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## Writing Micronesian History

### Setting the Context

This book examines how *shon Maikronesia* (Micronesians)<sup>1</sup> have dealt with and controlled varied past and present external influences, from colonial powers to modern economic forces, and environmental influences from typhoons to climate change. It is one of the first written post-colonial Micronesian beliefs and perspectives of *uruo* (history). These perspectives are enshrined in the Preamble<sup>2</sup> to the *Constitution of the Federated States of Micronesia*. The Constitution represents a Micronesian-centred outlook and reassertion of Micronesian heritage and independence.<sup>3</sup> This book reflects the author's upbringing, cultural roots and national and global identity. It traverses the space between local history and identity—as epitomised by the writer's Lekiniochian–Namoi<sup>4</sup> identity, national, post-colonial consciousness and international

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1 *Shon Maikronesia* refers to the indigenous people of the modern state of the FSM. All indigenous terms in this thesis are in Mortlockese–Chuukese, with terms in other Micronesian languages indicated as such.

2 The Preamble of the *Constitution of the Federated States of Micronesia* underscores a brief historical statement of the Micronesian people in terms of their past, present and future. See the *Constitution of the Federated States of Micronesia*, [fsmlaw.org/fsm/constitution/index.htm](http://fsmlaw.org/fsm/constitution/index.htm).

3 The *Constitution of the Federated States of Micronesia* is framed in accordance with Micronesian values and perspective of the world.

4 Lekiniochian–Namoi is a combined local and regional identity in reference to the island of Lekinioch, situated in the region of Namoi (now the Mortlocks) in the state of Chuuk, the FSM.

engagement as a scholar enmeshed in wider global historiography—to record in print a Micronesian perspective of history, which is absent from much of the literature.<sup>5</sup>

The history of Micronesians' engagement with the outside world remains an understudied area of academic scholarship. Most historians who have studied the Pacific Islands, and thus Micronesia's past, emphasise the history of outsiders' activities in the islands. As historian Paul D'Arcy observed:

historians have been more focused on instances of rapid change ... emphasising Western influences. Not surprisingly they often reproduced the same historical views as the main reasons behind the transformation of islander communities ... indigenous relations with Europeans receive the lion's share of attention, while ongoing and new interactions between local communities tend to be neglected.<sup>6</sup>

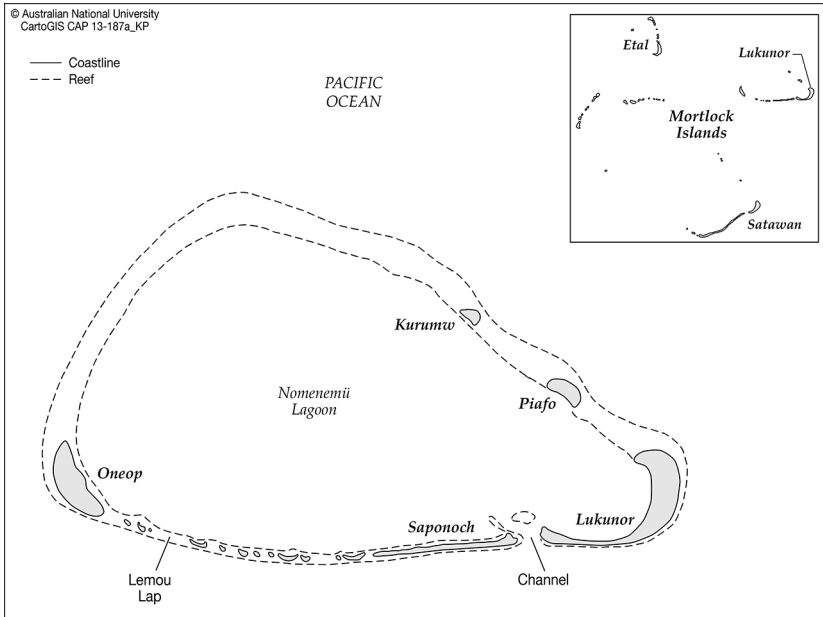
Like D'Arcy, anthropologist Mac Marshall highlights the continuous inter-island connections throughout history in reference to the indigenous people of the Mortlocks region, which also resonates throughout Micronesia. As Marshall observed, 'long before ... external control was imposed, people of (the Mortlocks) maintained contact with communities on numerous other islands via sailing canoe voyages using sophisticated celestial navigation techniques'.<sup>7</sup> Marshall's comments counter the corpus of literature that ignored Micronesians' perspective of history; that is, Micronesians were active participants in the production of colonial history. Indeed, Micronesians continue to interact with each other today just like in the past. However, they are expanding their diaspora to far distant lands like the US, Japan and Australia to internationalise their identity in a globalised world.

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5 I was born on a low-lying atoll, Lekinioch, and have lived in the US and Australia for many years. This has formed my deep and profound opinion and appreciation of indigenous history as contrasted with that of the colonial powers.

6 Paul D'Arcy, *The People of the Sea: Environment, Identity, and History of Oceania*, University of Hawai'i Press, 2006, p. 2.

7 Mac Marshall, *Namoluk beyond the Reef: The Transformation of a Micronesian Community*, Westview Press, USA, 2008, p. 3; D'Arcy, *The People of the Sea*, p. 2.



**Figure 2: Map of Lukunor atoll.**

Note: Oneop is an inhabited island that shares the same lagoon. There is a deep historical relationship between the two islands through the clanship system.

Source: Map produced by ANU CartoGIS.

Historian David Hanlon strongly advocates for the incorporation of Micronesian perspectives that have been missing from historical accounts for too long. This is to ensure that Micronesian voices become an enriching component of historical discourses.<sup>8</sup> He notes that Micronesians did not passively accept outside influence; they selected, incorporated and then manipulated what the outsiders had to offer to suit their circumstances.<sup>9</sup> This destroys the mainstream colonial accounts that Micronesians were on the periphery of history. To this end, the three cited scholars advocate for the inclusion of more Micronesian perspectives in the existing body of Pacific history to enhance the depth of the literature, which is currently limited by the amount of time scholars are able to spend in the

8 David Hanlon, 'Magellan's Chroniclers? American Anthropology's History in Micronesia', in *American Anthropology in Micronesia: An Assessment*, edited by Robert C. Kiste and Mac Marshall, University of Hawai'i Press, 1999, p. 77.

9 Hanlon, 'Magellan's Chroniclers?', p. 77.

field or archives. I seek to expand the partial truths that have emerged by presenting a more comprehensive perspective and timeframes more reflective of Micronesian experiences.

Four interrelated themes are used to construct this more comprehensive and integrated perspective of indigenous history: the law, religion, social organisation and the environment. These interrelated spheres of Micronesian actions and conceptualisation of the world in turn raise four major questions central to Micronesia's historical processes: 1) who do *shon Maikronesia* identify as the people of Micronesia, 2) how do Micronesians organise their socio-political affairs as a people, 3) what devices have Micronesians adopted to preserve their customs and identity, and 4) to what extent have Micronesians controlled the past and present for the purpose of future continuity?

## Micronesianising Historiography

*Uruo* is perceived by those in the Mortlocks as existing in a dynamic model akin to an intricate spider web, dissimilar to Western historiography, which follows a linear model. For instance, the *sou uruo*, depending on the question at hand, has to choose a particular event in the web to begin his oral narrative. He then connects the event to other series of events surrounding the question, bearing in mind the purpose of his narrative in seeking 'the truth' while his audience of other *sou uruo* are ready to validate the narrator's historical account.<sup>10</sup> It is like travelling on the sea where the *palou* is surrounded by a constellation of stars in the universe. The navigator picks a particular star as a reference point at the outset of his journey. He then relates that star to other stars during the journey to reach his specific destination while being mindful of the subtleties of the waves, currents and wind, as well as observing his relationship with his crew to ensure a successful voyage.<sup>11</sup> The voyaging *palou* would be judged by other *palou* upon reaching the final destination—on whether he arrived in good order, became lost or showed up late, for instance.

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10 During my fieldwork, I asked for specific dates for certain recent events. The interviewees said that they did not know the dates but remembered that someone died when the event occurred. This is the association of events, rather than the chronological ordering of events as usually practiced in Western historical discourses.

11 Destination is not so much where one ends the journey but the various points of the journey. An inter-island journey, like history, is circular and never stops completely at one particular point.

Like the navigator, my challenge is where to start to write about Micronesian history, since it is a vast area consisting of many local clans and thus histories. Naturally, the best position to start writing the history of the FSM is from my own personal experience; that is, the history of my clan and its relationship with other clans in the FSM diaspora.<sup>12</sup> The next step is consulting the corpus of literature to locate specific events to impart a sense of chronology to it. Most of the time-sensitive events are absent from the literature or only mentioned in passing. The war between Ettal and Lukunor, for example, which significantly influenced the history of the Lower Mortlocks, has not been discussed widely in the literature. Due to the dearth of information relating to events of significance to the indigenous community, I resorted to researching descriptive history in an attempt to follow the historical patterns that existed in the sources, while at the same time using my own sources gathered in the field, such as interviews and oral history for historical cross-analysis or references. I hope to provide a historical framework that invites future indigenous scholars to build on its foundation.

The inner core of Micronesian history is sacred. It requires painstaking attention to detail and is a delicate undertaking as it has its own *maniman*.<sup>13</sup> History should only be conveyed with respect and salutation to adhere to its inner principles. If one failed to honour this process, the ancestors would curse the narrator (in one form or another) for not adhering to the sacredness of the past. In the deep tradition of my Mortlockese–Chuukese–Micronesian ancestral past, it is customary for *sou uruo* (historians) to initiate their *kapasan uruo* (historical narratives) with the customary wisdom of ‘*tiro womi monson amusala ren ai lamelam tekia ren ia tolong lan kapasan uruo*’ (‘let me pay my humble respect to all historians for intruding into the subject of history’). This conveys deep humbleness, humility and respect for other historians both past and present. This is followed by an introductory remark, ‘*kapasan lon manimanen uruo*’ (‘within the spirit of history’), intended to invoke the past and also provoke the attention of the audience. This is also for the purpose of inviting the past into the present. This acknowledgement

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12 Due to the volume and richness of its past, I cannot include the entire history of my clan diaspora.

13 *Maniman*, from a Mortlockese point of view, is a form of spiritual power. It can be used to either destroy or save a person, depending on the context of a given situation. This term is also used by Pohnpeians but with a different spelling. See Rufino Mauricio, ‘Ideological Bases for Power and Leadership on Pohnpei, Micronesia: Perspectives from Archaeology and Oral History’, PhD thesis, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1993, p. 126; Glenn Petersen, ‘Kanaegamah and Pohnpei’s Politics of Concealment’, *American Anthropological Association*, Vol. 95, No. 2, 1993, p. 341.

of the omnipresence of the past in contemporary discourses conveys the continuity in oral history. The narrator seeks the blessings of respected historians to protect the narrator should he misstate a particular historical event. So, in following the footsteps of my Micronesian heritage, let me also convey my own '*tirowomi sou uruo monson*' from both the distant past and the present.

Historical themes and concepts are essential elements of history production as they have specific meanings and application in connection to historical events and contexts. Their meanings need to be understood for the purposes of facilitating and validating historical processes across time and space. They are also used to identify genuine historians from non-historians. Historical truths are measured in terms of the usage of specific languages and concepts known only to a selective group of historians. These historians can then determine the narrators' intention when speaking of history, especially in community settings. For example, in the Mortlocks, and many islands beyond, historians used specific concepts to test the knowledge of those who claimed/claim to know history without question. The exchange usually takes place during inter-island meetings, where *itangs* (orators) are also involved in contesting their knowledge of history in a different form of language known only to them. History to the *itang* is about validating one's legitimate right and control of resources locally or within the clan diaspora. Many of the traditional concepts embodied in this book have special meanings.<sup>14</sup>

It is no accident that the conservation of the environment for survival purposes is reinforced by the traditional religious practices and historical social ordering of the islands as embodied in the *Constitution of the Federated States of Micronesia*. These practices are designed to connect the clanship system and strengthen relationships between different clans. It will be argued throughout this book that historical continuities of cultural coherence and flexibility in the face of external challenges lie at the heart of modern Micronesian identity. They are apparent throughout Micronesia's long history of adjusting to seemingly overwhelming external forces, both human and environmental. In this context, Micronesians do not perceive themselves as victims of imposed external forces in reference to, for example, colonisation, Christianisation and globalisation. Instead,

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14 Traditional concepts are often difficult to translate into English as they have specific meanings and application. This book translates concepts into their closest English equivalents, with additional explanation provided where necessary.

they perceive themselves as challengers of these potential threats who draw strength from lessons from the past for continuity purposes. For example, during my field study, I interviewed many government officials and academics whose goal was to develop the economic system in light of its Micronesian cultures, history and geographical realities.<sup>15</sup> The notion that Micronesians should emulate the economic models of the developed world, especially those practised in the US, is to live in an unrealistic world that defies Micronesian traditions and relationships. Many former presidents of the FSM were keen advocates of developing the Micronesian economy in the nation's own image.<sup>16</sup>

## History as Dynamic and Trends

Historically, Micronesians have proven to be a skilful and knowledgeable people who have managed their relationships with each other and their environment to sustain their identity.<sup>17</sup> They are active agents in the production and reproduction of their own history.<sup>18</sup> For instance, the FSM's Constitution speaks of local agencies as always being active throughout the colonial and post-colonial periods. Drafted by community representatives from across the FSM, the Constitution represents the most comprehensive statement of Micronesian history, identity and survival to date.<sup>19</sup>

Micronesian history, like its seas, is fluid, dynamically subtle and inherently complex, with its own undercurrents. Deep human relations and the oceanic environment are the essence of historical narratives; they embody

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15 Mariena Dereas, Interview, College of Micronesia, National Campus, Palikir, 20 January 2011; John Haglelgam, Interview, College of Micronesia, Palikir, 11 January 2011; Peter Sitan, Interview, Kolonia, 27 January 2011.

16 Tereas, Interview; Haglelgam, Interview; Sitan, Interview; Josh Levy, 'Micronesian Nationalism Revisited: Reclaiming Nationalism for the Federated States of Micronesia', Paper delivered at Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, Uncasville, Connecticut, 5 June 2012, pp. 1–9; David Hanlon, *Making Micronesia: A Political Biography of Tosiwo Nakayama*, University of Hawai'i Press, 2014, pp. 4–5.

17 Christopher Lobban and Maria Schefter, *Tropical Pacific Island Environments*, University of Guam Press, USA, 1997, pp. 269–271, 288–294; William Alkire, 'Cultural Ecology and Ecological Anthropology in Micronesia', in *American Anthropology: An Assessment*, edited by Robert C. Kiste and Mac Marshall, University of Hawai'i Press, pp. 81–102.

18 David Chappell, 'The Post-Contact Period', in *The Pacific Islands: Environment and Society* (revised edition), edited by Moshe Rapaport, University of Hawai'i Press, 2013, pp. 144–145.

19 Paul D'Arcy, 'Cultural Divisions and Island Environments since the Time of Dumont d'Urville', *Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 38, No. 2, October 2003, pp. 217–236; David Hanlon, 'Micronesia: Writing and Rewriting the Histories of a Nonentity', *Pacific Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2, March 1989, p. 15.

the Micronesian history of continuity. This book adopts the Micronesian perspective of *uruo* to balance the misrepresentations and inaccurate images of Micronesians that have been manufactured, reproduced and transported in time and space by *shon liken*.

The genesis of Micronesia's historiography began with the arrival of Portuguese and Spanish explorers in the sixteenth century. The treatment and portrayals of Micronesians in the early literature focused largely on the types of responses exhibited by Micronesians to outsiders. Dumont de D'Urville, Captain Arellano and Andrew Cheyne, for instance, referred to the Chuukese as a violent and treacherous lot, the Pohnpeians as unfriendly and the Mortlockese as hospitable and considerate.<sup>20</sup> In Ulithi, Joao de Barros, a Portuguese historian, observed the indigenous people to be of simple rationality and still in 'the simplicity of the first age'.<sup>21</sup> The distorted images of *shon Maikronesia* continued to appear in subsequent literature by a host of scholars such as ethnographers, archaeologists, legal writers, economists and journalists. Literature on Micronesia is often compared unfavourably to Polynesia and Melanesia to conjure up the image of tiny islands with weak social structures. Like 'a handful of chickpeas flung over the sea',<sup>22</sup> the images of the micro-islands connote disconnection, isolation and deprivation. The micro-islands were imagined as a place lacking in the essential resources sought by the outside world.

The proponents of this perception are many. They include anthropologists William Alkire,<sup>23</sup> Ward Goodenough<sup>24</sup> and Sherwood Lingenfelter,<sup>25</sup> who described Micronesia as small islands suffering from isolation and poor soil, and depending heavily on rain to provide a subsistence life.<sup>26</sup> Francis Hezel, although often displaying great empathy for contemporary Micronesians and portraying them favourably, expounded on this description by reducing earlier generations of Micronesians to the lower

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20 Mac Marshall, *The Weekend Warrior: Alcohol in a Micronesian Culture*, Mayfield Publishing Company, Palo Alto, California, 1979, p. 38; Francis X. Hezel, *The First Taint of Civilization: A History of the Caroline and Marshall Islands in Pre-Colonial Days, 1521-1885*, University of Hawai'i Press, 1983, pp. 23, 90-91.

21 Hezel, *The First Taint of Civilization*, p. 12.

22 Hezel, *The First Taint of Civilization*, p. xi; Mauricio, 'Ideological Bases for Power', p. 240.

23 William Alkire, *An Introduction to the Peoples and Cultures of Micronesia* (2nd edition), University of Victoria, British Columbia, 1977, p. 44.

24 Ward Goodenough, *Under Heaven's Brow: Pre-Christian Religious Tradition in Chuuk*, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 2002, p. 29.

25 Sherwood Lingenfelter, *Yap: Political Leadership and Culture Change in an Island Society*, University of Hawai'i Press, 1975, p. 7.

26 Alkire, *An Introduction to the Peoples and Cultures of Micronesia*, p. 44.



end of the scale of human civilisation. He referred to Micronesians as ‘simply living on fish and taro or breadfruit, [wearing] their traditional dress ... and [carrying] on long-distance canoe voyages for which their islands were famous’.<sup>27</sup> The attendant question is, who is to say that living in an oceanic environment with its own challenges is ‘simpler’ than living on dry, industrialised, continental land with mammoth politico-economic problems.<sup>28</sup> Images of Micronesia are dictated by the eyes of the observer, and their cultural baggage determines both what they see and fail to see. In portraying Micronesians as being simple people living on the margins of civilisation, outsiders ignore a deep and intricate lore designed to enable people to live in harmony with nature and a complex system of social organisation that developed to provide inter-island links. For example, in the case of a natural disaster such as a typhoon, a sophisticated organisation was needed to support a seafaring culture where many men were away for long periods. Similarly, supporting technically complex enterprises like canoe building and seafaring required deep knowledge and group involvement. European powers are assessed as organised and efficient by the degree to which they could mobilise their societies to put fleets to sea in the service of national enterprises. However, smaller Pacific societies that maintained the infrastructure to put their entire population to sea in seaworthy sailing canoes at short notice with far less resources to call on are depicted as living on the margins of subsistence.

Like elsewhere in the Pacific, many contemporary scholars have inadvertently perpetuated negative images of Micronesia as a resource-poor nation suffering from remoteness and isolation, political corruption, dependency<sup>29</sup> and an uninvestable environment due to its anti-foreign Constitution.<sup>30</sup> As political scientist Meller stated: ‘Micronesia has limited living space and paucity of resources contributed to a subsistence closely bounded by the vicissitudes of nature and the ravages of human enemies’. According to Meller, it was ‘goods produced elsewhere which freed [Micronesians] from the day to day dependence on the vagaries of

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27 Francis X. Hezel, *The New Shape of Old Island Cultures: A Half Century of Social Change in Micronesia*, University of Hawai‘i, 2001, p. 7.

28 Epeli Hau‘ofa, *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works*, University of Hawai‘i Press, 2008, pp. 30–31.

29 Francis X. Hezel, ‘Micronesian Governments: A View From Outside’, *Micronesian Counselor*, No. 55, April 2005.

30 *Constitution of the Federated States of Micronesia*, Article VIII, Sections 4–5.

nature'.<sup>31</sup> Fuelling this image, human geographer John Connell observed that nowhere else in the Pacific is the gulf between image and reality as great as it is in Micronesia:<sup>32</sup>

Micronesia's image has become tarnished by a unique form of trustee military colonialism, an unusually dependent form of development, and limited prospects of achieving any degree of economic, and political independence, despite the signing of the Compact of Free Association. In a century, this strategically important region has gone from subsistence to subsidy.<sup>33</sup>

Connell's comments do not represent the realities of contemporary Micronesia; on the islands far from the political centres, traditional lifestyles largely untouched by American subsidies and funds remain the norm.

This book counters Connell's observation of externally imposed dependency by arguing that the current political arrangement between the FSM and US stems from Micronesian initiatives based on historical lessons to respond to contemporary international affairs on their own terms—that is, the US sought what it desired (military denial) in exchange for what the Micronesians demanded (to pay for that interest). Connell exemplifies the deep-seated, economically deterministic mentality of many contemporary commentators on the Pacific by interpreting this arrangement as being externally imposed, rather than a political stratagem. This is a shortcoming of contemporary evaluations of Micronesia: the assumption that the indigenous community holds the same worldview and political objectives as the commentator. This mentality ignores the roots of social and economic realities in Micronesia.<sup>34</sup> As will be argued in later chapters, these criticisms reflect externally imposed processes rather than inherent problems and solutions within Micronesian society.

The Compact is widely seen as the vehicle for Micronesians to access the US's employment market. The Compact should be more correctly seen as a lease between a landlord and tenant. The Compact monies are

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31 Norman Meller, *Constitutionalism in Micronesia*, The Institute for Polynesian Studies, Brigham Young University, Hawai'i, 1985, Part I, The Setting.

32 Gonzaga Puas, 'Federated States of Micronesia Still a Colony', *Pacific Daily News*, 15 January 2000, p. 19.

33 Puas, 'Micronesia Still a Colony', p. 19.

34 Many foreign observers continue to view the FSM as too dependent on the US. The question is, how does one define dependency from a Micronesian perspective? There is no literature on this topic. See Hanlon, 'Magellan's Chroniclers?', pp. 53–54.

synonymous with rent, and so the money may be spent the way the FSM desires. It is not up to outside observers to dictate the type of economic activities Micronesians should pursue, as has been attempted by American officials at various times during the Compact era.

Writing at a time before the move towards independence gathered force, political scientist Roger Gale contradicted the negative assessments of Meller and Connell. He stated that there are islands in Micronesia (e.g. Pohnpei and Kosrae) that are ‘lush and verdant’<sup>35</sup> and provide sufficient food crops for the islanders. Moreover, to Micronesians, the soil is viewed as very rich, as it has sustained islanders for millennia. Surpluses are shared between villages and neighbouring islands. Trade is also common between islands. The size of the islands taught the inhabitants about conservation techniques and fostered an appreciation of their environment. Moreover, ‘smallness’ is a relative term and has its own advantages. For example, the micro-islands may have discouraged outsiders to settle permanently, thus reducing the disruption to lives that often follows and denying the negative forces and elements of the global economy that have disrupted local lives elsewhere, such as around large mining sites. Today, Micronesians continue to carry on their traditional life with manageable interruptions from the outside world. The redesignation of Micronesia’s past territorial sea, which now forms its exclusive economic zone (EEZ), also speaks for itself. Micronesia’s territory now dwarfs many continental nations. As in the past, Micronesians continue to perceive the sea as an extension of the land itself. The outside world is starting to appreciate this fact; it puts the concept of smallness in a different context. Outsiders are now fixated with the potential economic wealth in the FSM’s EEZ.<sup>36</sup> Pacific Island leaders are now consistently depicting themselves as big ocean nations rather than small island nations, as will be outlined in Chapter 6.

The Micronesian perception of the land–sea continuum has not been well understood by outsiders. This point is illustrated by former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s response to questions about the ethics of nuclear testing in inhabited zones of the western Pacific without local consent

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35 Roger Gale, *Americanization of Micronesia: A Study of the Consolidation of US Rule in the Pacific*, University Press of America, Washington, DC, 1979, p. 7.

36 Hanlon, *Making Micronesia*, pp. 170–171; Peter Sitan, ‘The Development of the Tuna Fisheries in the Federated States of Micronesia’, Unpublished paper presented at the Micronesian Symposium, The Australian National University, 27–28 April 2014, pp. 3–6.

being sought: 'who gives a damn there are only 90,000 people out there'.<sup>37</sup> Kissinger's condemnation of Micronesians and their islands reaffirmed outsiders' ignorance of the enormity of the size of the islands' resource base when including the sea, let alone the ethical issue of deciding that others should suffer nuclear testing supposedly for the 'good of humanity' and to preserve world peace, regardless of whether they consented or not.

Kissinger spoke his mind from a continental perspective. It had no bearing on islanders' perspective of their oceanic world and their place in history. Micronesia might then be more accurately described as 'Macronesia', as Hanlon once noted.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps the context is Micronesia's 107,000 citizens who share a sovereign territory of 1.3 million square miles of land and sea.<sup>39</sup> While the sea served as a unifying force for Micronesians, outsiders considered it an obstacle for the area's effective management. Outsiders perceived the sea as separating the islands rather than connecting them.<sup>40</sup>

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are no wiser in adopting the negative line predicting economic doom for Micronesia. For example, the IMF predicted that:

the economy faces important risks ... from a potential deterioration in the external environment and, over the longer term, the scheduled expiration of Compact grants and the continued outmigration of the working age population.<sup>41</sup>

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37 Bethwel Henry, Interview, 28 June 2012. See also David Hanlon, 'You Did What, Mr. President? Trying to Write a Biography of Tosiwo', in *Telling Pacific Lives: Prisms of Process Nakayama* edited by Brij V. Lal and Vicki Luker, ANU E Press, Canberra, 2008.

38 David Hanlon, 'Tosiwo Nakayama', paper presented in Tokyo, 2011, p. 2.

39 Sitan, 'The Development of the Tuna Fisheries', p. 3.

40 Epeli Hau'ofa, *The Ocean in Us*, University of Hawai'i Press, 1998, p. 38; *The Constitution of the Federated States of Micronesia*, Preamble; D'Arcy, *The People of the Sea*, pp. 144–146.

41 International Monetary Fund, *IMF Executive Board Concludes 2012 Article IV Consultation with Federated States of Micronesia Asia and Pacific Department*, 17 January 2013; International Monetary Fund, *Federated States of Micronesia (FSM): 2012 Article IV Consultation Concluding Statement of the IMF November 19, 2012*, [www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2015/09/28/04/52/mcs111912](http://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2015/09/28/04/52/mcs111912); Asian Development Bank, *Federated States of Micronesia: Strengthening Infrastructure Planning and Implementation (Financed by the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction)* (ADB Technical Assistance Report, Project Number: 44471), November 2011, p. 4, [www.adb.org/sites/default/files/project-document/60497/44471-012-fsm-tar.pdf](http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/project-document/60497/44471-012-fsm-tar.pdf); Sione Latukefu, 'Oral Traditions: An Appraisal of Their Value in Historical Research in Tonga', *Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1968, pp. 41–42; Paul D'Arcy, 'The Role That Myths and Oral Traditions Should Play in the Study of Micronesian History', University of Hawai'i, 1986, p. 6 (Unpublished paper).

Many observers echoed the IMF's concern. The president of the FSM sought assistance from the ADB and other international organisations to pre-empt the negative economic outlook. However, the irony is that the ADB has patchy records about the economic history of the FSM as its data are largely based on 'fly in, fly out' consultants who remain briefly in the FSM before returning to Manila to write their reports and recommendations. For example, in the 2011 ADB report regarding technical assistance to the FSM, ADB consultants were each allocated two to three months in the FSM to complete their assignments.<sup>42</sup> The report did not deal with indigenous perspectives of their unique economic circumstances but focused on what the ADB believed was the way forward economically. The sea was not treated as an asset by the report either. It failed to note the importance of the sea and the increase in the FSM's income from the fishing industry. For example, the value of tuna in FSM fisheries in 2008 was estimated at US\$41,818,486 compared to US\$92,496,175 in 2012.<sup>43</sup> The industry is expected to grow further in the years ahead.

Many consultants do not understand Micronesians' current circumstances, let alone the depth of their history. Demonstrative of this point, Hezel claimed that the emergence of the cash economy has altered the fabric of Micronesian families 'almost beyond recognition during the last few decades'.<sup>44</sup> The reality is somewhat different. Money has been incorporated into the island system as another commodity circulating within the extended family model of *alilis* and *eaee fengan*, as Marshall diligently puts it.<sup>45</sup> Micronesians have not been overwhelmed by global economic forces but, rather, have incorporated these into existing mechanisms that have proven their worth over millennia. A few days in any location makes it clear that the doctrine of *alilis fengen* and the *ainang* system continue to operate and provide stability and support for clan members. In a different context, the informal economy model practised by Micronesians has never been discussed in any literature; outsiders fail to understand this model as it is hard to quantify in terms they are used to. They prefer to concentrate only on what is familiar to them.

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42 Asian Development Bank, *Federated States of Micronesia*, p. 4.

43 Sitan, 'The Development of the Tuna Fisheries', p. 21.

44 Hezel, *The New Shape of Old Island Cultures*, p. 8.

45 Keith Marshall, 'The Structure of Solidarity and Alliance on Namoluk Atoll', PhD thesis, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, 1972, p. 62.

## Micronesian Perspective of History

My upbringing and fieldwork have alerted me to the large corpus of oral history absent from most external commentaries on FSM societies. Only a fraction has been revealed to Western researchers, and much of that has been assessed in variable ways.<sup>46</sup> A holistic approach is required for improving our understanding of Micronesians' perspectives of history. The increasing presence of Micronesian perspectives in published histories requires that oral history must play a greater role in academia.<sup>47</sup> The challenge for all historians is to be conscious of the diversities of Micronesian voices and to ensure their placement in mainstream academic discourses. As in all history, different *ainang* have the tendency to skew historical narratives to stake their own claims and interests. Academic historians can work together with their local counterparts to construct possibilities and verify the validity of competing claims.

Historians must be aware of all the available tools at their disposal to fill in the existing gaps in Micronesian historiography. Written history has been appropriated as a complementary tool for Micronesian scholars to reconstruct their histories; they are becoming more accessible for indigenous scholars to examine. This trend perpetuates Micronesians as active agents in the production and reconstruction of their historical experiences. They are redefining and reclaiming their historical past that has been misplaced, mystified and mistreated for centuries as a consequence of colonialism and its agents. A Micronesian perspective of history is gaining momentum through emerging scholars from both the islands and outside.<sup>48</sup>

Many non-Micronesian scholars have been supportive of situating Micronesian perspectives within mainstream academia. In their assessment, oral history is just as reliable as written history. The fact that many scholars do not have access to oral history does not necessarily mean that it is not

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46 Negative portrayal of indigenous identity is exemplified by Poyer, 'The Ngatik Massacre', pp. 4–22; Ann Nakano, *Broken Canoe: Conversations and Observations in Micronesia*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1983. Positive views are yet to be revealed by the new generations of indigenous scholars.

47 Micronesian historical theories are often left to clan historians to prove or disprove the validity and dynamic of events. See Lin Poyer, 'The Ngatik Massacre', pp. 20–22. For commentaries and detailed analysis of Pacific history, see D'Arcy, 'Introduction'.

48 Joakim Peter, 'Eram's Church (Bell): Local Appropriations of Catholicism on Ettal', *ISLA Journal of Micronesian Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2, Dry Season 1996, pp. 278–280.

history per se. The debate is not which history is more credible, but how to reconcile both forms of history to increase our understanding of island discourses. Both should be treated as complementing each other for the purpose of enlarging scholarly engagement. As D'Arcy observed:

until quite recently archaeologists and others who study pre-European history of [Micronesia] tended to treat island communities as relatively self-contained. Modern academic writings portray external contacts as being of limited significance in the development of individual islands after initial colonisation by human beings. Pre-European cultural development is usually depicted as driven by the interaction of internal processes. These include; cultural emphasis on competition: adaptation of the founding culture to a new environment; population growth on a limited land area; environmental change, both natural and human-induced, and cultural emphasis on competition for status channelled into warfare, or the intensification of production for redistribution to forge social and political obligations. The possibility of new arrivals introducing cultural innovations is not dismissed, but it is always considered of secondary importance.<sup>49</sup>

D'Arcy,<sup>50</sup> Peter,<sup>51</sup> Ridgell, Ikea and Uruo,<sup>52</sup> and Berg,<sup>53</sup> for example, have disproven the idea that the islands were isolated with detailed accounts of inter-island interactions across time. My clan historians also contradict this image and suggest that even D'Arcy and other Western scholars most supportive of the view of the pervasiveness of inter-island interaction are still well short of conceiving of the true extent of inter-island interaction. My clan, for instance, spoke of continuing contact between members throughout history in far more detail and intensity than is portrayed in published academic sources. Contact with and knowledge of communities in the Marshall Islands and Kiribati figures prominently in some clan traditions but is portrayed as isolated and unusual in academic literature.

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49 Paul D'Arcy, 'Connected by the Sea: Towards Regional History of the Western Caroline Islands', *Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 2001, p. 163.

50 For specific details, see D'Arcy, *The People of the Sea*.

51 For an indigenous perspective, see Joakim Peter, 'Chuukese Travellers and the Idea of Horizon', *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, Vol. 41, No. 3, December 2000, pp. 253–267.

52 Reilly Ridgell, Manny Ikea and Isaoshy Uruo, 'The Persistence of Central Carolinian Navigation', *ISLA: A Journal of Micronesian Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Dry Season 1994, pp. 197–205.

53 M. L. Berg, 'Yapese Politics, Yapese Money, and the Sawei Tribute Network Before World War I', *Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 27, No. 2, December 1992, pp. 150–164.

Today, that contact remains undisturbed, especially when I travel in the FSM where relatives from different islands welcome me into their homes without hesitation.<sup>54</sup>

## Highlighting Micronesian Perspectives

A handful of scholars from different disciplines are opening new frontiers for Micronesian historiography. Historians such as Mauricio Rufino, Joakim Peter, Paul D'Arcy, David Hanlon and Vicente Diaz, sociologist Ansito Walter and anthropologists Mac Marshall, Donald Rubinstein, Glenn Petersen and Manuel Rauchholz have made valuable contributions to Micronesian historiography.<sup>55</sup> This new breed of scholars have advocated a style inclusive of indigenous perspectives. In doing so, they provide a space and validity for Micronesian perspectives to be heard in a broader setting. Mauricio Rufino, Joakim Peter, Myjollynn Kim, L. J. Rayphand, Margarita Cholmay and myself represent a new and exciting wave of indigenous scholars who are decolonising their history with reference to the unique insights their cultural upbringing has given them, combined with academic lessons from external scholars open to exploring and questioning European-dominated historical sources on cultural encounters in the Pacific.<sup>56</sup> The only nationally prominent advocate for FSM-centred history in the previous generation is John Haglegam.<sup>57</sup>

These indigenous scholars are critically engaging with Micronesia's history. For example, Mauricio noted the value of oral history in the perpetuation of Micronesian identity and continuity. Oral history, he claims, is an organising tool that can be used in conjunction with other academic disciplines to resuscitate Micronesia's past:

oral traditions provide a comprehensive and multi-vocal narrative of history of the evolving [Micronesian] socio-political system. This narrative history is much more than a compendium of stories

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54 This is my personal experience. Many of my relatives are unknown to me until they explain our affinity and historical links.

55 These scholars have expanded Micronesian studies by perpetrating the idea of indigenising history to broaden our understanding of Micronesian traditional societies in response to colonisation and these societies' status in the modern world.

56 New generations of indigenous scholars are currently investigating their own island histories and connection to their immediate region and beyond.

57 John Haglegam, 'Problems of National Unity and Economic Development in the Federated States of Micronesia', *ISLA Journal of Micronesian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Rainy Season 1992, p. 6.



about past events. It also represents a structured and dynamic body of knowledge administered and managed ... and continually translates past events ... in terms of the present-day affairs.<sup>58</sup>

Haglelgam echoes Mauricio's view where he states that, Micronesians have:

a common and ancient heritage born from the spirit of exploration, from the skills of navigators, and the builders of the outrigger canoes. Despite the differences in languages and specific traditional practises from island to island, we have long been aware of each other, occupy similar circumstances, and have been subjected to similar influences, both natural and political.<sup>59</sup>

Chamorro historian from neighbouring Guam, Vince Diaz, supports Mauricio's points by raising the need to reposition history to incorporate indigenous perspectives. Hanlon referred to such repositioning as the 'decentralisation' of colonial history to treat Micronesian perspectives as history in its own right.<sup>60</sup> This resonates in Walter's call to dismantle the self-promoting exercise designed to perpetuate outsiders' historical interest.<sup>61</sup> Again, Diaz praised such an intellectual movement as remarkable and a worthy cause to eradicate colonial distortions of Micronesia's past.<sup>62</sup> That is to say that the colonisation process was managed by the intellectual powers of Micronesians. Micronesian intellectualism was seen by outsiders as inferior or non-existent. The inability of the colonists to recognise this drive for maintaining self-direction enabled the islanders to continue to live in a dual world while waiting for future opportunities to reassert their independence.

Hanlon reaffirms Hezel's comments, stating, 'there has always been far more to the islands' past than colonialism'.<sup>63</sup> There is indeed a growing admission by scholars that 'Micronesians [were the] agents, actors, negotiators, appropriators, and manipulators ... who had dealt with past colonial regimes, survived war, and now'<sup>64</sup> continue to challenge new sets of circumstances. The new generation is laying the foundation

58 Mauricio, 'Ideological Bases for Power', pp. 8–9.

59 Haglelgam, 'Problems of National Unity', p. 6.

60 Hanlon, 'Micronesia: Writing and Rewriting the Histories', pp. 4–6.

61 Ansito Walter, *Desirability, Problems, and Methods of Achieving National Independence: Opinions of Citizens and Senators of the Federated States of Micronesia*, Ann Harbour, Michigan, USA, 1985, p. 33.

62 Vincent Diaz, *Repositioning the Missionary: Rewriting the Histories of Colonialism, Native Catholicism, and Indigeneity in Guam*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 2010, pp. 21–23.

63 Hanlon, 'Magellan's Chroniclers?', p. 77.

64 Hanlon, 'Magellan's Chroniclers?', p. 119.

of a new paradigm shift in Micronesian historical dialogue. It calls for a reinterpretation of history from indigenous perspectives, which has been marginalised from published works for too long.

Marshall, D'Arcy, Rubinstein and Petersen underscored the importance of the *ainang* as interconnecting Micronesian islands throughout history. Such connection continues to grow globally with the new diaspora. As Marshall observed:

[Micronesian] culture is not bound to [an isolated] place ... it is carried with [the people] as they cross borders in search of new opportunities ... or safety [with their relatives] from warfare and revolution [and disasters].<sup>65</sup>

Marshall's comment is supported by prominent FSM diplomat James Naich,<sup>66</sup> who asserts that Micronesians' relationship with each other has been an essential element that has defined, shaped and sustained Micronesians as a distinct group of people who have survived centuries of external threats.<sup>67</sup> D'Arcy expanded on these views in commenting that the history of Micronesia is about a sea of crowded islands and open sea markers that assisted inter-island voyages,<sup>68</sup> allowing the *ainang* system to flourish.

## The Sea as History

Development experts often neglect the importance of the sea to Micronesians. For example, the sea is viewed as an obstacle to the movement of goods and services from major world markets, while in reality, the sea is a major part of Micronesian identity. In his book *The People of the Sea*, D'Arcy outlined the importance of the sea to islanders, noting:

People of the sea need to feel truly at home with the sea. Most of the inhabitants of Oceania lived along the coastal margins of their island homes. The sights, sounds, and smells of the sea pervaded their lives while the tastes of the sea were often on their lips.<sup>69</sup>

65 Marshall, *Namoluk beyond the Reef*, p. 10.

66 James Naich is the deputy chief of mission (DCM) at the FSM Embassy in Washington, DC. I conducted an interview with him (via Skype) on 21 December 2014.

67 Naich, Interview.

68 D'Arcy, 'Connected by the Sea', p. 165.

69 D'Arcy, *The People of the Sea*, p. 27.

This is true in the case of Micronesia, where the sea is always part of daily activities. No one can escape the sea or wishes to.

Pacific scholars such as Epeli Hau'ofa ignited a debate on external misrepresentations of the role of the sea in Pacific Island life in the early 1990s. He referred to colonisation as disrupting islanders' mobility on the seas.<sup>70</sup> Colonisation superimposed imaginary boundaries in Oceania as a means to divide and rule local inhabitants. Islanders were contained within the designated boundaries under the rule of various colonial powers. Hau'ofa called for a reshaping of Pacific Island history to reflect Pacific Islanders' oceanic past. As he noted:

Nineteenth-century imperialism erected boundaries that led to the contraction of Oceania, transforming once a boundless world into the Pacific Island States and territories that we know today. People were confined to their tiny spaces, isolated from each other. No longer could they travel freely to do what they had done for centuries.<sup>71</sup>

Hau'ofa's view was more of a general vision of how to decolonise Pacific history than a detailed account of Pacific Islanders' use of the sea as a conduit for communication.<sup>72</sup> While his call for the decolonisation of Pacific history is laudable, part of that decolonisation involves correcting external images not only from Westerners but also other Pacific Islanders with different engagements with the sea. A number of Hau'ofa's assumptions are questionable, at least from a Micronesian perspective. It should be remembered that sea boundaries have always been a part of Micronesian history as they demarcated the many Micronesian identities that existed before colonisation. Demarcations defined people and space and established the norms of interaction between islands or island groups.<sup>73</sup> For example, in the Mortlocks, strict protocols governed fishing activities and sailing between islands. When a canoe approached an island, it had to observe protocols or the canoe would be deemed a threat. Expectation of foreknowledge of protocols by senior sailors was required to save lives, as was knowledge of the sea and landmarks, as each has a special individual

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70 Hau'ofa, 'Our Sea of Islands', p. 34.

71 Hau'ofa, 'Our Sea of Islands', p. 34.

72 D'Arcy, *The People of the Sea*, pp. 55–56.

73 This is from my personal knowledge. See also D'Arcy, *The People of the Sea*, p. 136.

meaning. As landfall approached, they signalled when to fold the sail, to sit, paddle and wait for further signals from the hosts to approach the beach. Disrespecting protocols could mean battle.

A variety of academics have noted inter-island protocols in the much-studied *sawei* system, when canoes from the outer islands in Chuuk would sail to meet their relatives in the island chain in Yap to pay tribute and exchange gifts with the chiefs in the main island of Yap in the district of Gagil.<sup>74</sup> In Chuuk, protocols were also established between islands when visiting relatives or engaging in trade with each other, especially the islands in the Chuuk lagoon.<sup>75</sup> Island security was defined by the boundaries on the seas. The protocols endured throughout the colonial period along with inter-island exchanges, despite the best efforts of colonial authorities to assert control. Decolonisation of the FSM in my lifetime has not lifted the restrictions; rather, they sit alongside international maritime laws that recognise the post-colonial divisions.

However, just as the sea is the provider for islanders, the sea may also destroy islanders through a new form of threat, climate change. Like colonisation, climate change is foreign induced and is affecting Micronesians' traditional way of life. The existential threat that climate change poses to Micronesians and their oceanic environment represents another phenomenon that islanders must adapt to. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7. Meeting this new threat will require resorting to historical knowledge of adaptation in partnership with technical knowledge from the outside world. However, Micronesians will continue to engage with the sea. It must be remembered that Micronesians have been adapting to natural disasters such as typhoons, tidal waves and drought in their aquatic world for millennia. Adaptation strategies have in turn influenced the way

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74 D'Arcy, *The People of the Sea*, pp. 146–150; Alkire, *An Introduction to the Peoples and Cultures of Micronesia*, pp. 49–52; Rosalind L. Hunter-Anderson and Yigal (Go'opsan) Zan, 'Demystifying the Sawei, A Traditional Interisland Exchange', *ISLA: A Journal of Micronesian Studies*, Vol.4, No. 1, Rainy Season 1996, pp. 4–6; Ridgell, Ikea and Uruo, 'The Persistence of Central Carolinian Navigation', pp. 197–205.

75 Felix Naich, *oral history*. Naich confirmed the trading activities between the Chuuk Lagoon and Mortlockese. During one of the trading seasons, a sailing fleet from Lukunor stopped by Losap lagoon in the Upper Mortlocks on an uninhabited island called *Piafo* ('new beach'). After they rested, the chief applied his magical chant to drag *Piafo* behind his sailing canoe to Lukunor for his son. *Piafo* is now located on the northern reef of Lukunor. The people of the Mortlocks still talk about this powerful event.

Micronesians engaged with each other.<sup>76</sup> Inter-island engagement prior to colonisation has refined the means and methods of travel and interaction and allowed Micronesians to adapt to new influences emanating from the outside world successfully.<sup>77</sup>

Outsiders continue to impose their ideologies in Micronesia through economic and political pressures. Yet Micronesian identity endures. Rather than being overwhelmed, Micronesians rearticulated colonisation through the process of accommodation and assimilation to absorb its shockwaves. For example, academics James Duane and Joakim Peter referred to the resiliency of the Mortlockese people in the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries in adapting to Christianity on their own terms. As Duane noted, ‘neither missionary activity nor the European ships which carried civilisation with them to the islands, have changed the [islanders] and their mode of living significantly’.<sup>78</sup> This eighteenth-century observation holds true for Micronesian engagement with outsiders today.

Since the 1950s, Pacific history has gained prominence as a specialised academic discipline advanced by James Davidson, considered the father of Pacific history. It has undergone fundamental changes as historians began to develop different approaches and methodologies in the discipline.<sup>79</sup> However, certain issues remain unresolved as many scholars continue the old habit of reproducing the Pacific in the image of imperial history. For example, in a recent book reviewing the sum of Pacific historiography, entitled *Texts and Contexts*,<sup>80</sup> edited by Pacific historians Doug Munro and Brij Lal, historians were asked to review selected books considered foundational in Pacific historiography. Each

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76 The exchange of adaptation ideas between islands was long established before colonisation. Exchange of ideas meant social and political interaction, influencing islanders’ thought processes. See the discussion on mobility in Juliana Flinn, *Diplomats and Thatch Houses: Asserting Tradition in a Changing Micronesia*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1992, pp. 11–14.

77 *Pukuan* are traditional signposts that demand certain behaviours when arriving at specific seamarks or landmarks. The legendary *palou* (navigator/s) Rongoshik and Rongelap reveal the importance of strict observation of inter-island protocols; Rongelap, who had only general knowledge of the protocols, died, while Rongoshik, who had specific knowledge of the protocols, survived.

78 Nason J. Duane, *Clan and Copra: Modernization of Etal, Eastern Caroline Islands*, University of Michigan, University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1971, p. 170; Peter, ‘Eram’s Church (Bell)’, pp. 282–285.

79 Paul D’Arcy, ‘The Teaching of Pacific History: Introduction Diverse Approaches for Diverse Audience’, *Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 46, No. 2, September 2011, pp. 197–206.

80 Doug Munro and Brij Lal, ‘The Texts in Its Context’, in *Texts and Contexts: Reflection in Pacific Islands Historiography*, edited by Doug Munro and Brij Lal, University of Hawai’i Press, 2006, pp. 1–11.

of the reviewers gave their impression of how Pacific history was written over time. Of particular concern was the lack of indigenous historians included in the review process, with critics such as historian Gavan Daws pointing out the shortcomings in the review. Daws<sup>81</sup> perceived *Texts and Contexts* as a vehicle for recycling outdated outsiders' practice of Pacific history. He questioned why indigenous historians were not selected for such a review and the reason for such a narrow selection.<sup>82</sup> *Texts and Contexts* should be appreciated insofar as it reflects a gazing into the past; a self-congratulatory exercise by a combined Euro-Indio vision of what constituted Pacific historiography, rather than being an example of what Pacific historiography could and should be.<sup>83</sup>

As part of the *Texts and Contexts* edition, Hanlon reviewed the book *The First Taint of Civilization*, authored by Hezel. In Hanlon's assessment, the book continues the old habit of reflecting negative images of Micronesians in contemporary literature: 'the overall argument of [some writers] ... points to a fatality of impact that left island peoples ignorant of their past, uncomfortable with the present, and uncertain about their future'.<sup>84</sup> Perhaps there should be a follow-up text on 'Oralities and Contexts' to ensure a holistic trend and development of Pacific history. Diaz echoes Daws's observation, stating, 'no group of people ... holds a monopoly over intellectual ... access to truth ... as theorised and practiced in rituals such as historical scholarship ... and in things such as books'.<sup>85</sup> The observations made by the above historians echo similar fundamental issues in Micronesian historiography—that is, who is writing Micronesian history, for whom and for what purpose?

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81 Gavin Daws, 'Comment: Texts and Contexts: A First Person Note', *Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 41, No. 2, September 2006, pp. 250–252.

82 Daws, 'Comment: Text and Context', p. 252.

83 Daws, 'Comment: Text and Context', pp. 256–259.

84 David Hanlon, 'On Hezel's *The First Taint of Civilization*', in *Texts and Contexts: Reflection in Pacific Islands Historiography*, edited by Doug Munro and Brij Lal, University of Hawai'i Press, 2006, p. 207.

85 Diaz, *Repositioning the Missionary*, p. 19.

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