
BOOK REVIEW FORUM

Norman Meller, *Constitutionalism in Micronesia*. Laie: Institute for Polynesian Studies, 1985. Pp. x, 400, illustrated, appendices, index. \$24.00 paper.

Ralph R. Premdas and Jeff S. Steeves, *Decentralisation and Political Change in Melanesia*. South Pacific Forum Working Paper, No. 3. Suva: University of the South Pacific Sociological Society, 1984. Pp. iv, 200. F\$5.00 paper.

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In *Constitutionalism in Micronesia*, Norman Meller has, in a sense, given us two books in one. The first is a richly detailed, firsthand account of the 1975 Micronesian Constitutional Convention in Saipan and the historical and political contexts in which it took place. What would eventually become the Constitution of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) was drafted there. As one who lived through a piece of that history, and continues to contemplate its aftermath, I can express only appreciation for the acuity of this account; it will no doubt stand as *the* history of American Micronesia in the 1970s.

The second book therein is an interpretation of that history. Meller played a key role in much of it, and he tells his tale from the perspective of his place on stage. It would, of course, be quite impossible to do otherwise. But precisely because this will be *the* history of the new

Micronesian nations, and will probably be required reading for the various young diplomats, technocrats, and carpetbaggers assigned to work in and with them, I find it necessary both to stress that this is *an interpretation* of what happened and to suggest that an array of alternative interpretations might shed more light on much of what took place during those critical years. I would not, I hasten to add, want anyone to take my word on this at face value. Meller's is a book first to be read, and only then debated. It would be a gross error to let my arguments and those of others stand in place of his enormous accomplishment.

Meller's story, which is structured as a play, begins where his *The Congress of Micronesia* (1969) left off: the formation of the pan-Micronesian legislature in 1965. One of the Congress's first acts was to initiate the long quest for self-government and the end of American trusteeship. This unbelievably complex process included the decision of the people of the Northern Marianas to seek closer ties to the U.S., America's ready acquiescence, and the 1975 plebiscite that gave them U.S. Commonwealth status, a vote that preceded the Constitutional Convention by only weeks.

Heading the list of proposals that the first Micronesian Political Status Delegation brought to Washington was "that the people of Micronesia will draft and adopt their own constitution" (p. 53). As the negotiations dragged on, and the question of future status grew more equivocal, they increasingly sought a more concrete notion of what self-government might actually look like. When the Constitutional Convention was finally convened, Meller, who had been a consultant to the first Congress of Micronesia, served as head of its Research and Drafting Section.

By the time the Convention got underway, the separate status accorded the Marianas had already had an impact. Palau and the Marshall Islands were pursuing the possibility of conducting separate status talks with the U.S.¹ The Palauan delegation to the Convention brought with it a set of seven "non-negotiable demands" (a phrase widely current in the American political discourse of those days). For the most part, these were aimed at limiting the role of any central Micronesian government that might be constituted and assuring the preeminence of the "states" (the Trust Territory's "districts") that would comprise the new nation.

Meller sees the Palauans' threats to quit the deliberations and proceed with separate status negotiations as the fulcrum on which the Convention turned. Considerable drama evolved out of what he calls the "Palauan ploy" and the other Micronesians' brilliant strategies to counter it.

While arguing that this maneuver enabled the Palauans to “call the tune” at the Convention, he also acknowledges that in the end their hopes that the individual states would be “recognized as the basic political unit of government” were superseded by creation of a “true federation.” The “powers delegated to the central government provided it with a far greater scope of authority than contemplated by the Palauan delegation’s outline of its position” (pp. 308-309). The Palauans ultimately rejected the pan-Micronesian Constitution, and went on to negotiate their own Compact of Free Association with the U.S., and Meller thus finds it thoroughly ironic that they had such an impact on the framing of the pan-Micronesian document.

But did the Palauans really call the tune, or were the Micronesians and the Americans (and this includes both the U.S. government and the Convention’s own staff) merely marching to different drummers? Bear with me a moment as I “open my album” and show to you a few “snapshots” from the life and times of the Micronesian Constitutional Convention.

- Several years ago, in the course of a wide-ranging conversation, a Micronesian leader who had not been there told me a story about the Convention. He spoke of the large number of American lawyers and advisers who aided the Convention delegates, and noted that throughout the Convention there had been on Saipan a man from the U.S. State Department. It appeared to the delegates, he said, that their American lawyers were passing along drafts of the various pieces of the constitution so that the State Department could advise them on how they should be framed. The delegates began to feel that the drafts they were receiving were not responsive to their requests. Eventually, as the time allocated for the Convention neared an end, a special committee was formed. This committee excluded from its meetings all the American lawyers and advisers, and then proceeded to work out the draft constitution that was ultimately approved. One of the lawyers, so the story goes, was so shamed by this turn of events that he wept.

- After receiving the request to review Meller’s new book, I asked a man who had been a delegate to the Convention about this story. He responded with mild incredulity, directed not at the question but at my need to ask for confirmation. “Of course. Why would you think otherwise?” was his tacit reply. When I pressed for more information, he told me he knew nothing specific about the relations between the Convention’s American advisers and the U.S. government, but he agreed that the special committee had indeed excluded advisers from its deliberations so that members could write a draft as they wanted it. He sug-

gested that one of the reasons the Convention proceeded so slowly was all the extra work put into turning aside the U.S.'s efforts to shape the constitution to its own liking.

- Just as the Convention was getting underway, the U.S. State Department's Micronesia specialist wrote:

Every effort should be made to assure that the convention does not write a constitution containing clauses which would be seriously inconsistent or in conflict with an acceptable (to the U.S.) future political relationship. . . . The U.S. *quietly* should seek to work with the constitutional convention in identifying and avoiding problem areas which could later jeopardize negotiations of a satisfactory political relationship. (Dorance 1975: 774-775, his italics)

- Midway through the Convention, according to Meller, Senator Lazarus Salii, one of the Palauan delegates and a prime mover in Micronesia's status negotiations with the U.S., charged that

"Some staff members . . . have enormous emotional investments in the outcome . . . and preconceived ideas of what the outcome ought to be. The staff are not here to mastermind the Convention, not here to direct or steer us. They are here to render professional services. If they cannot give us their services without promoting their emotional and philosophical considerations, they should-and this Convention should--reconsider their position." (p. 1, Meller's ellipses)

The first two of these four vignettes convey views that are still current in Micronesia, and were expressed to me by men who, as it happens, have quite different attitudes toward the U.S., yet share a common understanding of the context in which the Convention took place. The fourth suggests that theirs is not an entirely ex post facto perspective; it was voiced even while the Convention was in session. Meller several times characterizes this outlook, or variations of it, as "devil theory." The third comes from a study prepared at the National War College in Washington, D.C. It indicates to me that Micronesian perceptions need not be attributed to a conspiracy theory, but reflect, rather, quite accurate readings of what the U.S. intended for the Convention.

I should make it clear at this point that I do not share these Micronesian views about the activities of the Convention's American staff. I have nothing but respect for the work done and the advice tendered by Meller and his staff. I repeat these accounts only because I think we

must bear them in mind if we are to comprehend the milieu in which Micronesian negotiations with the U.S. have taken place. Micronesians know better than most that the actions of individual American citizens do not at all necessarily coincide with the plans and policies of their government. But the people of Micronesia have also had to live with what the U.S. has wrought in their islands, and I think we would do well not to dismiss their perspective lightly.

Meller's account succeeds very much in spite of his dismissing such suspicions as "near paranoia" (p. 71). For a host of cultural, historical, and political reasons, the peoples of Micronesia have a range of viewpoints that, in places, contrast sharply with those of a professor emeritus of political science at the University of Hawaii. While Professor Meller is acutely aware of these differences, the overall perspective of his book seems--to me, at least--to deny them.

Whether scholars agree with them or not, many Micronesians do in fact view their constitutional history as having been shaped by their responses to the colossus of America's presence in Micronesia, and in this they share much with the Melanesians. As Ralph Premdas and Jeff Steeves demonstrate in *Decentralisation and Political Change in Melanesia*, the internal political organization of the Melanesian nations must be understood in the context of their efforts to end colonial rule. The critical difference, of course, is that the Melanesians (excluding New Caledonia's Kanaks and the peoples of West Irian) were able to successfully pursue independence, an option denied to the Micronesians. The Herculean efforts of the delegates to the Micronesian Constitutional Convention had to be directed toward the Augean task of designing a constitution that satisfied the wishes of their people for an end to colonial rule and yet acknowledged that the U.S. was not likely to recognize any document that truly did so.

A broader perspective provides us with other ways to interpret the story told in Meller's book. As he notes--with the self-awareness that plays such an important part in his chronicle--his belief that it is "in the best interests of the Micronesians in the modern world that they achieve unity as a single political entity" is "based on Western logic--my cultural logic" (p. 167). He is thus led to dismiss Micronesian anti-Americanism as "a poor substitute for a more positive premise, such as might have been supplied by a common traditional heritage, to bind together all the peoples of the Trust Territory" (p. 22). This ignores the successes of the Melanesian nations in preserving unity despite cultural heterogeneity equal to or surpassing that of Micronesia. This unity has in some measure been achieved precisely because of cooperation spurred by

shared anticolonial sentiments. Meller's a priori discounting of the deep Micronesian resentments toward colonial rule makes the Palauan position appear *sui generis*, rather than symptomatic of strains shared by all Micronesians. Indeed, it may have been empathy, rather than strategy, that occasioned the enormous efforts that went into accommodating Palau.

Meller's book provides ample indication that the spark of disunity can be traced not to cultural differences per se, but to the very real fear that these differences would be eroded by a highly centralized national government. Opposition to a strong central government was hardly peculiar to Palau. Indeed, Meller himself notes that this position "probably represented the inchoate views of a majority of the delegates" (p. 181). The Palauan proposal merely gave shape to this sentiment.

Micronesian concerns about the character of the central government had at least two sources. Again, both of them are to be found within Meller's own account. The first springs from traditional Micronesian notions about what constitutes good government. The second grows out of the Micronesians' experiences with colonial governments, particularly that of the American Trust Territory. The two are so thoroughly intertwined that any distinction between them is heuristic rather than palpable.

As do many Pacific peoples (and others elsewhere, for that matter), Micronesians often conceptually merge social groups and tracts of land in ways that seem baffling, if not illogical, to European *Weltanschauungen*. Eminent domain--the right of the government to seize land for its own purposes--for the proposed new national government was one of the points on which the entire constitutional exercise nearly foundered. Another was the opposition between civil liberties and traditional custom. At one point the schism grew so broad, a delegate felt it necessary to insist that "Micronesians need their land more than they need their civil liberties" (p. 267). This seemingly peculiar dichotomy actually marks one of the major fracture lines that run between Micronesian notions about the kind of government they *should* have and the kind of government they *have* had.

I was present during the opening sallies of the civil liberties debate; what I heard in the Convention chambers and, more pointedly, in nearby restaurants, bars, and hotel rooms was etched deeply on my mind. Because my recollections coincide so closely with Meller's detailed account, I am inclined to trust them. The Bill of Rights articles proposed for the constitution were unsettling to a number of delegates because they were, among other things, perceived as placing the locus

of social responsibility in the individual and the government and removing it from family and community groups. If someone gives offense, heard it said, the offended social group has the responsibility and the right to seek redress with the group that gave offense. The freedom-of-expression rights put forward at the Convention were seen by some as *denying* fundamental rights that inhered in the *groups* of which they were a part.²

The doctrine of eminent domain commits even greater powers to the central government. It not only holds that authority resides in the government rather than in the social group, it specifies that the government may disenfranchise any group of its land--and, therefore, of its essence. Some delegates argued that eminent domain is inherent in a sovereign (that is, national) government; one group was "adamant in its demand that the central government must possess eminent domain powers" (pp. 268-269). Others sought to restrict the power to state governments. In the end, the constitution remained, and remains, silent on the issue of eminent domain. It does, however, specifically preclude the national Supreme Court from jurisdiction over land matters; these are reserved to state courts.

While the civil rights dispute was sidestepped by adding to the Micronesian constitution a complex and ambiguous article on tradition and traditional leadership, eminent domain remained one of the few areas in which no compromise could be found, no consensus reached. Clearly, compelling forces were at work here; the delegates were struggling not merely with notions about how government should be *structured*, but about what it should *be*. In doing so, they considered both the question of what would be acceptable to the U.S. and the history of what the U.S. had already wrought in Micronesia.

Meller observes that "nowhere in all the exchange of rhetoric was reference made to the central government's need to condemn land if it were to meet possible commitments to the United States under a future status compact" (p. 270). Left unstated here is that this refers only to the transcripts in the Convention's journal. The U.S. had made it clear that eminent domain was one of *its* "non-negotiable demands" and the delegates completely understood this.³ Meller also notes that in the past the possibility of "losing their properties through public condemnation by the American Administration was believed to be the moving force for the owners agreeing to lease or sell them" (p. 268). Elsewhere, he remarks that "the journal of the Convention contains disappointingly little debate on the subject of future political status" (p. 52). When this is juxtaposed with his comment about the delegates' silence over the

central government's obligation to condemn land, one gets the sense that there were certain things that simply did not need to be talked about--or were too fundamentally disturbing to discuss.

As they drafted their constitution, the delegates were aware of past abuses by a single central government, that is, the Trust Territory administration. Meller's comment that "rulings of the High Court with respect to customary obligations and, particularly, land matters in Micronesia had given rise to regional pockets of dissatisfaction with American law" (p. 33) understates the case. The delegates had reason to suspect that a new central government (their own), subordinated to the U.S. by the terms of a future political status yet to be resolved, would be required to behave in much the same fashion. Resistance to a powerful central government derived, then, both from the belief that it would arrogate powers that rightfully belonged to the community and from past experiences of the Trust Territory administration doing just that.

The Micronesian constitution was drafted before there was agreement on what the end of the trusteeship would mean for Micronesia. Meller explained to the delegates, as the Convention got underway, that this was not a problem: "like clay in the potter's hands, the shape of future political status would emerge as the powers and structures of the new Micronesian government were decided upon" (p. 154). This is, in a sense, what happened. But ignored, or derided as a chimera of "devil theory" (pp. 75, 340), is the refusal of the U.S. to acknowledge the right of the Micronesians to draft a constitution as they pleased. The delegates had to design a government centralized enough to satisfy America's insistence that it still rule Micronesia and yet decentralized enough to protect the people from that rule--an Augean task if ever there was.

Meller is skeptical about those who are "inclined to see hidden intrigue in Micronesian-American relations" and laughs at any who might have thought him a "conspirator or simpleton" (pp. 165-166). He makes only parenthetical reference (and this already in a note) to Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) surveillance conducted in Micronesia in the mid-1970s (p. 166). A U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence news release, while making no explicit reference to the Constitutional Convention, deserves more than the passing notice Meller gives it.⁴

Another snapshot:

The CIA engaged in clandestine intelligence collection operations in Micronesia from early 1975 until December 1976. The program included recruitment of Micronesian residents, some with affiliations with Micronesian political entities and some of

whom were paid for their information. None was informed that they were reporting to the CIA. At least one of the persons served on one of the island government entities involved in developing a compact with the U.S. as to future status.

The Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, General Brent Snowcroft, asked the CIA to initiate clandestine collection activities in Micronesia. A legal opinion was sought by the CIA prior to initiation of its collection activity, and such activity was found to be lawful by the then General Counsel of the CIA--an opinion disputed in May 1976 by the State Department Legal Adviser. The CIA sought and received in October 1973 from the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, Dr. Henry Kissinger, approval for collection operations in Micronesia as well as permission "to assess the possibility of exerting covert influence on key elements of the Micronesian independence movement and on those other elements in the area where necessary to promote and support U.S. strategic objectives." (U.S. Senate 1977:1-3)

The release goes on to note that as far as the Senate Committee could determine, the CIA did not actually engage in covert action or influence in Micronesia. It further acknowledges that the U.S. Congress had been notified of the CIA's plans.

While I am willing to believe that the CIA sought and received permission to assess the possibility of exercising covert influence on the Micronesians who were negotiating future status, nothing that has transpired in the past decade or so gives me reason to believe the assertion that the CIA did not try to exert such influence. Most Micronesians would find it patently absurd to grant any credence to such a denial.

The Micronesians were not, then, merely trying to draft something that would preserve a fragile unity. They were bent on producing a document that could protect them from the U.S. And as they engaged in this formidable task, they worked with full expectation--if not knowledge--that the U.S. was trying mightily to keep them from doing so.

Unity, and the Palauans' role in threatening it, did not, then, serve as the Convention's fulcrum. The Palauans' proposals were directed squarely at the nature of the proposed national government. Fears of strong central government, shared by many--perhaps most--of the other delegates, were not simply the chauvinistic calls for "Marshalls *Mokta*" ("Marshalls First") or "Palau for Palauans" that Meller cites (pp. 90, 94); such sentiments have been expressed widely in the Pacific

(for example, *Samoa mo Samoa*, the title of J. W. Davidson's classic study [1967] of a comparable period in Western Samoan history, means "Samoa for the Samoans"). They were, rather, quite reasonable observations about what the U.S. had wrought in Micronesia and what it was still planning to achieve. The real fulcrum, as I read it in these pages, was the Micronesians' attempt to design a government that would simultaneously be competent--that is, strong--enough to negotiate with the U.S. *and* be decentralized enough to guarantee that, whatever the final outcome of the status negotiations, the Micronesians would reclaim a significant measure of self-rule.

I have made reference to Meller's use of the phrase "devil theory." He does not explicitly define this term, and it is difficult to be sure just what he means by it. He first employs it in his discussion of policies the U.S. pursued in the Marianas, which were radically different from those in the rest of the Trust Territory. "In keeping with the devil theory held by many Micronesians, this differentiation was deliberate: the Machiavelian U.S. at no time ever intended to surrender its control of the Northern Marianas" (p. 75). While this is a matter over which reasonable scholars might disagree, it hardly seems necessary to resort to name-calling; one could marshal considerable evidence suggesting that the U.S. has never entertained the possibility of surrendering the Marianas. He later writes: "To those who hold to the devil theory of Micronesian-American relations, the postponing of the referendum on the Federated Constitution was intentionally designed to further the process of Trust Territory disintegration initiated with the forming of the Northern Marianas Commonwealth, enabling the Americans to confront smaller, weaker Micronesian entities to the end of assuring a permanent United States presence throughout the area" (p. 340).

It appears to me that by "devil theory," Meller means any suspicion that the U.S. actually intended for the Micronesians to negotiate from positions of weakness, including all the problems that attend internal divisiveness. Yet this is certainly the regnant view in contemporary Micronesia, and both Dorrance's (1975) and McHenry's (1975) histories of the trusteeship, as well as the U.S. Senate's news release, provide substantial evidence that this was indeed the case.

Let us now consider the new Melanesian nations; they have thus far been able to preserve internal unity, and this in spite of the significant challenges that continue to arise. Why have they succeeded where Micronesia has not?

Premdas and Steeves's account of decentralization demonstrates that all the internal stresses under which the Micronesians negotiated self-

government were operating in Melanesia as well. The key difference is that Britain and Australia, if not France, wanted to decolonize.

The term "decentralization" carries much of the same burden in Melanesia that "federalism" bears in Micronesia. In his survey of Pacific islands constitutions, Stephen Levine found that only two nations--Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia--explicitly define their governments as federal. Nonetheless, similar allocations of powers and responsibilities amongst national, state, and local governments "may be found in Pacific Constitutions for non-federal entities as well, when internal politics suggest a need to maintain important local political structures" (Levine 1983:26). Furthermore, as Premdas and Steeves point out (p. 85), decentralization may be encountered in either a federal or a unitary system. In other cases, of course, nominally federal systems may not actually decentralize at all.

In *Decentralisation and Political Change in Melanesia*, a series of essays chart the various courses pursued by Papua New Guinea (PNG), the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu as they have sought to balance the imperatives of sovereignty against the perils of bureaucratic centralization. At different points the approach is historical, political, or organizational.

Premdas and Steeves begin by heralding the role decentralization might play in realizing decolonization. They conclude, however, on a much less sanguine note. Decentralization, they find, "cannot by itself deliver upon all its potential promises. Whether through provincial government in a unitary state or local government in a federal system, in the last analysis an organisational structure must operate in the real context of culture and people. There is no inherent behavioral outcome that decentralisation can bestow spontaneously" (pp. 139-140).

Melanesian decentralization has not been--is not--a simple, or single, phenomenon; there are continuing disagreements about its purpose, utility, and efficacy. Nor are there agreed upon notions of what it entails or models of what it should be. In both theory and practice it is a product of competing political exigencies and ideologies. At its best, decentralization has been hailed "as a pre-eminent means of *decolonization*" (p. 121). Iambakey Okuk, then leader of the PNG opposition, has accused it of making a nation "ungovernable" (Okuk 1978:21).

Two broad issues emerge in the course of this study: the degree to which decentralization aids or impedes the ending of colonial controls in the periods just before and following independence, and the effects it has upon the efficient and equitable functioning of the new national governments. These are by no means exclusive of each other.

We find in Melanesia widespread apprehension that anything falling

short of a thoroughly unitary national government will lack the requisite strength to fully sever the colonial bonds. It is expedient, then, to turn first to questions about the internal strengths and weaknesses of decentralized governments. Premdas and Steeves hold that decolonization has two dimensions, the first being the independence process itself, while the second entails "the return of power to the people at the grassroots via elections" (p. 1). For some, however, these appear to be mutually exclusive possibilities; only a powerful national government, they believe, can hold onto independence, and any transfer of power to the grassroots will inevitably weaken the center.

From this follows the expectation that decentralization leads inexorably to fragmentation.⁵ Many in both Papua New Guinea and the Solomons suspect that any shift of authority from the central government to the provinces will cause more and more regions to seek provincial status, and lead to even greater disunity. Calls for decentralization are thus interpreted as unenlightened demands on behalf of purely local interests, while any local control of development funding and planning that is achieved then receives the blame for inefficiency and corruption.

On the other hand, Premdas and Steeves argue, if decentralization is to be truly effective, it must be disruptive. In parts of the Solomons, people "seemed to share the feeling that the transition to independence was being made just a bit too smoothly and quickly, thereby denying the opportunity for citizens to discuss major issues such as the distribution of power in the state" (p. 185). As the authors point out, the transfer of government functions from the national to the provincial level is often no more than a shift from one center to another, and since local councils remain largely dependent upon central government for their funding, they remain effectively subordinate to them.

In response to the argument that too much local authority threatens to fragment the nation, it was acknowledged in the Western Solomons, for instance, that "a system of government that accommodated legitimate regional differences would no doubt cultivate provincial or state sub-nationalism, but that this was a first indispensable step in nurturing a sense of nationalism for the larger federal unit" (p. 155).

In the same way that independence does not necessarily return power to the grassroots, decolonization does not necessarily terminate the former colonial regime's control over a new nation. In PNG, for instance, the national infrastructure depends for its stability on large-scale financial aid and this in turn serves to maintain dependency. Australia's "contradictory aims-- military security and self-determination" led to "delays in preparing the Territory for self-government" (p. 13). In the

newly decentralized Melanesian polities, local governments remain similarly dependent upon and subordinate to the national governments that are the sources of nearly all their revenues. It is often the symbols, rather than the substance, of power that are transferred.

The notion that decentralization is necessary to genuine decolonization has thus been countered by the claim that it actually serves as an impediment to independence. Again and again we see that independence is the premier goal, and anything that threatens to impede it is suspect. Thus Walter Lini, head of Vanuatu's ruling Vanuaaku party, "was fearful that those who advocated a federal formula had ulterior designs to dismantle the state and were manipulated by foreign interests" (p. 68), and Vanuatu eventually settled upon a unitary national government.

Ultimately, the Melanesian solutions to the dilemma of independence and decentralization were pragmatic. In PNG, Bougainville threatened secession and decentralization followed; in the Solomons, it was the breakaway movement in Western Province; in Vanuatu, Nagriamel's uprising. In each case, there was a great deal of expedience exercised. "Pressures translated into costs [which] set in motion the process of transferring power from the center to provincial and local units via decentralisation" (p. 3).

Within its unitary national government, Vanuatu incorporated a system of decentralization designed in response to the demands for federation. In the Solomons, where allocation of powers is "quasi-federal," calls have been voiced for a more explicitly federal system in which provinces or states are coequal with the national government. In PNG, the original report of the Constitutional Planning Committee recommended a government closely resembling "a federal arrangement," and the system of decentralization finally adopted drew heavily upon the original plan.

What, then, is the difference between the unity that has evolved in the Melanesian nations and the fragmentation taking place in Micronesia? It cannot be explained solely by relative degrees of geographical or cultural heterogeneity, nor by the minutiae of governmental structures.

Melanesians had a vision of independence as they organized their polities and have indeed been independent as they have set about resolving their internal problems. For them, a central government, whether strong or weak, was to be-- and has been--their own government.

Micronesians, on the other hand, did not--could not--know what kind of relationship they would ultimately achieve with the U.S. Lacking that knowledge, their government had to be constituted with

extraordinary flexibility. The "Palauan ploy," as Meller calls it, can be read as a threat to unity (and I would not deny that it was) ; but their list of demands can also be understood as a remarkably comprehensive summary of what most of Micronesia wanted: real, local self-government. In the absence of any solid indication that the U.S. was going to give up final authority in the region, nearly everyone wanted to see a constitution that placed authority in the states.

I am not suggesting that everyone in Micronesia wanted independence. Many did not. But most wanted self-government. A deal struck locally with the U.S. must have appeared to provide a good deal more of this than a vaguely defined national government ever could. It is a tribute to the Convention delegates that they did write a constitution all could sign, and it is worth repeating that the Palauans signed a document that provided much less than they had called for.

The process continues. As Meller notes in his conclusion, the potential for continued fragmentation in the various Micronesian nations is quite real (p. 340). There are, after all, no precedents for overcoming centrifugal tendencies. The people of Pohnpei, a majority of whom voted against Free Association in the 1983 plebiscite, feel that the FSM national government is indeed too responsive to the U.S. and that they have not achieved the sort of local rule they expected when they approved the FSM constitution (Petersen 1986).

In explaining Pohnpei's current dissatisfaction, one of its more visionary leaders spoke to me of what he called Americans' fixation on unity. He voiced a sentiment that is widespread on Pohnpei these days: unity is worthwhile only when it grows from the cooperation of equal and autonomous groups; it is not efficacious when it is imposed from without. His observation about Americans' fixation on unity brings me back to Meller's discussion of his own predispositions. Meller acknowledges his own Western cultural logic as the source of his belief that it is in the Micronesians' best interests to achieve unity as a single entity.

In situating the question of unity as the fulcrum of the Convention, Meller has responded to his own intellectual imperatives. In shifting the center of gravity to the question of the Micronesians' future political status, I respond to my own. We have made value judgments, and quite rightly so.

In *What Is History?*, E. H. Carr addresses this question of historical judgment. History, he writes, "is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past," and "the historian is engaged in a continuous process of moulding his facts to his interpretation and his interpretation to

his facts. It is impossible to assign primacy to one over the other" (Carr 1961:34-35). He expands on this with a metaphor singularly appropriate to the Micronesian case:

The facts are really not at all like fish on the fishmonger's slab. They are like fish swimming about in a vast and sometimes inaccessible ocean; and what the historian catches will depend partly on chance, but mainly on what part of the ocean he chooses to fish in and what tackle he chooses to use--these two factors being, of course, determined by what kind of fish he wants to catch. By and large, the historian will get the kinds of facts he wants. History means interpretation. (ibid.:26)

Meller and I interpret the Micronesian Constitutional Convention quite differently. His view of America's performance in Micronesia is prelapsarian, shaped by the liberating advance of America's forces during the Pacific War. My own introduction to the Pacific came when I was sent to fight in Vietnam. Where he sees a continued commitment to liberation, I see arrogant insistence on America's right to rule.

Nowhere, I think, do our perspectives clash more directly than on the matter of what traditional Micronesian politics has to contribute to modern Micronesia. Meller believes that "the cultures of Micronesia embodied no fundamental egalitarianism which would serve as the basic underpinning for the building of a democratic polity. In the main, it waited upon the American Administration after World War II to nourish political implants which subsumed that the future course of Micronesia was to be along the path of democracy, with all of its citizens to be treated as political equals" (p. 29-30). He reacts to the post-Constitution history of the constitution with the observation that, "countering the democratic processes introduced during the thirty-five years of American rule, the influence of the traditional remains a major force to be reckoned with in Micronesian governance" (p. 329).

I find it difficult to comprehend how peoples so committed to the achievement of consensus and to the proper siting of government within their communities can be portrayed as lacking in a democratic tradition. When juxtaposed with the U.S. Senate's own report of Henry Kissinger's commitment to *Machtpolitik*, the delegates' efforts seem particularly noteworthy. It was, after all, the Micronesians who had to wonder about the possibilities for democracy while the U.S. sought to exert "covert influence on key elements of the Micronesian independence movement . . . where necessary to promote and support U.S. strategic objectives."

NOTES

1. A number of Micronesian entities have changed the spellings of their names in recent years, among them Belau (formerly Palau) and Pohnpei (Ponape). Meller uses the mid-seventies spellings, and I follow his usage in this case; I employ the current spelling for Pohnpei.

2. The delegates showed considerable perspicacity. Subsequent events suggest that at least some of what they foresaw has already come to pass. In deciding a precedent-setting case regarding the place of traditional Pohnpeian apology rituals (*tohmw*) in contemporary legal proceedings, FSM Chief Justice Edward C. King held that

Ponapean customary law flows from an island tradition of interdependence and sharing. It de-emphasizes (compared to the constitutional legal system) notions of individual guilt, rights and responsibility, and places greater stress on the groups to which the individual accuseds and victims belong. . . . Families, clans and community groups are the principal subjects and objects of customary law. Major purposes of a customary forgiveness are to prevent further violence and conflict, to soothe wounded feelings, and to ease the intense emotions of those most directly involved so that they can go about their lives in relative harmony.

The constitutional legal system, paradoxically, concentrates upon both smaller and larger units than those intermediate groups emphasized by customary law. This legal system's procedures are calculated to focus upon the individual accused. Grounded upon a premise of individual responsibility, the court system seeks to pinpoint one particular act or series of actions and to determine whether an individual accused is guilty of the crime. (FSM vs. Mudong and FSM vs. Benjamin 1982: 9-10)

Furthermore, as one of the Convention delegates (William Eperiam) and a historian have recently observed: "While many Pacific nations find themselves forced to acknowledge demands for decentralization of power and authority, the national government of the FSM seeks to secure its survival and well-being through a centralization of major governmental functions" (Hanlon and Eperiam 1983:98).

3. The U.S., like the Palauans, did not hold strictly to this "non-negotiable" posture. The FSM Constitution still makes no provision for eminent domain on the part of the central government.

4. In two separate but similar situations, Meller makes ambiguous use of his sources, or so it seems to me.

When Meller chides those "inclined to see hidden intrigue in Micronesian-American relations," he gives no specific source for the information that the CIA was active in Micronesia at the time of the Convention. Much later, when quoting a delegate's remark that the Micronesians themselves are responsible for the outcome of the Convention, rather than "some American Secretary, or ambassador, or high commissioner, or CIA agent," he cites the Senate news release by way of explaining the reference, remarking, "Whether this included the Constitutional Convention is not known" (pp. 326, 344). At no point does he provide us with any information about the disturbing (to me, at least) contents of the Senate report.

In another context, we encounter an oblique reference to the so-called Solomon Report, a government study authorized by U.S. National Security Action Memorandum No. 243 in May 1963. This document provides a blueprint (much of which was never implemented) for creating an aura of successful economic development in the period preceding a planned mid-sixties plebiscite, and goes on to record that "it is the Mission's conclusion that those programs and the spending involved will not set off a self-sustaining development process of any significance in the area. It is important, therefore, that advantage [i.e., the plebiscite] be taken of the psychological impact of the capital investment program before some measure of disappointment is felt" (Solomon 1963:41-42; reprinted in McHenry 1975). Meller (p. 16) chooses to cite David Nevin's (1977) description of the capital improvement aspects of this plan, while ignoring the darker implications of the original report. Later, he does quote directly from the report (p. 37), which suggests that his circumspection does not have to do with the circumstances under which the still-classified document came to light.

Some readers might be inclined to find "angel theory" at work here.

5. The assumption that decentralization is inherently unstable has considerable currency in political theory (de Rougemont 1941; Franck 1968).

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