**The Micronesian Milieu: Myths and Facts about Change Today**

Catholic Church workshop, July 2003

***Myth#1: Population Explosion***

* Graph showing population plateaus in FSM, RMI and ROP.
* Chart on population growth in Palau, indicating that almost all growth has been in foreign population.
* Main reason for the slow-down of population growth is emigration. Chart showing the flow out of the islands.
* 40,000 Micronesians abroad.
* Drop in fertility rate is another reason for slow-down of population growth.

***Myth #2: Expatriates are taking all the jobs.***

* Foreign population is very small in FSM and RMI, if not in Palau. Compare with most Pacific nations, with foreign populations of 10-30%.
* In job decline in FSM between 1994 and 2000, the number of foreign workers dropped much more sharply than the total job loss.

***Myth #3: The Brain Drain***

* The percentage of those with high school diplomas may be greater among emigrants than residents of the islands....
* But the percentage of those with college diplomas is much higher at home.

***Myth #4: The Economy Needs Only a Strong Industry***

* Breakdown of FSM economy by sector shows that it lacks a solid industrial base. Note: fishing, farming and tourism bring in only 5% of the total GDP.
* Table showing comparative strength of economies in FSM, RMI and ROP.
* But the industrial economy is not the only concern. Many people in the subsistence sector looking for a cash crop, since the demise of copra.

***Myth #5: Education is the sure path to a good job.***

* Graph on employment showing the downturn in jobs in FSM and RMI since 1995.
* Although school enrollment is not expanding, the education systems are still struggling with high drop out rates and low standards.
* High school grads, in the face of poor job prospects in the islands, are leaving the islands to find jobs abroad.
* Even if unable to guarantee jobs, education remains as important as ever today–to help emigrants advance beyond entry-level jobs, and to ensure that those who remain at home will be able to participate in today’s world.

***Myth #6: The loss of Catholics to the small sects***

* Graph showing that Catholic share of the total population has increased between 1973 and 2000. The exception is Palau, where large numbers of non-Christian Chinese has skewed the numbers.
* By contrast, this table shows that the Protestant share of the population has declined in the countries.
* The smaller churches in FSM: most are holding steady or declining slightly. In the period 1994-2000, SDAs grew by a few hundred and Assembly of God grew by 1200.

***Myth #7: Family Breakup in More Common Today Than Ever***

* Even right after the war, young people were choosing their own marriage partenrs.
* Divorce rate was high for young people in the post-war years.
* Present divorce rate in Chuuk is much lower than in the West today.

***Important Changes Today: Family, Land, Conflicts, Custom, Individualism***

***#1: Changing Family***

* In the traditional society, land and kin were shaped to one another. The large family group worked the land to produce for all its members. The land fed all the members of the extended family. The large kin group was an economic and social unit.
* The lineage worked together as a unit–preparing food, building shelter, etc. [photo of people cooking]
* Lineage members shared in more than food preparation. They also helped out in parenting. [photo of children seated on ground]
* As society becomes more cash-based and more and more get jobs, a significant number of people now have the ability to support themselves–not from their land but from the food they purchase.
* Cracks appear in the lineage. Ties between households and the lineage weaken, as the heads of households take responsibility for feeding their own members.
* Childrearing becomes concentrated in the mother and father. Each family is responsible for its own children. Discipline by other relatives that would have once been regarded as assistance is now looked on as interference. A multi-parent family is narrowed down to a two-parent family. There is not the back-up in child care that there once was.
* The protective cover of the extended family is breaking down, so that children no longer find their main friends in those of their own larger family circle. Why? Because the extended family doesn’t associate as closely with one another any longer. Because boys and girls go off to school more frequently and for longer periods of time. Because households move more readily to distant places in search of jobs.
* The smaller family must provide its own resources... which means that parents are absent longer periods of time working for money. So even parents spend less time with their children.
* The smaller family also lacks the resources it once had to resolve conflicts:

between parents and children

between older members of the extended family

* An authority gap grows between the father and sons since the father now has much more authority over his son. Since the father is spending little time with them (unlike mother and daughters), father and son aren’t easily able to get used to one another easily.
* These changes–fewer resources for healing conflict, and growing authority gap between father and son–can lead to suicide.
* The relationship between married sisters and brothers is redefined since they no longer share the same resource base. The husband assumes fuller authority over his wife. Hence, the former controls in the case of wife-beating or child-beating weakened. The controls become even weaker as women and their husbands move away. The distance reinforces the autonomy of the nuclear family.
* Women’s domestic workload increases as they must do without the help of their extended family and as their husbands take jobs that keep them away all day long.

***#2: Changing Land Practices***

* Land in a traditional society rooted the people who lived on it and gave them their identity (and sometimes even their name). People had mystical ties with their land, symbolized by the burial of the umbilical cord at birth on their lineage land and their burial there at death.
* Land has become commodified; it is bought and sold for cash. It is no longer the sole resource of importance in the island economy.
* Land ownership shifts from corporate to individual control.
* Land inheritance patterns are changing–from matrilineal passage to a father-son pattern. This is a result of the growing importance of the nuclear family.
* This results in increasing conflicts within the family and more land disputes reaching court. Such cases exacerbate tensions within the extended family. At the same time, those senior family heads who would have resolved such cases in the past no longer have the authority to do so.

***#3: Conflict Resolution***

* With the breakup of the extended family and the emergence of the nuclear family, the authority of heads of lineage has decreased. They are no longer in as strong a position as formerly to resolve conflicts within the family.
* People do not consult chiefs for dispute settlement as they once did. For one thing, their authority has faded under colonial rule.
* Traditional chiefs–“the voice of the land”–held power based on their authority over land. Chiefs suffer a loss of political authority as money rather than land becomes the dominant resource. Modern elected leaders, not chiefs, control the cash resource.

***#4: Customary Exchanges***

* Exchanges of goods and money are common at special family and community functions in island societies. Examples: at betrothal, exchange between boy’s family and girl’s family; at funeral on Pohnpei, gifts of sakau, pigs, and yams, partitioned and returned to high titles.
* Functions of such events: 1) meet material or social need; 2) unify the community; 3) gain prestige for parties involved.
* But today’s exchanges are more frequent and more expensive, and so often become oppressive to people.
* While the magnitude of the exchanges changes, the cultural practice is changed so that: 1) the practice loses its original purpose (eg, healing social scars in the family at the time of a funeral); 2) reciprocity is sometimes lost (as when the richer side of the family takes care of the whole party)

***#5: Individualism***

* Individualism begins when the individual gains the means to support himself or herself.
* Social obligations persist, at least for a while, but the individual and his family become an ever larger part of the equation when decisions are being made.
* Soon, individuals begin making choices based on self-interest that would have been made with others in their kin group at one time. Among these decisions are choices of spouse, career, and lifestyle.
* Summary: All this begins with the start of a viable cash economy. This contributes to the breakdown of the extended family system.
* Land practices also change, as the form of the family is reshaped.
* The authority system with traditional chiefs also changes, and power is reallocated.
* The importance of cash as a resource leads to the search of jobs, even to the point of emigration if they can not be found at home. Self-support brings about individualism.

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