

Glenn Petersen, *One Man Cannot Rule a Thousand: Fission in a Ponapean Chiefdom*. Studies in Pacific Anthropology. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982. Pp. 154, figures, maps, glossaries.

This book appears in the University of Michigan Press' series in Pacific Anthropology, edited by Vern Carroll. We are fortunate to have this series and this book. It is a clear and lively account of political fission on Ponape and adds considerably to our understanding of the dynamics of Ponapean politics. It also presents important material bearing on the question of how indigenous political structures respond to colonial pressures.

In 1979 Upper Awak, a petty chiefdom or section within the paramount chiefdom of Uh, gave birth to a new, competing section. This was not an easy birth; it both arose from and exacerbated characteristic Ponapean social tensions. Petersen was there to witness these events and was uniquely situated to understand them. He had already spent a year on Ponape researching Awak politics and ethnohistory, he had mastered the rather complex literature on Ponapean politics, and, perhaps most importantly, he was a close friend of the chief of Awak. These factors allowed him to understand better than most what was happening as a number of his friend's people, alienated and disaffected, proclaimed themselves a separate chiefdom.

Petersen views the section or minor chiefdom as the principal unit of Ponapean politics and the secondary unit (after household/farmstead) of social organization, and his description of these events certainly bears him out. The minor chiefdoms have managed to retain their vigor and importance despite quite revolutionary changes imposed on Ponape by the various imperial powers which have ruled there. No longer playing a role in the distribution of land, chiefs now rely solely on their control of honorific titles to bind their followers to them. Since titles are greatly desired, a chief can use his control over them to generate and maintain a high level

of activity within his section--especially production of foodstuffs for feasts. Yet there are limitations on his ability to use titles to ensure political loyalty.

Chiefs tend to confer titles on important members of powerful kin groups in order to insure the support of those groups. However, as the population of a section grows, tensions begin to emerge. There simply are not enough important titles to go around--thus "one man cannot rule a thousand." Furthermore, there is competition between and within matrilineages over important titles, up to and including that of chief. Eventually, as happened in Upper Awak in 1979, a discontented, "title-hungry" group will break off and proclaim itself a new section.

Among the strengths of Petersen's account of these events is the very clear way in which he consistently links its details to a larger understanding of the way politics work on Ponape. In order to do this he must reduce the great complexity of the observed materials to their underlying order and then relate that order to the dynamics characteristic of the larger system. This is not an easy task, as anyone who has worked with cases can testify, and he accomplishes it in a graceful and convincing manner. Yet it is also here that I think the major defect of the book can be found--the lack of explicit attention to social theory.

Following the splitting off of the new section, the chiefdom of Upper Awak went through a major reorganization and experienced an upsurge of activity. Petersen is quite clear that one of the results of the fission was the strengthening of the parent section. This is an outcome whose broad outlines were made familiar in the work of Max Gluckman. Now, if this were all that Gluckman had to say about such processes, the fact that Petersen omits any reference to him could be applauded as a decision not to include the kind of ritualistic bow to an ancestor figure which too often litters ethnographies. But this is not the case, for Gluckman also pointed out how processes of conflict can validate and strengthen political institutions in general. Attention to his work might have led Petersen to investigate whether or not the survival of the institution of chief in Ponape was a result of just the kind of conflict he so ably reports. Attention to the work of other theorists of political anthropology, for example M. J. Swartz on political process, F. G. Bailey on power, or Maurice Bloch on political oratory, could also have served both to further the analysis and better relate the book to the concerns of the discipline as a whole. This is not to say, by any means, that the book is bereft of theoretical interests or suffers from any shortage of ideas. And, as the example from Gluckman shows, it is quite easy to see the theoretical relevance of much of what

Petersen describes. But it is fair to say that a more explicit attention to theory could have strengthened the analysis.

At several points the main theoretical thrust of the book seems to be near the surface but never quite breaks through. It appears to be related to the controversy between Harris and others about the correct way to conceptualize the relations between the means of production on the one hand, and political organization on the other. A strict cultural materialist interpretation would lead one to predict that following the abolition of the tie between chiefdom and land ownership the institution of chiefdom should have withered away. Yet as Petersen remarks, in several places it has flourished and shows no sign of decreasing in importance. Because this point is developed without any explicit discussion of the theoretical literature, this part of Petersen's contribution may have less impact on the development of anthropological ideas than it deserves.

Despite this flaw the book stands on its merits as a well realized description of Ponapean political processes and will well repay reading by political anthropologists and Pacific specialists.

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