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## **PRESERVING COLONIAL HERITAGE IN POSTCOLONIAL MICRONESIA**

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Micronesia has a long history of colonial occupation: Spanish, German, Japanese, and finally American. Each power left tangible remains of its occupation and each has influenced the preservation of Micronesian culture. This essay explores the nature of historic preservation of colonial sites and property in a postcolonial world. What are the priorities and what are the constraints for Micronesian countries to manage their colonial past at a time when cultural self-determination has become reality?

**HISTORIC ASSOCIATIONS** with non-Oceanic civilizations have shaped today's emergent nation-states of Micronesia. Given the vital and dynamic nature of Micronesian societies, it was inevitable that contact between them and shipwrecked sailors, traders, whalers, escaped convicts, and colonial administrations should initiate rapid cultural changes. Whether deliberate or accidental, adopted or imposed, those changes have contributed significantly to the social constructs of Micronesia today.

The terms "colonial," "precolonial," "postcolonial," and "neocolonial" are frequently used as though they have been clearly defined and their definitions widely accepted. This is not the case, and as Gandhi shows, "postcolonialism" is "a diffuse and nebulous term" (1998:viii), a description that may properly be applied to all four terms.

In practice, determining when a "colonial" period ended and a "post-colonial" period began is frequently difficult (Chen 1996; Henningham 1996; McClintock 1993). Decolonization is a complex process. The simplest definition may involve replacing a foreign administration with a form of self-rule. More complex definitions may involve more-radical "social surgery" to remove cultural associations and constructs built by colonial influences. Similarly, national independence is a term that is changing in definition and

application. The forces of international econometrics drive development of a global economy and communications infrastructure, frequently disempowering small nation-states of the Pacific (Suter 1995).

How real can political independence be when its boundaries are set by the hard realities of economic dependence? Blaisdell suggests decolonization in the Pacific is an "unfinished business" (2000). Despite self-government, old familiar forms of colonialism have not disappeared in the euphoria of national "independence"; rather, they have evolved into a neocolonialism incorporating new forms of dependence and control.

### **Colonial Forces, the Politics of Exclusion, and Independence**

Spain was the first colonial power to arrive in the region and remained dominant for far longer than any other. A continuing result is that Hispanic and Roman Catholic influences are particularly strong in those areas Spain physically colonized. Guam, for example, formed part of Spain's geographically vast empire throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries and has undergone significant cultural change as a direct result (Rogers 1995).

Other areas, such as the Marshall Islands, were not at first considered to have significant economic or strategic value and consequently retained their independence until much later. The perception of their comparative insignificance began to change rapidly in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Within a single lifetime, between 1880 and 1950, four separate colonial/imperial powers administered those areas of Micronesia that later became the Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands: Spain, Germany, Japan, and the United States of America. Each change in control resulted from military action initiated by nationalistic forces centered outside Micronesia.

Following a devastating loss in the Spanish-American War of 1898, Spain withdrew from the Pacific in disarray. The United States did not take control of all the area Spain had claimed, giving Germany the opportunity to expand its influence in the region and become, if only for a brief time, a significant colonial power. The 1914–1918 World War saw Japan annex most of Germany's Micronesian colonies, a move subsequently confirmed by the League of Nations despite vociferous American objections. Following Japan's defeat in the Pacific War of 1941–1945, the United States controlled the region. As the political and military estimates of Micronesia's strategic value increased, the United States replaced the military administration with a civilian one as America's grip on the region strengthened.

Micronesians were excluded continually from many decisions regarding their own future. Examples include the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, by which the European powers divided the world between Spain and Portugal.

The Berlin Congress of European nations in 1884 established rules by which these expansionist states divided the Pacific amongst themselves. In 1898 the Treaty of Paris saw Spain surrender Guam and the Philippines to the United States, and in the following year Spain sold its remaining Pacific colonies to Germany. In 1919 the Treaty of Versailles awarded much of Micronesia to Japan, and in 1920 the League of Nations confirmed the area to be a mandated territory (Class C) of the Japanese empire. In 1945 the United Nations ratified America's hard-won military control over the area and established the Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands under U.S. supervision.

All of these international agreements were formulated, agreed to, and enforced by powers originating outside of Micronesia. Indigenous Micronesians were denied any significant input in critical decisions regarding their own land, their own cultures, and their own futures.

More recently, direct Micronesian involvement in developing self-government was encouraged by the United States. An important step towards that goal was the Congress of Micronesia, established in 1964. The official American policy, however, was that self-government should be limited and steps taken to ensure that Micronesians "chose affiliation with America," according to Hezel (1995:301). Both Thompson (1994) and Hezel (1995) suggest that American actions at this time undermined the attempt to establish a single pan-Micronesian political union. As a result, several small nation-states with few natural resources and small economic bases have emerged from their common past.

Since the 1970s, America has gradually withdrawn from direct administration and the emergent nation-states of Micronesia have acquired a measure of national "independence." These postcolonial processes did not always go smoothly, and at times conflicts developed within Micronesia and between Micronesians and America (Heine 1974; Hezel 1995). Although self-government was achieved in a remarkably peaceful manner, these small nations remain largely dependent on handouts from previous colonial masters, mostly the United States (Thompson 1994). Associated with the development of self-government, a deep interest in what Micronesians perceive to be their "real" heritage and a realization that they must now manage *their own past in their own terms* is arising. Difficulties are attached to this responsibility, as the great conundrums of historic preservation remain: Who owns it, who wants it, who is responsible for it, and who pays for it?

### **Tangible Historic Property**

Each colonial authority has influenced the development of today's Micronesian cultures and left elements of its own heritage behind as it withdrew.

Tangible historic Spanish property remaining in Micronesia include

churches, forts, monuments, and cemeteries. Several examples have been documented by Galván (1998), including remains of Fort Alfonso XIII on Pohnpei, the tower of the former Mount Carmel Church on Garapan, and Fort Soledad in Umatac, Guam. The Casa de Gobierno (Spanish Governor's Palace) in Guam was originally built in 1736 and enlarged in 1885. Rogers (1995) and Galván (1998) document how little survived the destruction that occurred when American troops invaded and recaptured the island from Japanese forces in 1944. *La azotea* (terrace) and parts of the *real almacén* (arsenal) wall remain. Situated in the Plaza de España, a very accessible section of downtown Agaña only meters from the main Catholic cathedral, this highly significant structure is in poor condition. It deteriorates with typical tropical rapidity as little is done to protect it from the most fundamental processes of natural decay. Timber is rotting and stonework suffering vegetation-induced mechanical decay. Moisture is present in almost all structures, molds and fungi are very active, and insect damage to some wood structures is considerable.

Examples of German-related sites include two significant cemeteries and two churches. One cemetery is the simple, unadorned burial site for the leaders of the 1910–1911 Sokehs Rebellion, who were executed by firing squad after being found guilty of murder (Hezel 1995). This site, located beside a road and between several houses, is in poor condition with no interpretation. The low wall that surrounds the burial site was broken but not repaired, and the mass grave is overgrown with weeds. The second cemetery contains more-substantial and individual memorials to those Germans who “died for Emperor and country” during this rebellion by the Sokehs people and may be compared to the unadorned common grave shared by the executed “rebels.” Without appropriate preservation management, these memorials are also decaying. Some headstones have eroded and are now almost unreadable. Others have fallen over. At least one has been broken and the pieces laid as tiles in a path through this dilapidated and overgrown cemetery.

A belltower and apse is all that remains of a large Catholic church built in Colonia, Pohnpei, frequently referred to as the German belltower. The church was constructed in 1908 to 1911 during the German colonial period, designed and built by Capuchin monks who came from Germany. A German Capuchin, Salvator Walleser, was consecrated bishop of the vicariate, Pohnpei became his episcopal seat, and this church became his cathedral (Hezel 1991). Despite the significant German elements in its history, the church was adopted by Pohnpeians as theirs. Pohnpeian lives from birth to death centered on this church: Pohnpeians worshiped in this church, Pohnpeians were baptized in this church, Pohnpeians were married in this church, Pohnpeians celebrated mass in this church. It formed a central part of Pohnpeian culture

at a particular time and its remains are truly Pohnpeian heritage, showing the great influence Catholic missionaries, first from Spain and later from Germany, had on areas of Micronesia.

Much historic civilian property originating in Japanese times was destroyed during World War II. Some examples remain, however, including a hospital site on Saipan and a memorial to the Japanese emperor on Majuro in the Marshall Islands. An extensive array of historic military property remains from World War II: foxholes, pillboxes, fortified caves and bunkers, and equipment including guns, tanks, landing craft, ships, and aircraft (Denfeld 1979a, 1979b, 1981; Look and Spennemann 1994; Spennemann 1992b, 1992c). Many Japanese vessels were sunk in Micronesian anchorages, such as those of Palau, Truk, and Kwajalein (Bailey 1982; Lindemann 1982, 1991). Hezel and Graham describe those now lying on the bottom of Truk lagoon as comprising an underwater museum (1989). Two Japanese coastal defense guns (200 mm, 12 cal) provide an unusual example of "preservation"—they were removed from their original emplacements to allow construction of the Onwards Agaña Hotel, Tamuning, Guam (O'Neill 2000). Following the hotel's completion, the guns were placed between the hotel facade and swimming pool in replica fiberglass shelters built to represent part of the original gun emplacements (Spennemann 2000). In this unsympathetic act, their historic associations were destroyed. No longer defending the beaches of Japanese-occupied territory against an American invasion force, the guns have become an almost invisible part of the decor of a modern tourist hotel. Mute, corroding, ugly—they squat like fallen gargoyles before the ultimate irony of Japanese and American tourists swimming together in the pool of a Japanese-owned hotel built on U.S. soil.

As so much of the Pacific action of World War II was fought on, over, and under the waters of Micronesia and its scattered islands and atolls, battle relics are widespread. The U.S. government determined that those beaches of Guam by which U.S. forces invaded the Japanese-controlled island should be dedicated as a memorial. The War in the Pacific National Historic Park was established in 1978, and today consists of an integrated array of small parks and reserves throughout Guam. Many private collections of historic property from this period are also held; items collected range from bullets, uniforms, and knives to swords, handguns, and tanks (Spennemann 2000). The floor of Bikini Atoll is the final resting place of warships from several nations that participated in World War II (Delgado, Lenihan, and Murphy 1991). They are often referred to simply as the "Sunken Fleet" but now lie together as a museum, commemorating not so much a dreadful war that involved almost the entire globe but development of a conflict that became known as the "Cold War."

### Preservation

Decay is a series of continuous processes whereby tangible cultural property is lost to present and succeeding generations. Although decay cannot be prevented, in many cases its processes may be slowed with effective preservation management (Spennemann 1992a; Look and Spennemann 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1996). It occurs most rapidly in tropical regions where heat and moisture combine to increase the effectiveness of almost all other elements of decay. Consequently, effective management actions to preserve historic property are even more critical in tropical areas like Micronesia than elsewhere and may be summarized under four main functions: (1) *locate* historic property, (2) *document* historic property, (3) *minimize* decay by devising and instituting effective management processes, and (4) *educate* the community.

Individual processes or factors of decay rarely operate alone; they usually combine in various ways (Florian, Kronkright, and Norton 1990). Issues that may not be direct causes of decay can still contribute to deterioration of historic property by providing enhanced conditions for decay to occur. Under such circumstances preservation management can become a difficult and complex task.

Even when sufficient resources and community interest exist, preserving elements of heritage on tropical islands, particularly low-lying coral atolls, is dependent on two factors: effective management of anthropogenic and non-anthropogenic change, and the uncontrollable dynamics of chance. Natural laws determine when and where earthquakes or volcanic eruptions will occur and which direction tropical cyclones will take and when, where, and how intensely they will develop. It is possible to predict in general terms that an earthquake may occur, but not its magnitude or timing (Spennemann and Look 1998:186). It is also possible to predict other natural disasters such as cyclones and floods, but the dynamics of chance still appear to control. Tropical cyclones regularly ignore the predictions of the yet-flawed science of weather forecasting by changing direction, ground speed, and intensity with deadly effect and rapidity; volcanoes and earthquakes occur with scant respect for seismologists' predictions.

### Preserve What?

Like other social groups, Oceanic peoples are genuinely proud of their varied and dynamic cultures. Their pride is frequently displayed in areas that Western cultures may regard as being less important. For example, they do not always value *tangible* historic property highly and have a marked tendency to focus strongly on *nontangible* heritage such as traditional skills, knowledge, and oral traditions. This tendency is very evident in communi-

ties from low coral islands, such as the Marshall Islands. Perhaps this may be attributed to the frequency with which tropical storms cause extensive property damage and the islanders' reliance on less permanent resources for traditional tools and building materials. In contrast, Western styles of cultural preservation tend to concentrate on tangible historic property, a focus that may not be at all appropriate in Oceania.

An alternative form of historic preservation may better suit Micronesian cultures. It involves the sacrifice of physical remains in favor of preserving nonphysical elements in recognition that cultural "connectedness" is not necessarily based on physical historic remains. This alternative avoids the inherent dilemma of a style of historic preservation that is impossible simply because processes as inevitable as aging and decay cannot be stopped. Lowenthal refers to how the Ise Shinto Temple in Japan is dismantled every twenty years and replaced by a replica built of similar materials. His comment that "[p]hysical continuity signifies less to the Japanese than perpetuating the techniques and rituals of re-creation" is a concept that Micronesians are likely to understand implicitly. He further observes that "craftsmen trained in the old skills are themselves designated 'Living National treasures'—prized exemplars of cultural heritage" (Lowenthal 1995:384–385). This is another concept that fits well with traditional Micronesian social constructs of respect.

In the era following the disappearance of most examples of the old form and structure of colonialism, the focus of preservation management in Micronesia has changed from nonindigenous historical property to indigenous. This critical development has increased the complexity of historic preservation management. It may also have triggered "adoption" by local communities of historic property otherwise regarded as being of colonial origins. Historic property associated with the operations of trading companies, such as the Likiep Village Historic Site in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, is an example.

### Preservation Resources

From a conceptual viewpoint preservation seems easy. If a people have the right to decide what elements of the past are to be preserved as their heritage, they need only make their choices, allocate resources, and proceed to preserve their chosen elements of heritage. From a pragmatic viewpoint, however, it is considerably more difficult. Effective preservation and management of cultural property is dependent on two critical factors: sufficient community interest and political will, and availability of the necessary resources.

Probably no preservation authority anywhere in the world has sufficient

resources to appropriately care for the variety of heritage material remaining. This situation is particularly true of Oceanic states. They rarely have the trained personnel, and they lack the financial reserves and infrastructure. Unless local communities develop a strong desire to preserve their heritage and are able to convert that desire into sustainable political will, it is doubtful there ever will be enough resources. Not only are funds and equipment scarce, but required skills are frequently also nonexistent or fully committed elsewhere. Chandra highlights the lack of appropriately trained personnel as a major issue in the Pacific Islands (1997).

Decay processes are so rapid and forceful in tropical areas that preservation of historic property involves a constant and expensive fight to delay the inevitable. Governments find it difficult to apportion limited resources among the frequently conflicting interests of developing the national economy, building a national infrastructure, and constructing and preserving a national past.

#### *Interest and Political Will*

To be successful, any movement for preservation must develop an interest in heritage issues within the broader community, thus generating political authority. Without such a constituency governments will allocate resources to other areas, and the potential benefits accruing from investment in cultural preservation will never be realized. Are former colonies interested in preserving the physical vestiges of their previous colonial administrators? What do these emergent nations regard as their own national priorities?

Social and political environments where the will to preserve tangible historic property is frequently low, where pressure to provide modern infrastructure is high, and where national resources are limited are not conducive to historic preservation. Such environments are common throughout Micronesia today. Consequently, it is unrealistic to presume that scarce resources will be used to preserve historic colonial property. This is particularly true when previous colonial powers do not show any interest in the property or display any sense of association with it.

#### *Funding*

Most Micronesian nation-states have little national disposable income and a steadily declining number of external providers willing to assist. Since the 1941–1945 Pacific War, they have become highly dependent on external funds in the form of international aid (Connell and Lea 1997), most of which comes from the United States. With few exceptions natural resources are

limited, the industrial base is restricted, underemployment is high, and national economies are lethargic (Albinski 1985; Connell and Lea 1997).

Micronesia is in an anomalous situation in comparison with other emergent nation-states. In a speech before the International Monetary Fund, Anton De Brum, then minister of finance, stated that the Republic of the Marshall Islands has "unfettered access to the United States" and a currency that is, by treaty, the U.S. dollar. He also stated that, consequently, the Marshalls does not suffer the same fear of massive currency devaluation as other states (De Brum 1998). These statements are fundamentally true of all Micronesian states. However, as Connell and Lea point out (1997: 85), there is a significant regionwide problem: Micronesian states (including the Republic of the Marshall Islands) import much more than they export, resulting in highly unbalanced national trade figures, restricted national economic opportunities, and poor medium-term economic prospects.

Unemployment is high in most Micronesian states, and as much of it is hidden by other factors, it may be even worse than reported. It is probable that official figures do not show the real levels of unemployment, as existing data preclude analysis for underemployment (Connell and Lea 1997:97-104). Differentiating between real unemployment, underemployment, and subsistence activities is difficult. Compounding the problem of unemployment is the fact that many of those who are employed may be paid at rates below any legislated minimum, an industrial practice permitted by some governments desperate to encourage business development. Low community wage levels in turn contribute to low levels of personal income-tax revenue, little community savings, reduced spending, and an inhibited local economy with less money available for investment. Table 1 compares the estimated per-capita income earned in Micronesian states during 1990 and 1995.

TABLE 1. **Micronesian Income Per Capita, 1990 and 1995**

Nation-State	Per-Capita Income (US\$)		Increase/Decrease	
	1990	1995	\$	%
Guam	9,928	11,552	1,624	16.36
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands	7,199	6,897	(-302)	(-4.20)
American Samoa	3,039	3,270	231	7.60
Palau	2,656	3,526	870	32.75
Federated States of Micronesia	n/a	940	n/a	n/a
Republic of the Marshall Islands	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: U.S. Department of the Interior 1999.

In some states, the use of low-wage workers from overseas is reported to have increased markedly during this period (U.S. Department of the Interior n.d.). This practice contributes to generally low per-capita incomes with consequently lower tax revenues. In many states “cash/barter economies” and extended-family obligations further reduce government income from taxation and thus the funds available to finance government activities.

When these factors are combined with relatively low tax rates, national revenues gained from taxation are low. All of these factors contribute to national economic bases that are small enough to cause genuine concern about their ability to fund national development, let alone historic preservation. Essentially, funds for historic preservation must be generated internally or externally. The first requires a population with disposable income and the second an external provider with the ability and willingness to fund historic preservation in another country. In both cases the political will to preserve historical property must also exist.

### **An Example: A German Colonial Site in the Marshall Islands**

Property remaining from the German administrative period in the Pacific is disappearing quickly as the typically rapid decay processes of the tropics destroy them. A general lack of interest is apparent by both Micronesian nation-states and Germany. This disinterest is evident in a lack of funding, a lack of proposals to preserve, and a general and widespread public lack of knowledge of a shared past. Consequently, preservation management strategies and practices that are appropriate to the political and physical realities of Oceania in the twenty-first century are needed if these properties are to be documented.

For example, forty historically and culturally significant books of business records were found in a disused house in Likiep village, where they were decaying in a pool of water and accumulated rubbish (O'Neill 2000). This neglect may indicate a lack of interest in a past the islanders consider unimportant or simply a lack of knowledge of the books' significance. The conundrums remain—whose heritage is it and who pays? Marshallese themselves are very interested, particularly those living on Likiep Atoll. The government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands chartered a not-for-profit organization—the Joachim De Brum Memorial Trust Corporation—to preserve this highly significant site in September 1982. Projects to maintain and restore the house, on Likiep island, were funded by the U.S. National Park Service in 1976 and 1984. Despite close historic connections, no funds have been obtained from Germany to assist with preservation of this site that originated with the German administrative period.

The general opinion of most Micronesians appears to be that satisfying present-day community and family needs is more important than preserving any disused building. A good example of this occurred on Likiep when a severe tropical storm damaged many homes in the late 1980s. The storm also extensively damaged a small, disused building constructed by Joachim De Brum as a kitchen and dining room and situated about fourteen meters southeast of his house. Building material was salvaged from it and used to repair other damaged homes. All that remains today are some badly deteriorated foundations.

This building had high architectural significance, and through its direct association with Joachim De Brum it also had high historical significance. Consequently, it formed part of the first Micronesian site to be included on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places, the Likiep Village Historic Site. Despite this, the kitchen-dining room building had not been repaired during the two earlier U.S.-funded preservation projects of the site and had been left to continue its decay. This action strongly implied the building was considered unimportant and valueless. Thus, when an alternative and urgent need developed for its material to be used elsewhere, it was used without qualm.

The common problem is one of ownership. For example, ex-colonial powers do not appear to be interested in their own colonial heritage and Micronesians do not generally regard remaining colonial property as part of their heritage. They feel little sense of ownership or association and, consequently, little desire to preserve such property. It seems quite certain that no Oceanic nation-state would be prepared to use its precious resources on a heritage with which it feels little connection.

### **Is It Too Late?**

Preservation of colonial heritage in Micronesia depends for the most part on these small nation-states receiving sufficient resources from elsewhere. They simply have neither the finances nor the experienced personnel. If what remains is to be preserved, actions need to be taken now, because deterioration is accelerating in a natural series of aging processes. These processes cannot be reversed, they cannot be stopped, but they can be delayed.

The Casa de Gobierno in Guam was badly damaged during World War II, and with little effective maintenance since, its continuing decay has been rapid. The mute remains of two Japanese coastal defense guns in the Onwards Agaña Hotel in Guam corrode rapidly as inappropriate preservation leaves them almost unprotected in a saline environment. The remnants of Fort Alfonso XIII on Pohnpei are deteriorating rapidly as is the Catholic

belltower—both have been left unprotected from the destructive decay elements so active in the tropics. Management issues associated with historic “colonial” property in Micronesia revolve around preservation from rapid tropical decay. The examples discussed here are only a few—their story is repeated many times throughout Oceania today.

Is it too late? The highly significant kitchen–dining room of Joachim De Brum’s house on Likiep has been all but totally destroyed and is no longer capable of preservation. Will all other historic properties remaining from the colonial era in the Pacific be destroyed too before they can be preserved and documented? Unless “owners” can be found and funding for preservation provided quickly, it seems certain that these bridges with our shared past will soon disappear.

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