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## REVIEWS

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David Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia: Discourses over Development in a Pacific Territory, 1944–1982*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998. Pp. xv, 305, illus., bib., index. US\$50 cloth; \$34.95 paperback.

*Reviewed by Lin Poyer, University of Wyoming*

UNDERSTANDING MODERN MICRONESIA entails understanding American intentions and actions in the islands since they came under American rule. David Hanlon, a respected historian of Micronesia, turns his attention to the intersection of American desires to shape the islands and islanders in the path of “progress” and Micronesians’ desires to determine their own futures.

The rich scholarly potential of the postwar era in Micronesian history has hardly been touched. This volume presents an important early study of the significance of the economic programs designed for the islands, from the perspective of cultural history and critical analysis. Readers should be warned that this is not an economic history: Hanlon’s goal is not to explain the failure of various development schemes, although he does some of this. Rather, his goal is a culture history of the “discourse over development”—that is, how the ideas and intentions surrounding the culturally weighted notion of “economic development” guided American-Micronesian interactions. The period he addresses dates from 1944, when occupying American troops lavished supplies on hard-pressed islanders emerging from years of war, to the negotiations heralding the end of U.N. trusteeship in the early 1980s.

Hanlon sets out explicitly to explore “economic development” as “a strategy of domination” (p. 3). The first chapter outlines the four themes of

the book: “American Ideology in the Postwar Period” (how the American cultural linkage of political and economic desiderata, and conviction that the American way is best for all, came ashore with the U.S. troops and stayed); “Economics as Culture” (how American ideas of productive work contrasted with Micronesian notions of work as embedded in social relations, and how Americans misjudged Micronesians as a result); “Development as a Discourse of Domination” (using Esteva and Escobar, how the global discourse of development fostered by the West was “employed to rationalize American domination” [pp. 10–11]); and “The Counterhegemonic Dimensions of Underdevelopment” (how Micronesians, both ordinary people and well-educated political leaders, responded to the program of domination by development).

The body of the book is broadly chronological, beginning with how Americans perceived their responsibilities to the islands taken from Japan. Ignoring the fact that war had devastated the colonial economy built by the Japanese, the first U.S. occupying forces began the soon-familiar habit of using poor economic conditions as “justifying preface for the efforts at social reconstruction that would follow” (p. 23). The later naval administration under U.N. trusteeship used agricultural, fishing, and other projects—all counted as failures—to further the “paternal and self-serving strategic politics of economic development” (p. 54) by concluding that Micronesians were culturally unable to manage productive labor. When the Department of the Interior took over, efforts immediately began to compensate (as critics saw it) for the U.S. Navy’s failure to develop successful local economies. Thus began, in the 1960s, the golden era of planners and consultants.

Although the U.S. Commercial Company had produced the first American economic plan for Micronesia immediately after the war, the navy had shelved most of its recommendations. Of course, the same fate awaited the plethora of expensive reports commissioned during the next two decades. Hanlon reviews the Solomon and Nathan Reports, envisioning massive alteration of Micronesian societies, and the numerous other plans that followed through the 1970s. Efforts to remake Micronesia soon engaged the emerging discourse of modernization, and Hanlon effectively links development efforts of this era with global trends. Enter the Peace Corps, which attempted to connect local communities with the grandiose cultural make-over plans of the development experts. It is at this point in the book (chapter 4) that Hanlon turns to Micronesian responses to these plans, describing how what development planners saw as commercial fishing, retail transactions, and tourism opportunities were viewed in completely different ways by Micronesians. These examples reveal the classic distinction between production in a nonindustrial society—embedded in kinship and

social relations—contrasted with the reification of the economic in industrial societies.

In the second half of the book, Hanlon explores the Micronesian perspective in more depth, following the Congress of Micronesia as it discussed the same issues of development that preoccupied American administrators. Using Gramsci, Hanlon looks for “counterhegemonic discourse” from the congressmen, and he finds it. Though, to be sure, they consistently argued for increased development (complaining repeatedly, for example, that there were too many plans and not enough action), they also recognized and spoke against the wholesale importation of American culture. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the topic of “dependency” was on everyone’s lips, as U.S. federal welfare programs came to the islands (Hanlon includes an interesting selection of Micronesian responses, pro and con, to bringing the “War on Poverty” to their shores). Micronesians who had been blamed for not being interested in development because of their commitment to local culture (in the 1940s) were now blamed for not being interested in development because of their lack of commitment to local culture (by accepting the “welfare programs” of the 1970s).

Indeed, the most haunting residue of Hanlon’s book is the clear sense that Micronesians were damned if they did (buy into the program) and damned if they didn’t. In a sense—because of overwhelming American might—their choices were irrelevant, because the steamroller of American strategic interests was going to overwhelm any efforts at local control. What is interesting to the historian, then, is how American interests deployed the strategy of development discourse and blame and how that discourse preserved for those in power the greatest freedom of action. The countervailing responses of Micronesians—how they have used the “weapons of the weak”—form the second strand of the discussion. Hanlon shows this process in detail in an entire chapter devoted to the “problem” of Ebeye, the crowded and impoverished labor-reserve adjunct to the well-appointed U.S. Army base at Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands. And, in his concluding discussion of the Compact of Free Association (and recent journalistic descriptions of Micronesia, reminiscent of those of thirty years ago), he reveals the current very active status of islanders’ “struggle to persevere against those powers that have sought to dominate them” (p. 240). Everyone who has worked with Micronesians knows the strength of local cultural visions and will appreciate Hanlon’s efforts to place the political efforts fostered by those visions into the context of current scholarly work on discourse and political economy.

Hanlon’s emphasis on analysis of discourse—rather than empirical process—will please those who are eager to see Pacific studies come more fully into the mainstream of current academic work, but will disappoint those

who want a technical answer to “Why have efforts at economic development in Micronesia been so disappointing for all concerned?” There is neither enough economics nor anthropology to satisfy those who want to understand specific processes of local culture change. Another caution: this is not a “balanced” view of American intentions in the islands. A reader who does not agree that American interests in Micronesia have been predominantly selfish, strategic, and aimed at remaking the region in the U.S. image will not find Hanlon’s approach congenial. Although he states, “I do not mean to portray American colonialism as a monolithic force,” (p. 237), there is some of that here. American administrators who saw more clearly or sympathetically the Micronesian perspective are given rather short shrift. In fact, Hanlon’s opinions are so clear that at times one wishes he had gone further and explored in more detail his view of “alternative futures” that might more fully accord with his analysis of Micronesian counterhegemonic visions.

Those who are not familiar with Micronesia’s recent history, but would like to become so, will find this a valuable critical supplement to Fran Hezel’s *Strangers in Their Own Land* (Honolulu, 1995). Those who already know the outline of the events Hanlon discusses will find valuable depth in his coverage of documentary sources for this era and thought-provoking interpretations of what Americans and Micronesians thought they, and each other, were up to. Hanlon’s book is also a significant step in the effort to bring Pacific scholarship into closer dialogue with current humanities and social science theory and an exciting glimpse of the wealth of material that awaits scholars who look to recent history to illumine Pacific lives.