Micronesian Counselor

The Cultural Revolution of the '60s

Francis X. Hezel, SJ

The Core of Island Culture

What is culture? It may depend on who's asking the question and what they expect the answer to be. When Micronesians are asked to display their culture in public–at a school presentation or at the conclusion of a conference–they may trot out a few island dances, intone an old chant, or describe the sailing canoes and navigation systems that have a four thousand year pedigree. But that's not the guts of the culture, as they know very well. Most Micronesians today have never even traveled on a sailing canoe, and the dances and chants they perform belong to the past rather than to the present. Push people a little further and they may speak of grand chiefly systems and heroic battles–things that appeal to the imagination of islander and foreigner alike. We're getting closer but are not quite yet there!

The bedrock of any Micronesian island culture is its social organization system, and this system is anchored in the family.

Pull a couple of islanders aside for a private conversation and ask them the question again. More often than not they will talk about things like this: the respect shown between men and women in the family and between the young and elders, or about knowing who your "people" are so as to avoid offending them, or the importance of sharing within the family. At last we're getting close to the heart of the culture, that complex network of relationships and obligations that defines the everyday life of

Check our website www.micsem.org

The MicSem website offers more than just the controversial but popular forum discussion. Online you can find:

- **Micronesian Counselor : all past issues on-line in full text**
- **Articles written by Francis X Hezel over past 40 years**
- **Videos produced by MicSem listed in viewable versions for those with high speed internet access**
- **Photo albums, all 28 historical albums posted online**
- **Diabetes page, with materials on how to recognize the disease and what to do about it**
- **School page, with photos & information on the condition of each public schools in FSM**

School s Web Page

MicSem will soon be updating the Schools Page on our website. We are asking for photos of public elementary schools, in FSM as well as in Marshalls and Palau. Send digitals of the interior and exterior to us as *euke@micsem.org*. We would also welcome any further information on the schools that you might want to send, especially any improvements that have been made.

Survey of Top Students

Help! Do you remember who was the valedictorian and the salutatorian when you graduated from high school? Names? Contact information?

MicSem is doing a survey of the three top graduates from each of the FSM high schools, public and private, between 1976 and 2004. This is to determine what they're doing now, how much further education they received, and where they are now living.

If you remember your top three classmates, please help us out. We'd like to know their name, high school, graduation year and contact information (if you have it.)The Micsem staff person on this project is Eugenia Samuel. You can email her at *euke@micsem.org*.

Coming Soon

You Are Not Alone:

You didn't think rape was a problem in the land of love sticks & night crawling? The stories presented by the people interviewed in this Micsem Video should change your mind. The new video offers a discreet but touching look at the problem that many of us have been slow to acknowledge.

March Toward Self-Government. (1960-1980)

History Video 5

This final segment surveys the changes in US administration policies that began with President Kennedy with a focus on improvement of education and health services. The list of government employees expanded, along with the population of the towns. The Congress of Micronesia offered new leadership roles and a vision of full self-government, but also revealed the fissures in an area that had been unified for a century under foreign rule.

Island Hospitality— Photo Album

Caring for visitors is as Micronesian as taro and breadfruit and fish. People who had sailed in from another island could always expect a warm welcome from their hosts and a generous share of their food. Today, with the rise of the tourist industry, the care for visitors has developed into a business. These pictures offer a sweeping view of island hospitality, especially as it has developed in the years since the war.

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people, the mysterious workings of what people call the "family"–something that has little entertainment value at conferences and classroom presentations, but which comes closer than anything else to defining what it is to be an islander.

> ***The basic formula in traditional island society was simple: Without land there was no way to live, and without family there was no way to access land.***

The bedrock of any Micronesian island culture is its social organization system, and this system is anchored in the family. "Family" is a word that has multiple meanings everywhere in Micronesia, but at bottom it refers to the basic social unit and its members–their social roles and relationships to one another, with all the rights and duties these relationships entailed. Families had to find food for themselves, and so members of the family divided up the chores of food-gathering and cooking. They had to rear their children, passing on to them life skills, family history and the wisdom of the past. They had to exercise authority over their own members and maintain relations with others in the larger community, so the family needed leadership. As the basic economic unit, the family had to acquire and maintain the resource base that it would live off–that is, land. Without land there was no hope of survival, and so the use of land and its inheritance was closely supervised by the family. In fact, we might say that the family system and the land ownership system were intimately linked, one fitted tightly to the other. The basic formula in traditional island society was simple: Without land there was no way to live, and without family there was no way to access land.

Dollars are the Difference

There are other levels of social organization in the islands–at the village level and at the island or chiefdom level. It is these

higher levels of social organization that draw much of the attention of anthropologists and other social scientists, if only because they are so visible and colorful, so obviously influenced by local wars and colonial incursions. The story of Koror's rise to the top of the Palau prestige pinnacle in the 19th century, with the help of British arms, is a fascinating tale. So is the disinheritance and exile of the Sokehs people from Pohnpei following their uprising against the Germans in 1910, after which their chiefdom was resettled by refugees from nearby atolls. The impact of both these events on the subsequent history of their respective island groups may well have been significant, but their effect on the basic cultural system embodied in the family was close to zero. Chiefs and their chiefdoms can rise and fall, villages can be depopulated or consolidated into larger units, title systems can be altered or done away with altogether–all of this without causing so much as a ripple in the workings of the family system, the social foundation of island society. It is only when the family system is threatened that cultural tremors are felt and people have intimations that all is not well. That is precisely what happened, not at a period of foreign conquest of inter-island warfare, but at a time of peace and at the start of an era of unparalleled prosperity.

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During the last 40 years, the Micronesian family at its most basic level has been altered as it never had been before. The revolution has been masked by the fact that some of the forms in the family remain much as they were before, and the values of sharing and cooperation endorsed by all Micronesian societies are still practiced. Yet, underneath this apparent continuity lie
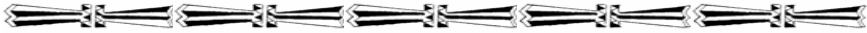
introduction of the cash economy to the point where money could supply basic household needs for the first time in history. When a significant number of people in island societies began to live off paychecks rather than land, we reached the point of no return and the structure of the family was altered.

The redefinition of the family is sometimes called the transition to a nuclear family, but this does not come close to capturing its significance. It might be better to see it as a reorganization of the basic social system of the island society. With the redefinition of the island family, the protections embedded into the broader traditional family were lost, thus bringing about an increase in those problems that the old family was designed to offer its members. These problems include suicide, wife-beating, unresolved family conflict, failure in child rearing, even incest–in short, most of the issues that have made it to the top of our social agenda during the past two or three decades.

Finally, the culture shock that many have experienced as our island societies have struggled to cope with these problems threatens to cloud our vision of the future. We may have made inroads on resolving some of the social problems that have stemmed from the revolution of the 60s, but many have developed an allergy to further cultural change. When, for instance, we are offered a solution to the pressing economic problems of these new nations that may involve further cultural dislocation, people become nervous. Having just survived a cultural transition that has absorbed so much of our energy, people are understandably cool toward taking on another similar challenge. This can affect the decisions we make toward opening island societies towards still further changes. But that could well be the subject of another article.

suggesting new levels of tension in the family in order to explain why his wife or children so often show up with bruises.

We could go on to list a number of other social problems that we face today–from child neglect, to drug use, to family battles over land, to incest. None of these problems originated from the social revolution of the 60s, and the upheaval of the family that followed. They stem from the flood of human passions that has always threatened to wash over the cultivated terrain of island societies. The difference between then and now is this. The seawall, in the form of the traditional island family, that has always protected us from this flood is broken. So, it's either off to higher ground to escape the swirling waters or begin what may be the impossible task of trying to rebuild the breakwater.

Conclusion

For all those who are engaged in a frantic campaign to preserve the "traditional" features of their island culture, look again. It's already been substantially transformed, thanks to the cultural revolution inaugurated in the 1960s. The transformation isn't simply the loss of navigation or canoe-building, nor the change in dress styles, nor the passing of the old dance forms. It's one that reaches more deeply into the heart of the culture than any of these material items, touching as it does the island family and the way that the family operates. What could be more deeply rooted in the culture than that?

The changes in the family are not, as many people tend to think, the result of too much TV or the acculturation brought by outsiders or even returning Micronesian college students who have absorbed a little too much of their host country's influence. They are structural changes that have occurred as a result of the monetization of the economy. By this we mean not the first introduction of cash (which happened a century and a half earlier without any profound consequences), but by the gradual

profound changes that have greatly altered the basic structure of the family in recent times. The reason is the impact of a cash economy on this key social unit. Dollars are the difference–at least when they are available in such a supply that they can challenge the traditional land-based economy. Teach a person to fish and he will remain dependant on the old system that offers him fishing rights, but give him the opportunity to work for cash and you've liberated him forever.

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Social Impact in the 19th Century

Cash–or, at least, the things that cash can buy–has had a long history in Micronesia. The first intensive Western trade began in Palau, where merchant vessels and British naval ships began visiting the island group in the late 18th century. There was some trading, of course, but the most coveted items were the gunpowder and firearms the British brought, with Koror gaining a major share of the weapons, thanks to its geographical position and its fine harbor. These early goods may have changed the balance of power between the villages of Palau, but they had little effect on the inner workings of the Palauan family.

In the mid-19th century, during the height of the American whaling era, some of the islands in eastern Micronesia were exposed to steady Western contact for the first time when whalers in great numbers began visiting these places. Contact was not just a matter of a half dozen ships a year, as might have been the case during the earlier part of the century, but 40 or 50 ships, with each putting in for two or three weeks. This was

certainly the case in Pohnpei and Kosrae in the 1850s. We know that on Pohnpei, at least, the whaleship trade likely strengthened the power of paramount chiefs inasmuch as the chiefs gathered from their people the supplies sold to the whaleships and often redistributed the goods that were received in exchange. If the chiefs didn't actually redistribute these trade goods, they usually carried away the first share of it, like the foreleg of a pig at a feast. By 1855, the yearly value of goods obtained on Pohnpei from whaleships was an estimated $8,000 (or about $1 per capita in 1850 dollars), but these were metal tools, cooking utensils, rifles, clothing and tobacco–what would have been regarded in those days as luxury items. Much the same was true on Kosrae as well. While this added to the inventory of the average household, the impact of this trade on the inner dynamics of the typical Pohnpeian or Kosraean family was minimal.

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Missionaries began appearing at the same time, many of them urging a change of lifestyle to conform to what they thought of as Christian values and practice. They made some modest changes in the lifestyle of the people, but were unable to impose the very changes that would have reached into the heart of the family. For instance, although they preached that in Christian marriage a man is to "leave behind his father and mother to become one flesh with his wife," there is abundant evidence to suggest that their most well-

resources to feed its members, offered clear lines of authority to resolve disputes, and protected members from one another's excesses. When what had once been a well integrated system began to dissolve, the tremors were felt throughout the culture.

The seawall, in the form of the traditional island family, that has always protected us from this flood is broken. So, it's either off to higher ground to escape the swirling waters or begin what may be the impossible task of trying to rebuild the breakwater.

The clearest example is probably suicide, as I have pointed out time and again in articles and presentations. Suicide may have been an age-old phenomenon in the islands, but the rates quickly escalated during the 60 and 70s until they reached the highs that are still being recorded today–a rate of 25 per hundred thousand that is five times what it was before the social revolution of the 1960s. But why wouldn't it increase when the maternal uncle was becoming a no more than a shadowy, impotent figure, and when older relatives who would have formerly stepped in to heal the wounds of the offended young man were melting into the background?

Or consider the problem of what we call domestic violence. It's unlikely that a husband who was living in close proximity to his wife's extended family, or even his own, would thrash his wife or children when their sobs or whimpers would carry to nearby relatives. After all, these relatives would have once had a legitimate claim to a stake in his family. Deny the relatives any authority in his household, however, thus increasing the social distance, and transfer his household to town, adding to the geographical distance as well, and you have a very different dynamic at work. The social forces that would have once acted to restrain the husband's display of anger are no longer present. We don't have to invoke long and convoluted arguments

They no longer felt entitled to exercise authority over the wider kin group.

When a conflict occurred between a father and son, the maternal uncle no longer felt free to counsel the young man or to offer strong advice to the father. Parents might be more reluctant to intervene when their married son began striking his wife or mistreating his children. The upshot of this was loss of protection against suicide and incest and domestic abuse, to name just a few problem areas. What could be called the social safety net for the young was torn apart. The smaller, stripped down family might have gained considerable independence, but it was now vulnerable to problems from which it had been protected by the larger kin group.

At the same time, gender relations were shifting, while land tenure and inheritance patterns were altering. Women were now in the marketplace holding jobs, an area that would have been a male domain in the past. With the shrinking of the family, land was passing increasingly from father to son rather than along the traditional lineage lines, and land disputes within the kin group were becoming an all too regular occurrence.

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When the family, the foundational social structure of a society, is shaken, the whole edifice feels the impact. The extended family system delineated roles for its members, organized labor to meet the needs of the family, provided the

intentioned converts were never quite up the task. What Micronesian could bring himself to leave his father and mother to fend for themselves once he took a wife! Not even the common island custom of giving out children for adoption was curtailed by Christian teaching.
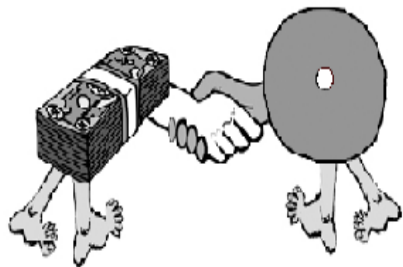
But there were other changes going on in such places as Pohnpei and Kosrae. The shift from matrilocality to patrilocality on Pohnpei, for instance, and the change in land inheritance to a father-son pattern (often attributed to the Germans, but just as likely the result of a gradual shift initiated by island leaders during the 19th century). At the end of it all, however, the residential grouping, or "family," remained a large extended family that retained its traditional function as an economic unit and performed much as it always had. The same seems to have been true on Kosrae by the end of the century, where extended family groupings were the rule rather than the exception. If the shape of the family on Kosrae was affected more profoundly than on Pohnpei, this was due to the rapid population decline that transformed the way of life during the 19th century.

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Traders and naval commanders could do a lot with their wares: they could help bring about revolutions in the political order (as they did in Palau with the firearms they introduced), and they could modernize the cook house and tool kit of villagers (as on Pohnpei and Kosrae). Missionaries could win over thousands of new converts, introducing new dress styles, banning the use of sakau and smoking, and reorienting the weekend activities of their people. But neither missionaries nor ship captains could touch the inner workings of the family with the belief systems they promoted or the wares they peddled.

Toward a Cash Economy

Even before the end of the century, new economic forces had come into play. Foreign currency had become accepted in most of the major island groups in Micronesia, even though barter continued to be the usual type of transaction. Moreover, stores stocked with foreign goods could be found just about everywhere, thanks to the ubiquity of the resident copra trader.

By the end of the 19th century, the Marshalls was producing 5 million pounds of copra. . . $50,000 a year was being pumped into the local economy–or $4 per Marshallese.

During the late 1800s, the peak of the resident trader, copra was produced by island families and sold to traders in exchange for trade goods. By the end of the 19th century, the Marshalls was producing 5 million pounds of copra. At a selling price of a penny a pound, $50,000 a year was being pumped into the local economy–or $4 per Marshallese. But the items purchased with this trade credit were again largely tools, clothing, tobacco, and firearms. Certain types of Western food, such as tinned meat or ship biscuits, were often available, but the average income was not sufficient to allow people to purchase any significant portion of their food this way. A windfall of a few dollars made on copra sales might allow a family to throw a party with corned beef and biscuits and other canned delicacies, but this could not be done very often. Otherwise, it was back to the land, and the extended family, for normal sustenance.

the extended family was shifting–away from the head of the lineage and towards each household head. With this shift came greater responsibility for providing for the security of his household. No longer could he count on the extended family to help raise his children, counsel or correct them when they had strayed, or calm hurt feelings at times of conflict.

Results of family change

The change in the family structure at the most basic level revolutionized society in a way that dissolution of chiefdoms and changes at the village level could not. It fragmented the family, as households began to provide for themselves, even as they maintained the tradition of sharing within kin networks. This revolution left the family smaller, weaker, and stripped of the resources on which it could once depend to resolve many of the problems it faced. The extended family network continued to function, of course, but without the clout that it once exercised over its members. After all, in Micronesian societies the inexorable but unwritten rule is that the one who provides sustenance also has the right to exercise authority.

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From the outside, the shape of the family may have looked pretty much as it had years before. Houses of closely related kin were adjacent to one another on the same parcel of land, with a meeting house and even a cookhouse nearby. But this concealed the shift in authority that was occurring as the head of the household assumed ever greater control of the affairs in his own small family circle. Grandparents and uncles and aunts often lived in close proximity (although in time they began drifting off to other places), but they no longer enjoyed the mandate to intervene in domestic affairs that they once had. What older relatives once did as a matter of course to protect their kin and head off conflict gradually came to be regarded as an intrusion.

significant portion of the year.

Sharing of resources within the kin group continued, as it must in an island society, but now the income earner was in a position to have a say on the extent to which he would share his resources. The distribution of goods within the family could be renegotiated since the cash earner did not rely on his extended family for sustenance. Land rights continued to be granted through the kin group–at least for a time, until individual land ownership became ever more common–but the wage earner no longer needed land and its fruit to provide for himself. Hence, the full-time employee could declare his independence of his extended family.

Independence from the extended family did not mean rejection of it. The head of the household did not pile his wife and children into the family vehicle and strike out for a new place to live. He and the people who shared his house did not lock the doors against their relatives, or absent themselves from the social functions that the extended family organized. Socialization continued much the same as it always had, and food was shared among households as before; life within the extended family was lived pretty much as it always had been–at least to all outward appearances.

But the externals masked deeper changes that were taking place in the family structure. The household head was assuming an ever greater responsibility for feeding his own household members, although it was presumed that he would continue to send food to others in the extended family. At the same time, authority within

Then, in 1914, Japan took possession of the islands. The Japanese era, especially the halcyon years of the middle and late 1930s, offered full-time employment for cash wages to a significant number of islanders for the first time. But the estimated 1,500 jobs held by islanders yielded only about 230,000 yen a year, or a per capita income of 5 yen. Earnings from copra exports might have provided another 2.7 million yen, but altogether this would meant a total per capita income of only 55 yen, or less than $15 in post-war dollars. A wide range of new products, including clothing, footware, bicycles and musical instruments, appeared on the shelves of Japanese stores, and people may have enjoyed an occasional bowl of udong or ramen. But the earnings were not adequate to allow these people to sustain themselves on their salaries. Even during the height of Japanese prosperity, then, islanders had to depend on their own land to feed themselves on breadfruit, taro and fish.

After World War II, the US made every attempt to slow down the pace of economic growth. By 1957, twelve years after US occupation of the islands, 3,000 Micronesians (that is to say, residents of what is now FSM, Palau and the Marshalls) worked at full-time jobs. Their total yearly earnings of about $1.5 million, when added to the yearly export total of $1.4 million, yielded a total monetary income of $2.9 million, or $50 per capita income. As in the past, people purchased the usual array of household items, tools, and luxury goods. But even in those years when goods were relatively inexpensive by our standard, no islander could feed himself on store-bought food for merely 15 cents a day.

The Tipping Point

It was only during the late 1960s and 1970s, as the pace of development was deliberately accelerated, that the tipping point was reached. As US policy towards the Trust Territory was sharply reversed during 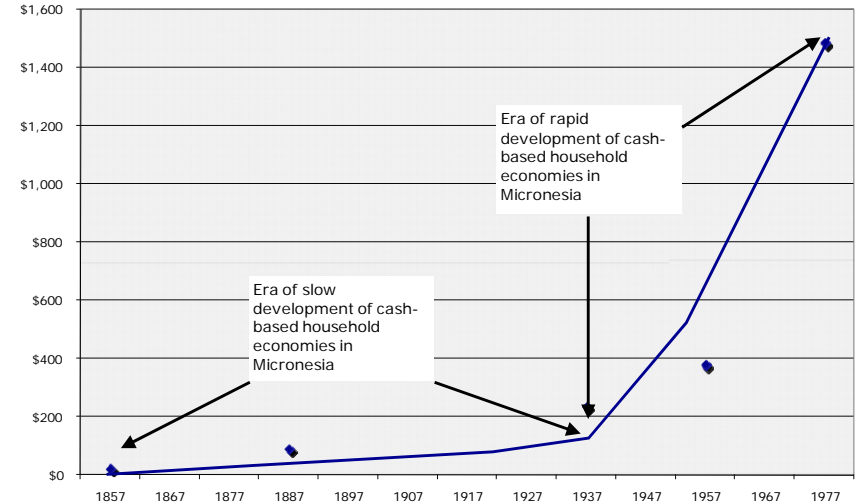the Kennedy Administration in the early 1960s, funding from Washington expanded each year. Government positions in the islands multiplied and thousands of Micronesians were added to the payroll. By 1977, 18,200 Micronesians had found full-time employment, a six-fold increase from the 3,000 with salaries just twenty years earlier. Their total earnings amounted to $42.8 million. Percapita income rose to $412 a year.

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The growth in income between 1937 and 1977 represented an economic sea-change. Percapita income, as measured in constant 1950 dollars, had grown from $15 in 1937, to $42 in 1957, to $114 in 1977. From the boom days of the Japanese "economic miracle" in the islands, the average income for Micronesians–every man, woman and child–had skyrocketed by 760 percent in forty years. For the first time in history it was possible for workers to feed their families on their own cash earnings without recourse to food produce from the land. The conditions were in place for one of the greatest upheavals in island history, all because of the significant increase in cash.

Changes in Per Capita Income of Micronesia 1885-2000
(constant 2007 dollars)

Era of rapid development of cash-based household economies in Micronesia

Era of slow development of cash-based household economies in Micronesia

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The household head was assuming an ever greater responsibility for feeding his own household members. At the same time, authority within the extended family was shifting away from the head of the lineage and to-wards each household head.

Prior to this time it was unimaginable that an islander provide for his family through the fruits of his own labor. To support those who depended on him, an islander would have had to rely on the yield of the land and access to resources from the sea. This meant that his survival was dependant on land, which was corporately owned in all but a few cases, and on the labor utilization that was intimately tied to his kin system. But during the US-funded revolution of the 60s and 70s, the cash earnings of the breadwinner reached a new high; they were adequate to provide store-bought food for members of his household over a