees of U.S. military freedom of action in Micronesia to defend the nation's security in the Pacific.

Guam, over the years, has made some small progress in achieving more self-government, as the result of U.S. congressional actions which allow Guamanians to elect their own executive officials and to have a nonvoting delegate sit in the nation's House of Representatives.

The Changing Position of the Elderly

As evidenced by the foregoing discussion, any assessment of the status of the elderly in contemporary Micronesia must adopt a multifaceted approach if proper recognition is to be given to the complex mingling of geographical, cultural, and historical factors which have affected the present complexion of island populations in quite different ways. The situation of older persons today reflects the rate and direction of social change experienced by *all* members of the society. The elders, of course, represent within their own lifetimes a longer exposure to change than those who are younger. Many of the elderly people have had but one gener-

ation to accommodate a fairly traditional life-style to one of increasing dependence on external resources controlled by global forces. Other seniors have inherited cultural forms which were already altered by decades, even centuries, of contact with Western nations. On a graded scale of modernization, some populations (including the elders) appear to have assumed nearly the whole cloak of American custom, as in the case of Guam, while others still retain their essential nature as island Micronesians. However, as noted above, some societies have changed more rapidly than others, and hence have endured much greater stress.

A few examples, which follow, may help the reader to understand the complexities of change in the region and its effect on the position of the island's senior citizens.

At one extreme, the coral atolls lying between Yap and Truk represent a relatively uncomplicated organization of social and political cultures. They display a realistic relationship between the subsistence economy and the sparse island ecology, and manifest an absence of significant change under foreign administrations. Only very recently have these people become acutely aware of the new options open to them in the context of the political nationalism that is sweeping Micronesia.

Midway on the scale are the Marshall Islands, another atoll region with a similar resource base, but there the sameness ends. A traditionally stratified society with autocratic powers wielded by paramount chiefs, the Marshallese have seen foreign development of their copra industry, conversion by New England missionaries of the Protestant faith, extreme deprivation as a battleground between Japan and the United States in World War II, resettlement and radiation exposure of whole communities during the nuclear weapons testing programs in the late 1940s and 1950s, and dislocation and discrimination occasioned by construction and operation of the Pacific Missile Range at Kwajalein Atoll. In the 1970s, the Marshallese adopted a parliamentary form of national government and continue to bargain intensely with the U.S. government concerning the terms of a compact of free association.

A third example, at the other end of this spectrum of change, is Guam, largest of the Mariana Islands. The people of this territory have preserved only a vestige of traditional Chamorro culture, which is overlaid with Spanish customs assimilated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. After 1898 they were ruled as an American naval station, were ruthlessly occupied by Japanese forces during World War II, and were reluctant hosts to U.S. development of their island as a major military air and sea facility in support of that country's security in the western Pacific. Guamanians now seek closer economic ties with postwar Japan and other

Asian countries and are currently striving to improve their political status in terms of greater self-government and closer union with the United States.

A more precise picture of the position of the elderly in contemporary Micronesia may be gained by brief resumes of their situation in three areas of the region which in very broad terms will depict some of the differences alluded to in the preceding general statement. These areas are (1) the Caroline and Marshall Islands which comprise the principal part of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands and together have a somewhat similar history of Western contact and change even though marked cultural contrasts abound within the area; (2) the Northern Mariana Islands which are linked with the former area in events of this century but have a strikingly different history prior to that time; and (3) Guam, southernmost of the Marianas, whose people shared much of the same cultural and historical heritage with the rest of the Marianas until the beginning of the present century, but have followed quite separate courses since that time.

(1) *Caroline and Marshall Islands.* The summary statement on traditional culture included in the section on "General Background" is fairly accurate for the area now under discussion. The principal cultural divisions are the high island societies of Palau, Yap, Truk, Ponape, and Kosrae and the low island groups of the Marshalls in the east and the so-called Outer Islands between Yap and Truk. (A useful reference for more details on ethnography of the region is Alkire, 1977.)

As noted earlier, linguistic differences follow the above pattern. The elderly are especially restricted to using the language of' their own society. A few of them are able to communicate in Japanese, but most have not had opportunities to learn English, as the younger people have done in American schools since World War II.

Census data from 1973, the latest detailed count available until the 1980 census is more fully published, indicated a very young population with 47 percent of the total 98,051 inhabitants being under 15 years of age. Those 60 years and above, about 6,000 persons, accounted for only 6 percent. Women in the latter group slightly outnumbered men (TTPI, 1973).

The same data revealed a significant difference in the residence patterns of older people. Of the total population, 39 percent resided in the more urbanized district centers, while only 30 percent of those 60 years and above lived there. More of the elderly have preferred to remain in the rural and more traditional outer islands. The concentration of Micronesians in the centers was most marked in Palau (Koror) and the Marshalls (Ebeye and Majuro) where over 50 percent of the district populations

lived in the sites named. By comparison, only 39 to 41 percent of senior persons resided in the centers. In the other districts (Truk, Ponape, Yap, and Kosrae), the centers claimed from 21 to 35 percent of the total population, and the elderly consistently numbered about six points less than that. The migration to the centers has involved mainly middle-aged adults, and this has created serious problems for the elderly in outlying villages because of the decline of able-bodied labor and of persons needed to fill the essential roles in the middle age level for proper functioning of the islands' social and political systems.

In the district centers, most of the inhabitants have immigrated from many different home communities, some of which manifest contrasting traditional modes of living. For example, in Colonia, the Yapese population has been augmented to a limited extent by atoll peoples from the outer islands east of Yap. Similarly, in Kolonia, the Ponapeans have had to share their island with atoll dwellers from other Micronesian (and Polynesian) outliers in the area. Consequently, there is a relative lack of integration in district center social organization. (For more details on the differences in life-styles between the centers and the outer islands, see Mason, 1975.)

In such circumstances as these, the elderly are the ones who suffer most. They are for the most part reduced to caring for their younger grandchildren while the parents are working, and they are deprived of normal socializing outside the extended family household. They live on land which does not belong to them or to other members of the family, for the land must be rented from local landowners. The elders are removed geographically from traditional resources for subsistence food and materials normally utilized for housing and clothing. They must depend upon income earned by other members of the household who work for the government or in the private sector. In the urbanized setting, the aged are unable to assert their accustomed prerogatives and cannot employ to advantage their time-honored skills and knowledge.

Even in the outlying villages, where most of the elderly have opted to stay, the traditional assets of seniors have been minimized by the gradual encroachment of Western living patterns. This can be observed in new food preferences and innovations in clothing and housing. However, the elders retain some security in their continued attachment to ancestral landholdings and to the social status and authority associated with the land. On a modified scale, they also participate in the customary exchanges among kinfolk and they observe traditional occasions of importance. Where family composition has been less affected by out-migration, the older people continue to enjoy support from their children and other

relatives who are younger than they. In matters of physical and mental well-being, they still rely on indigenous healing practices and seek spiritual security in old and familiar ways. At the same time, it must be noted, they visit local dispensaries staffed by island health aides and attend local church services led by native pastors or visiting priests.

Almost all Micronesians in the region are now reported as Christians. The 1973 census data reported 55 percent as Protestant, 39 percent as Roman Catholic, and 3 percent as traditional. The last statistic represented almost wholly a nativistic movement in Palau called Modekngei which began early in this century as a synthesis of native values and Christian practices. The older generation is more active in church participation than are young persons. The districts varied significantly in their support of Protestant versus Catholic organizations. Thus, the people in Kosrae and the Marshalls were Protestant by an overwhelming margin, due primarily to the mission efforts of New England Congregationalists who arrived in eastern Micronesia as early as the 1850s. Support for Catholicism was equally compelling in Yap and the Outer Islands of that district. Palau also leaned more toward a Catholic commitment. In Ponape and Truk districts, however, the memberships of the two faiths were more evenly matched. Throughout much of the region, the Catholic church under the direction of Jesuit priests has been active in developing a local leadership in a cadre of deacons recruited from the island congregations. Some Micronesians have been ordained as priests. Protestantism is almost entirely controlled by islander-led church associations. In recent years, the islands have seen increasing activity by fundamentalist and other church groups.

Another facet of the aging process is the degree to which islanders have acquired formal schooling. According to the 1973 census data, among those 55 years and older, about 36 percent reported no formal education and 63 percent claimed one or more years of elementary training. The latter experience was gained either in the first three grades of Japanese schools conducted for island children between World Wars I and II, or in the so-called “Bible” schools maintained for the most part at Protestant missions. Women appeared to have been less educated than men, especially in the Yap and Truk districts.

In regard to economic activity, among those 60 years and over, 67 percent reported no employment at all. About 25 percent were engaged in “village” labors, such as farming, fishing, and copra or handicraft production Most of those in this category were males and this kind of work was more typical in the Yap and Ponape districts. The remaining 8 per-

cent worked in the "money" economy, earning wages from government or private employment and were almost exclusively males.

A final comment must be added regarding the condition of communities (and their elderly) in the Marshall Islands who were either relocated in the 1940s from Bikini and Enewetak Atolls to make way for U.S. testing of nuclear weapons or were exposed to massive radioactive fallout at Rongelap and Utrik Atolls during the 1954 test of the first hydrogen bomb. 'These people, some 600 in all at the time of their initial crises, have since then suffered great hardship in social and ecological adaptation to resettlement sites or in illnesses as serious as thyroid abnormalities requiring corrective surgery. In these four communities, the elders have borne a major share of the stress encountered in the disruptions created by the military testing programs.

(2) *Nothern Mariana Islands.* Although legally still part of the Trust Territory, the people of this former Marianas District have rejected union with their Micronesian neighbors in the Carolines and Marshalls and are now in transition to commonwealth status and U.S. citizenship. Their cultural heritage, originally a variant of Micronesian tradition, has been drastically altered since the seventeenth century under colonial rule by Spain, Germany, Japan, and finally the United States. Today the quality of life in the Northern Marianas reflects Western (more specifically American, since World War II) values and practices more than that of any community in the Carolines or Marshalls. An exception to this statement may be discerned in the status of the Northern Marianas elderly who find themselves increasingly losing touch with the younger generation in both language (English is the speech medium of youth) and cultural experience (the elders relate more to their socialization under the Japanese between World Wars I and II, which none of the youth have ever known.)

A further division affecting the status of older people is the ethnic cleavage within the society between the Chamorro majority and the Carolinian minority. Long ago, ancestors of the Chamorro were the only inhabitants of the island chain and possessed a language and culture with affinities among other indigenes of western Micronesia. In 1815, forebears of the Carolinians sailed to Saipan, largest of the Northern Marianas, seeking new residence after their home atolls in the area between Truk and Yap had been devastated by a typhoon. Carolinians today retain much of their cultural identity, compared with the Chamorros whose cultural modes have been strongly hispanicized. Intermarriage between the two groups is not common, and a certain antagonism stems from a Chamorro tendency at times to disparage the capabilities of the Carolinians in

contemporary affairs. The latter use their own language among themselves although by necessity most have learned to speak Chamorro as well. Popular estimates suggest that Chamorros outnumber Carolinians about three to one.

Using the same census data (TTPI, 1973) as in the previous section, one notes again a very young population with 48 percent of the total 12,581 native inhabitants being under 15 years of age. Persons 60 years and above numbered only 570, accounting for 4.5 percent of the total population,, Women in this age group outnumbered males by nearly 6 percent. Widows were more numerous than widowers by almost three to one. About 86 percent of the local population lived on Saipan, political and commercial center of the islands. Almost 8 percent lived on Rota Island, reportedly the most conservative community in the group. A significantly higher proportion of seniors counted on Rota may be due to the movement of many middle-aged Rotanese to Saipan for employment (comparable to the migration from rural areas to urban centers as already noted for the Carolines and Marshalls), leaving a larger percentage of older people at home in the security of a more comfortable environment.

The overwhelmingly Roman Catholic commitment in the islands is well documented in the 1973 census data. Among those who reported a religious affiliation, nearly 94 percent were Catholics and barely 5 percent were Protestants. The priests, who are of the Capuchin Order, exercise a great influence in community affairs and provide spiritual comfort in times of family crisis. Among the elderly, whose generation stands closer in time to the dominant role of the Church in the Spanish period, the women especially find much satisfaction in the social and ritual gatherings associated with the church calendar. The Carolinians, because their ancestors came to the Marianas late in the Spanish regime, seem to show less commitment to the Church traditions although, like the Chamorros, they are predominantly Catholic in membership.

In the Northern Marianas, the elderly are much better educated by comparison with the rest of the Trust Territory. Among those 55 years and older, according to the 1973 census, less than 14 percent had received no formal schooling, while 82 percent reported some elementary education, and 4 percent had been to high school. The disparity between the sexes noted for other districts in the Trust Territory was much less apparent here. This doubtless reflects the greater opportunities for education in the Northern Marianas under the Japanese between the two World Wars, when the number of immigrants from Japan many times outnumbered the local population and influenced the social as well as the economic situation.

As regards economic activity among those 60 years and over, 53 percent reported no employment at all. About 18 percent were engaged in "village" labor, mainly growing crops and livestock, and almost all were males. 'The remaining 29 percent worked in the "money" economy, most of them employed by the government. Only few women reported working for wages.

Outwardly, Marianas people live very much as do many Americans in the material aspects of their daily lives. But American observers will be misled if they assume that this apparent assimilation applies to other areas of the culture. Kinship ties are widely extended, and within the family there is great respect for older people. But family support systems are eroding, the range of effective kin obligations is narrowing, and parents are losing control of their children as the latter seek more freedom of individual action apart from the constraints of family and church.

(3) *Guam.* When Magellan discovered Guam in 1521, it was inhabited by Chamorros as were the other Mariana Islands. The people of Guam, living under Spanish colonial rule from the mid-seventeenth century and subject since 1898 to American territorial administration, have undergone drastic changes in their cultural and racial heritage. Guam now presents an image of a modern, urban, cosmopolitan community in which the number of non-Chamorro immigrants has increased to the point where residents of Chamorro ancestry are in danger of becoming a social minority on their own island. However, the blending of ethnic groups has given a special flavor to the island society. In this commingling of ancestral strains, the Chamorro people still represent the core and provide a certain social stability within the larger Guam community.

It is difficult to determine the relative size of age groups in the local population because the U.S. decennial censuses include American military personnel and their dependents who are based on Guam for limited tours of duty. Government planners on Guam tend to use a constant figure of about 22,000 to represent this shifting population. On that basis, the more permanent residents in 1980 numbered about 84,000. Until details of the 1980 census are published, a household survey of the civilian population, conducted in 1975 (Government of Guam Department of Labor, 1976), will provide a useful basis for understanding the status of the elderly. A relatively young population was indicated, with 41 percent being under 15 years of age. Those who were 60 years and older, about 4,000 persons, accounted for about 5 percent of the total. In this age group, the women outnumbered men about five to four.

According to the same study, the ethnic composition of Guam's local population was 56 percent Chamorro, 7 percent mixed Chamorro-

Filipino or Chamorro-Caucasian, 19 percent Filipino, 9 percent Caucasian, and the rest Micronesian or Asian. The median age for Chamorros was 18, but for the Filipino and Caucasian groups it averaged 26, probably due to the larger number of adults immigrating in these populations. About 88 percent of local people were American citizens, and the rest held permanent resident alien status. According to the 1970 Census (United States Department of Commerce, 1973), about 16 percent of the island's non-military population was foreign-born, and three-fourths of these were native to the Philippines.

A University of Guam survey (Haverlandt et al, 1975) reported that most Guamanian families were nuclear in type (that is, parents and children only), but that one-fifth of all households included one or more other individuals. Many of the latter were either widows or widowers, usually a parent of the wife in the household. Traditionally, a Chamorro woman was expected to provide primary care for her elderly parents.

Another study conducted in 1978 on a 10 percent sample of Guamanians 55 years and over (Kasperbauer, 1980) found that most of Guam's elderly were literate, and that 95 percent spoke at least two languages (usually English and Chamorro or a Philippine language such as Tagalog). Chamorro was the favored conversational medium, although English was acceptable. Nearly three-fourths of the sample had completed between three and eight years of elementary education, and less than 6 percent reported no formal schooling. This record surpasses that of the elderly in the rest of Micronesia and attests to the priority placed on public school training by the American government after Guam was annexed in 1898. Of the two-thirds who had been born on Guam, a remarkable 70 percent had traveled off-island to visit children or other relatives living in the United States and elsewhere. Over 60 percent were residing with their spouses, and about the same number owned their own home. Nearly everyone interviewed was "comfortable" in his/her present situation, even though some noted the lack of such conveniences as electricity, telephone, indoor bathroom, and hot or cold running water.

Although Chamorros and Filipinos as ethnic populations on Guam are associated with different linguistic and cultural traditions, they now share many social practices as the result of a generally similar experience in past generations, in both Guam and the Philippines, under Spanish colonial rule and American territorial control thereafter. This shared heritage is true especially among the elderly. Both groups are relatively at ease with American customs which now prevail on modern Guam. Both are supportive of Roman Catholicism as taught from Spanish times, and the Church plays an important role in the family and community affairs of

each. Both ethnic groups value children and foster the ideal of large families which was originally part of their island customs, and was reinforced by Spanish influence. This continues to be true on Guam today even though the influence of planned parenthood is evident in the smaller size of households. Reciprocity within the extended family continues to be an important principle in social interaction. Respect for older people, be they parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, or godparents, is a common theme which survives.

It should be noted that nearly 50 percent of Guam's women are employed outside the home, usually in order to insure sufficient family income to meet Guam's high cost of living. Such working wives must still manage the home in all of its aspects. Therefore, if there are elderly persons in the household, they are much valued as an aid in easing that burden.

Villages in southern Guam are more traditional in following Chamorro custom. Residential areas established more recently in north-central Guam have a higher proportion of Filipinos. Among Chamorros, a number of community organizations have sprung up which are devoted to the promotion and preservation of traditional language, culture, and the arts, thus manifesting a new commitment to strengthening Chamorro identity among both young and old. Filipino associations have also been organized on Guam, especially among the women, in support of charitable and other local projects, thereby achieving greater visibility and benefit for Filipino ethnic identity.

Nowadays, the ability of families on Guam to accumulate monetary wealth and to spend conspicuously is seen by many as more appropriate for improving one's social standing than by traditional exploitation of land and marine resources. Territorial and federal government assistance to the elderly is often viewed as an extension of the customary kinship support system, when senior citizens find it increasingly difficult to depend on the time-honored caring responsibilities of their younger and more individualistically oriented kinsmen.

Social Services and Social Policy for the Elderly

As stated in the introduction, the wants and needs of the elderly in modem, Micronesia are not always easy to assess. This poses a challenge both to local island governments and to externally based public and private agencies. First, there is the problem of identifying the material needs of older people and of determining whose responsibility it should be to help meet those requirements. Where a Western cultural orientation is

manifest in the more urbanized communities, the elders' concerns about housing, transportation, income, food, and health are similar to those which are generally voiced in American cities.

Second, and more compelling in the final analysis, is the question of what can be done to satisfy the social and psychological needs of senior persons. They want to be accepted as an integral part of their community, to be able to assume responsible roles in local affairs by giving from their fund of experience and knowledge, and to feel proud in making those contributions to a society which places increasing emphasis on inputs from younger, middle-aged members. The present situation of the elderly calls for a great deal of humanity and cross-cultural sensitivity in the planning and implementation of formal programs which are intended to assist the region's senior citizens (Mason, 1981c).

Before reviewing the federal programs funded since the early 1970s under the Older Americans Act, it should be pointed out that, in addition to the traditional support available to elders at the community level, there is a continuing source of assistance in the programs implemented by church organizations. Today, the older generation is more committed and active in church participation than the younger people, many of whom have drifted away from the church. Hence, the elderly stand to benefit in greater proportion from the ministrations of church officials. Also not to be overlooked in this regard are ongoing government programs designed to help the population as a whole in such matters as housing, transportation, income, community development, public health, and other social services. Some of these activities are funded from locally derived revenues and others are made possible by categorical grants from federal agencies whose jurisdictions have been extended to include the U.S. territories.

Older Americans Act. Federal legislation was enacted in 1965 to provide financial support for program planning and development on behalf of the elderly in the United States. As amended in later years, the Act led to creation of state and area agencies to serve as advocate and focal point for concerns of the elderly and to plan comprehensively for the coordination of services among agencies and organizations in the public and private sectors. Principal objectives of the Act are to enable senior citizens (identified as persons sixty years of age and older) to achieve maximum dignity and security in a home environment through appropriate support services and to remove barriers to their economic independence in government and business. Application of the Act was extended to the U.S. territories, and by 1970 grants were being made to "state" agencies in Guam and the Trust Territory. The Administration on Aging (AoA) had been set up in Washington within the Department of Health, Education,

and Welfare to oversee all programs conducted under the Act. Region IX of AoA includes California, Hawaii, Nevada, Arizona, and the Pacific territories, namely Guam, Northern Marianas, Trust Territory, and American Samoa. The regional office is located in San Francisco.

Guam was the first of the Pacific territories to be funded under the Act. Elderly programs on that island are managed by the Division of Senior Citizens in the Department of Public Health and Social Services. Contracts for delivery of services are arranged by the division with other government departments and with private organizations. Program development in the Trust Territory (TTPI) has been the responsibility of the Office on Aging in the Community Development Division of the Department of Public Affairs at headquarters on Saipan. Implementation has been carried out by district offices established for that purpose in Palau, Yap, Truk, Ponape, Kosrae, and the Marshalls, and formerly in the Northern Marianas. In the Carolines and Marshalls, the aging programs are implemented by means of contract agreements between the local offices and other government departments such as Public Health and Education. When the Marianas District separated from the rest of the Trust Territory in 1978, funding was provided by AoA directly to the new commonwealth government where the program is managed by the Division on Aging in the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs with field coordinators based on Saipan, Tinian, and Rota. Administration of elderly programs elsewhere in the Trust Territory is being transferred from TTPI headquarters to the new governments, that is, the Federated States of Micronesia (Ponape, Truk, Yap, and Kosrae), the Republic of Belau, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. However, until negotiations between the U.S. government and these three entities are finalized, TTPI headquarters will continue to hold responsibility for the AoA grant.

Services to the elderly in all of the region have been determined primarily by the regulations and guidelines of the Older Americans Act. Program variety within the region reflects local needs assessments and also administrative priorities. In general, most of the following services are available to the elderly, at least in the more urbanized centers of population (in the Carolines and Marshalls, communities in the outer islands tend to be slighted owing to problems of inter-island transportation and the smallness of the aged populations):

a) *Health* (health screening, health education, home care for the frail elderly, geriatric nursing, direct medical treatment in clinics and dispensaries, medical referral for specialist aid),

b) *Nutrition* (nutrition education, congregate hot meals at senior centers, home-delivered meals for shut-ins),

c) *Homemaker* (outreach aid for home chores and personal care),

d) *Multipurpose senior centers* (social, recreational, informational),

e) *Transportation* (to medical centers, to senior centers, for visits to relatives and friends, for shopping),

f) *Cultural* (employment in community service projects, teaching in schools about traditional subjects, historic and cultural preservation projects, handicraft production),

g) *Counseling* (legal aid, employment and training opportunities, personal and family problems).

In the Trust Territory, some AoA funds have been approved for home renovation, especially in the outer islands where houses occupied by older persons were badly in need of repair. Generally, the region's administrators have avoided premature or inappropriate institutionalization of the elderly. Their aim has been to meet the needs of the aged in the context of home and community support, with supplemental assistance being provided from external sources only when sorely needed. Guam is somewhat exceptional in that a housing project for senior citizens has been completed recently, and similar projects are planned for other communities on the island where senior residents will be able to enjoy continued close contact with relatives and lifelong friends and neighbors.

Older persons have generally had to rely on the same medical facilities that are available to everyone in the community. Only in a few instances, on Guam for example, have special programs been developed for geriatric care. Private medicine in the Western sense is available almost nowhere except on Guam. Many older people in the region prefer to seek diagnosis and treatment of their ills by traditional practitioners, whose methods as a rule have either been ignored or not been encouraged by hospital and clinic personnel except on a referral basis. The primary causes of death among the elderly are heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and hypertension. Government programs such as Medicaid and Medicare have not operated long enough in the islands for very many older people to receive help. However, in the case of Guamanians who served with the U.S. military before or after World War II, veterans' benefits provide their elderly dependents with care at federal hospitals.

Typical problems which have challenged administrators of aging programs in the islands include the following:

a) Recruitment of qualified local staff,

b) Training of service providers, project managers, and advisory council members to improve their understanding of the intent of the Older Americans Act and to enhance their ability to implement its provisions,

c) Difficulty in coordinating projects for the elderly with other government departments, which is due in part to poor communication and to low visibility of the aging program,

d) Lack of imaginative and resourceful leadership in project planning and implementation, and

e) Neglect of the monitoring and evaluation components in developing project designs (East-West Center, 1974).

Aging is a process which begins at birth. Today's island youth will be the elderly generation in three or four decades. Age in years is not a realistic measure to apply across the board among the diverse cultures in Micronesia. Definitions of who is "elderly" will vary locally, and may be related to various factors such as physical capacity, health, mental agility, and judgment. One Marshallese told the author years ago that a man is considered to be "old" when he no longer can climb a coconut palm to get down some drinking nuts. In general, "being old" in the islands has a much more positive connotation in comparison with the usually more negative images prevailing in the United States.

The experiences of a decade in administering programs for the elderly in Micronesia has shown that the unique cultural and historical character of each locality militates against application of a standardized approach in program planning and implementation (Mason, 1980, 1981 a and b). It is also evident that a community-based effort with primary input from the elderly themselves is essential for a successful operation. In this regard, the contributions of local advisory councils on aging have been useful and should be encouraged even more. The suggestions of others in the community during public hearings on proposed elderly programs should be solicited with greater vigor.

Public assistance legislation like the Older Americans Act, which was designed to meet the needs of the elderly in the United States, cannot properly be transferred *in toto* to Micronesia to ease the burdens of the island elderly. In a study of the aging program in Truk, one researcher has concluded that "Aging in the Micronesian context is sufficiently different from aging in the American context that in spite of slight modifications, our federal programs for the aged are often inappropriate, wasteful, and perhaps even harmful when applied in Micronesian settings" (Borthwick, 1979).

Within the island societies of which the elders are a part, there persists a lack of real enthusiasm for government aid to the aged. This statement is more true for the Carolines and Marshalls, less so for the Northern Marianas, and least for Guam. The reason for such differences probably lies in the more traditional practices still prevailing in the Trust Territory

as compared with the more Americanized or urbanized attitudes expressed in Guam and the other Mariana Islands. Where a negative sentiment exists among community leaders it is largely due to continuing pride in the tradition that kinfolk should take care of their elders, and to an unwillingness to recognize that a growing number of senior citizens have needs today which are not always met adequately by traditional support systems.

Since the 1960s, a heightened political consciousness in the islands has opposed continuance of any form of colonialism. The emerging leadership is composed mostly of younger people, reared and educated in an artificial environment created over the years by a succession of colonial regimes. These new island leaders have had little opportunity to learn the skills required to manage contemporary affairs, now that Micronesians have been granted self-government that approaches independence. This situation calls for heroic efforts by island administrators in their newly assumed offices as they attempt to resolve the many conflicts of public interest and priorities arising from the stresses of government in transition.

In this setting of uncertainty, the elderly are able to offer a broader perspective, one gained from lifelong experience with the transition from traditional modes of life to the open-ended and non-directed social interaction in which they now find themselves involved. Elders in Micronesia may well constitute a vital resource for island leaders if they are invited to assist in restoring that spiritual essence of island living which makes life really worthwhile. That ideal is now endangered by the overwhelmingly materialistic concerns of the island governments in matters of political status and economic development.

Conclusion

In viewing the status of the elderly and the problems of service delivery in government aid programs, Micronesia presents a tantalizing potpourri of variables to confuse the unwary observer and to confound the program administrator. Not only is Micronesia a puzzling entity to the ill-informed American venturing into the islands from a bureaucratic post in the United States, but the region is also in turmoil within because of the marked contrasts in cultural, historical, and ecological character that distinguish one society from another.

Traditionally, in the specific custom of each locale, the elderly have been highly regarded for their age, their wisdom, and their reservoirs of knowledge. Their advanced years have given them authority, respect, privilege, and the leisure to enjoy the twilight of their lives. Two in-

stitutions underlie this position of advantage. One is the extended family in which the elders sit at the apex of the generational hierarchy. The other is the shared ownership or use of land by the extended family where land rights are the ultimate basis of social and political status.

Unfortunately for the elderly, change has visited Micronesia over the past two or three centuries, as it has everywhere in the world. The processes of westernization, urbanization, or modernization, by whatever name, have eroded the time-honored heritages of custom in the islands--in some places much more than in others. The intrusion of a monetary economy, new political forms and practices, sectarian Christianity, and universal public education has placed the older people in an untenable situation where the guidelines of a lifetime no longer enjoy unanimous acceptance and where the prerogatives of being old have lost their substance and meaning.

Part of the problem faced by elders in modern Micronesia has to do with material concerns about health, housing, food, transportation, and income--how do they support themselves in this strange consumer-oriented world? But a larger part of the problem involves the social and psychological needs of the older generation in what is fast becoming a foreign culture to them.

Then, too, it must be noted that some of their uncertainties about the present (and the future) are defined quite differently in the various subareas of Micronesia. Guam stands at one end of the spectrum of change and seems almost as American as an island population can be. The reason for this exception lies in the longstanding association of Guam with the United States as a territorial possession. The other islands in the Marianas chain have had a more complex history in the twentieth-century succession of German, Japanese, and American administrations.

When it comes to the rest of the Trust Territory, the Carolines and the Marshalls, pressures for change from foreign nations and cultures have generally been much less evident. These islands, in turn, must be differentiated into two worlds: (1) the more urbanized port towns or district centers, such as Koror, Moen, Kolonia, or Majuro, and (2) the outer islands which are visited less frequently by agents from the outside world when field trips touch at an island for only two or three days before the next visit a month or more later. In the hinterland of Micronesia, tradition is understandably more vigorous. Yet, even here, the outer island populations have been decimated by the migration of middle-aged adults to the urban centers in search of employment or other attractions associated with the new Micronesian way.

Federal programs supported under the Older Americans Act of 1965, as amended, have delivered services to the elderly in the region for a decade, providing health care, hot meals, part-time employment in cultural projects, counseling, and the like--comparable to what has become ritual in senior citizen programs in the United States under the same legislation. These services are helping the elderly in the islands to meet their newfound material needs, but less has been achieved in the social and psychological aspects of their situation. Here is where imagination and ingenuity are required of program administrators and government leaders alike. The answers to the dilemmas of the elderly are not theirs alone. The answers must ultimately be found in the solutions achieved by the entire society in the constant adjustment to present day conditions required of Micronesians in every age group.

In the final analysis, the elderly want to be valued as human beings, not as casualties of the changing times. In this desire, they are not really different from most people in the world today. They can also be a positive resource in helping their island communities to forge a meaningful bond between the older traditional ethic and the newer values that are emerging from the maelstrom of societies stressed by too rapid change.

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