



Suicide in the Micronesian Family

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Introduction

For more than a decade a few of us have been keeping a constant but helpless watch as the suicide rates in Micronesia have risen to what appear to be unprecedented heights. We have tried to identify all suicides in the area since 1960, gathered from a variety of sources case data on the victims, and established a computerized file that has been regularly updated. We have also participated in perhaps a dozen full-fledged conferences and innumerable informal sessions on the problem, always in the hope of finding some viable explanation for the mysterious and tragic social phenomenon that has afflicted Micronesia of late. Such a striking social phenomenon as this, we felt, cries out for a sociological explanation of some sort. To provide a sharper focus for our research, which we knew would have to take full account of the cultural features related to suicide, we decided to concentrate for a time on Truk, an island group in the geographical center of Micronesia with a population of 50,000 and one of the highest rates in the area. My principal colleague, Donald Rubinstein, a cultural anthropologist who was until recently based in Hawaii, carried on a three-year ethnographic study that issued in several papers on the subject (Rubinstein 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1987). The results of his work, which I have incorporated into two summary articles (Hezel 1984b, 1987), lays bare the tight cultural patterning of Trukese suicides and gives what we regard as a plausible hypothesis as to the social changes that have given rise to the suicide epidemic of the past twenty years. In this article I hope to apply and extend, even while allowing for real cultural differences, an findings on Truk to the whole of Micronesia. This, then, is our attempt to provide that elusive sociological explanation for the suicide phenomenon of late.

It was in the early 1970s that the first noticeable increase in suicides occurred in Micronesia (Table 1). The term "Micronesia" will be used here to designate the Marshall Islands, Palau, and the four states (Yap, Truk, Pohnpei and Kosrae) of the Federated States of Micronesia. Our data for the 1960s, which might be incomplete, shows an annual suicide rate for the general population of about 5 per 100,000. This is comparable to the overall rate of 8 per 100,000 recorded during the 1920s and 1930s by the Japanese government that then administered the islands (Purcell 1987: 8). There is nothing to suggest that the intervening period of the 1940s and 1950s, on which we lack reliable data, had a higher incidence of suicide than the decades immediately before and after. By the early 1970s the rate had risen to 10.8, and it ascended even more rapidly to 21.7 by the mid-70s, peaking at 28.2 by the early 1980s (Table 2). Thereafter the rate dropped to 25.8, approximately the same level as during the late 70s. The epidemiological picture overall is of a sharply rising suicide rate

during the 1970s, followed by what seems to be a slow decline during the present decade. It may of some significance that the pattern of change in rates for Micronesia as a whole closely resembles that for Truk, the largest of the island groups in the area and the one that serves as my paradigm in this research (Table 2). It also resembles the graph of the suicide epidemic in Western Samoa that bears many similarities to the outbreak of suicides in Micronesia (Figure 1).

TABLE 1: SUICIDES IN MICRONESIA BY ISLAND GROUP, 1960-1987

Years	Pohnpei	Truk	Marshalls	Kosrae	Palau	Yap	Total
1960		1			4	1	6
1961					1		1
1962					2		2
1963		1			2		3
1964	1	1			1		3
1965		2			2		4
1966		1	1		1	1	4
1967		2	3				5
1968		2	1		1		4
1969	1	1	1	1	4	1	9
1970	1	4	2		4	2	13
1971		4	6		1		11
1972	1	6	4		1	5	17
1973	2	5	4			2	13
1974	3	10	4		3	1	21
1975	8	12	7		5	2	34
1976	5	6	3		4	1	19
1977	5	11	4	1	1	2	24
1978	5	8	10	1	1	6	31

1979	4	19	5	1	7	2	38
1980	4	18	10	2	4	3	41
1981	2	18	9	0	3	5	37
1982		13	4	1	4	4	26
1983	4	13	6	1	4	4	32
1984	4	15	1	2	7	2	31
1985	1	11	8	3	3	2	28
1986	3	15	10	1	3	0	32
1987	10	10	20	0	2	1	43
Total	64	209	123	14	75	47	532

Source: Data compiled by Hezel and Rubinstein for Micronesian Seminar.

**TABLE 2: NUMBER AND RATES OF SUICIDE PER 4-YEAR PERIOD FOR MICRONESIA AND TRUK,
1960-1987**

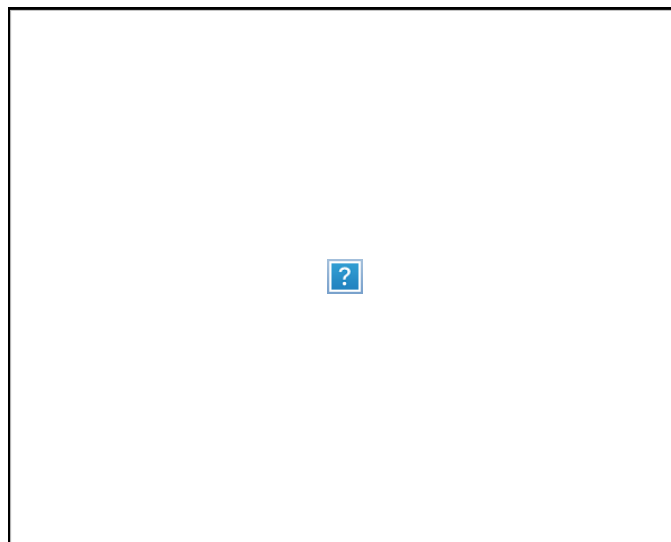
MICRONESIA

Years	Total	Average	Rate/100,000
1960-63	12	3	4.3
1964-67	16	4	5.2
1968-71	37	9.25	10.8
1972-75	85	21.25	21.7
1976-79	112	28	25.5
1980-83	136	34	28.2
1984-87	134	33.5	25.8

TRUK

Years	Total	Average	Rate/100,000
1960-63	2	0.5	2.3
1964-67	6	1.5	5.7
1968-71	11	2.75	9.8
1972-75	33	8.25	26.1
1976-79	44	11.0	30.9
1980-83	62	15.5	38.8
1984-87	51	12.75	28.3

Figure 3: Average suicide rates per 100,000 in Micronesia, Truk and Western Samoa for four-year periods, 1960-1987



Characteristics of Suicides

Although the island groups in Micronesia show considerable variation in their rates over time (Table 3), they share a number of common features related to suicide. Everywhere suicide is overwhelmingly a male phenomenon; male victims outnumber females by a ratio of over 11:1. The age of the typical victim is young, as is indicated by a median age of 22 and the concentration of nearly 60 percent of the victims in the 15-24 age bracket (Rubinstein, In Press). The distribution of suicides in terms of both age and sex has narrowed significantly since the onset of the recent epidemic, prior to which the male/female ratio was between 3:1 and 5:1 and the median age was about 30 (Rubinstein, In Press). During the past ten

years the average annual rates for the highest risk group, males aged 15-24, ranged from 70 per 100,000 in Palau to 206 per 100,000 in Truk (Rubinstein, In Press). The most common method of suicide by far is hanging, with many of the victims slipping their head into a noose while standing or seated and leaning forward into the rope until they pass into unconsciousness and die of lack of oxygen. Over 80 percent of the suicides are carried out this way, and there is little variation in this figure from one island group to another. Among the other means employed are ingestion of medicine or other toxic substances, gunshot and drowning. Frequently, in over 40 percent of the cases, the victim is either intoxicated or drinking heavily at the time of death, although this is, naturally, less often true of females and younger boys who take their lives.

TABLE 3: SUICIDE RATES BY ISLAND GROUP PER 4-YEAR PERIOD, 1960-1987

Years	Pohnpei	Truk	Marshalls	Kosrae	Palau	Yap*
1960-63	0	2.3	0	0	23.0	6.6
1964-67	1.6	5.7	5.5	0	9.1	0
1968-71	2.9	9.8	11.9	6.9	20.8	18.8
1972-75	18.1	26.1	19.5	0	18.1	43.3
1976-79	22.4	30.9	20.0	16.7	25.0	40.9
1980-83	10.6	38.8	22.7	19.2	30.2	60.3
1984-87	16.7	28.3	26.5	25.9	28.8	20.2

* Yap rates are for the high island of Yap only and do not include the outer islands, an area that is culturally distinct and that has had very low rates of suicide.

Source: Data compiled by Hezel and Rubinstein for Micronesian Seminar

One can not help but be struck by the familiar pattern that Micronesian suicides follow regardless of where they occur. In one typical case, a 17-year old boy who had often complained that his family did not love him injured his younger brother in a fight and was severely scolded by his parents for this act. Not long after this he got drunk and hanged himself outside his house. Another young man from a different island was ordered by his father to work in the family garden even after he remonstrated that he had other plans that day. After the family had left to attend a community celebration, he dug up the garden and

then hanged himself. An 18-year old from still another island group committed suicide shortly before his graduation when his request for money from his parents went unheeded. One young man in his early 20s, who is representative of many others, took his life when his family refused to allow his marriage to a girl with whom he had been living for almost two years and who had already borne him a child. Another young man hanged himself after a prolonged drinking bout following the discovery that he had been making sexual advances towards a girl in the household who was classified as his "sister." Boys in their early teens have hanged themselves for similar reasons: one in anger at his mother for giving away a pet dog, another in shame and terror at injuring an uncle with a rock he had thrown, and a third for fear that he would be beaten for returning home late after watching video. Old men occasionally take their own lives, as in the case of a 78-year old invalid who resented his family's neglect of him, and a 73-year old asthmatic whose wife would not let his children by a first marriage visit him in the hospital.

Even a cursory examination of the case data reveals that Micronesian suicides exhibit an etiology markedly different from that associated with suicide in the West. There is almost none of the chronic depression, the vague sense of meaninglessness of life, or even the despondency at failure in business or school that seems to play such a large part in suicides in other parts of the world. Micronesian suicides are manifestly interpersonal in nature, occasioned by what is perceived as a disruption in a significant relationship. What has been written of Truk suicides applies as well to Micronesian suicides in general: "The suicides are almost always triggered by some conflict, actual or anticipated, between the victim and a parent, an older relative (including an older sibling), or occasionally a spouse" (Hezel 1987: 284). It might be noted that older victims are often offended by their children or other younger persons who are expected to serve as their care-takers.

Micronesian suicides, then, must be seen as tightly patterned responses to very specific situations. The dominant emotion at play in suicide, everywhere in Micronesia, is anger (Table 4). Usually the victim takes his own life after he is denied a request, chastised or rebuffed in some way by parents or an older sibling. Inasmuch as Micronesian cultures place strong sanctions on the direct expression of negative feelings toward a parent or older authority, the offended party can choose either to suffer in silence or to act out his anger upon himself by suicide or such non-lethal means as cutting himself with a knife or refusing to eat for a time. Many of the suicides in recent years are of young men or women who, although acting impulsively, have nursed a grievance towards their family for months or even years. The imbroglio that precedes their death is often merely the latest, but decisive expression of tension between them and their families. Yet their act of self-destruction, as we have noted elsewhere (Hezel 1987: 285), is not a gesture of blind rage, much less defiant retaliation against the family; rather, it is seen by Micronesians as a poignant plea for understanding and reconciliation with the family. In a small minority of cases, perhaps 13% overall, the break in family ties is caused not by other members of the family, but by the victim himself, who is ashamed of something he has done to offend the family and fears the disruption in his relationship with the family that his action may cause. The young boy who injured his uncle with a rock he threw and the youth who was discovered making sexual advances towards his sister are examples of this pattern of suicide.

TABLE 4: CAUSE OF SUICIDE BY ISLAND GROUPS, 1960-1987

Cause	Truk	Palau	Yap	Pohnpei	Kosrae	Marshalls
Anger	72%	50%	60%	76%	58%	85%
Shame/fear	17%	10%	27%	15%	8%	4%
Mental illness	6%	34%	13%	7%	33%	2%
Others	5%	6%	0%	2%	0%	9%
Sub-total N =	193	62	30	59	12	91
Missing	8%	17%	36%	8%	14%	26%
TOTAL N =	209	75	47	64	14	123

Source: Data compiled by Hezel and Rubinstein for Micronesian Seminar

Note: Percentages for the different causes are for known cases only, and might change appreciably if "missing" causes could be incorporated

*Because of the small population base and relatively low rate, Kosrae is not included in the discussion

Conflict between the victim and an older member of the family, whether caused by one or the other, is the context in which the vast majority of Micronesian suicides occur today as in the past. Whatever the cultural differences between island groups in the area, the pattern of suicide outlined above and described more fully in other works (Hezel 1984b, 1987) can be seen as the basic etiological stratum in each island culture in Micronesia.

Such fragmentary historical sources that we possess on suicide in earlier times all concur that the nearly universal reason for suicide was trouble with one's family. The several suicides on Pohnpei in the period of social upheaval following the smallpox epidemic in 1854 were all attributed by the missionaries to conflicts with other family members (ABCFM: Sturges, 26 Oct 1858). A spate of five suicides within the three-year period 1838-1841 on one of the Gilbert Islands was ascribed to the same reason: "offense taken at the conduct of some person, whom affection or fear renders them unwilling to injure" (Wilkes 1845: V, 107). Thus, suicide as a response to grievances suffered at the hands of the family, we may assume, is a very old and very strong pattern throughout Micronesia. Indeed, the same dominant etiological patterns that show up here and in the Gilbert Islands are evident in the recent suicide data for Western Samoa (Macpherson and Macpherson 1985).

Such variation as occurs within Micronesia today seems to be an overlay upon this foundational pattern. The table indicating the nature of the relationship that was thought to

be in jeopardy at the time of suicide indicates that in Truk and Pohnpei about half of the suicides were occasioned by difficulties with real or adoptive parents (Table 5). To this can be added another 21 percent for Truk and 16 percent for Pohnpei representing conflict with older siblings, towards whom a younger member of the family is obliged to show submission and a respectful social distance. It is noteworthy that problems with an aunt or uncle, who were traditionally important authority figures in the family, constitute a very small percentage of the total. Overall, then, in 70 percent of the Truk suicides and in an almost equal percentage of the Pohnpei suicides the problematic relationship is with either with a parent or an older sibling. Anger or jealousy towards a spouse or lover accounts for a relatively low percentage of the Truk and Pohnpei suicides in contrast with those in other places. This should not surprise us since men are entitled to express their anger at their wives quite directly; there is no cultural reason for them to suppress these emotions or redirect them, as they are required to do towards older blood relations. Truk, and to a slightly less degree Pohnpei, may be viewed as embodying more clearly than the other island groups prototypical cultural patterns governing suicide in Micronesia.

Palau, Yap and the Marshalls show a significantly lower percentage of suicides motivated by difficulties with parents or older siblings, although none of these places shows any indication of more serious problems with other older relatives such as aunts or uncles than Truk or Pohnpei. The basic pattern of suicide described earlier is prominent enough in the case reports from Palau, Yap and the Marshalls, but there is also a significant number of departures from the norm. A large percentage of the suicides in the Marshalls (41%), and a smaller but still considerable percentage in Palau (27%), are occasioned by conflicts with a spouse or lover (Table 5). This is rather startling in view of the fact that men have always been permitted to express displeasure towards and even beat their wives as they feel circumstances require. The offended woman could always leave her husband to take up residence with her own kin, but such an event, although it could be painful, was by no means catastrophic for either party. "Suicide from unhappy love is rare," a missionary working in the Marshalls at the beginning of the century observed. "In general, frustrated love finds enough opportunities of soothing the affliction by means of a new love" (Erdland 1914: 133). Such information as we have on suicides in a much earlier age seems to confirm his observations. There are a number of cases in which men take their lives when their family fails to ask for the hand of a girl with whom they are in love, or when their own family either intervenes to break up their marriage or taunts them afterwards about their loss, but the real issue in these cases is the victim's anger towards his own kin rather than his wife. Of the 70 instances of suicides prior to 1960 that are recorded, only six appear to be motivated principally by anger or jealousy at a spouse. Three of these six cases occurred in Palau, the only Micronesian society in which there appears to have been a long-standing tradition of "love suicides," if we may believe Kubary (1900: 31). There were none in the Marshalls.

TABLE 5: RELATIONAL DISRUPTIONS LEADING TO SUICIDE

Relationship	Truk	Palau	Yap	Pohnpei	Kosrae	Marshalls
Parents	49%	34%	42%	52%	37%	38%
Older Sibling	21%	10%	7%	16%	0%	9%
Parents' Sib	5%	2%	4%	7%	13%	4%
Spouse/lover	12%	27%	12%	13%	13%	41%
Others in family	7%	5%	12%	4%	0%	1%
Non-family	6%	22%	23%	9%	37%	7%
Sub-Total N =	154	41	30	56	8	81
Missing	26%	45%	41%	13%	43%	34%
TOTAL N =	209	75	51	64	14	123

Source: Data compiled by Hezel and Rubinstein for Micronesian Seminar

*Because of the small population base and relatively low rate, Kosrae is not included in the discussion

Despite the rarity in the past of what may be called "love suicides," they have undeniably become an important feature in the Marshalls and Palau today. It is unclear exactly why a traditional cultural response to conflict within the circle of one's senior blood relatives should have now become commonly extended to wives and sweethearts, who were formerly regarded as expendable and replaceable in a way that one's family was not. A large number of the recent "love suicides" in Palau and the Marshalls seem to have been motivated by sexual jealousy, as when the woman threatened to leave her spouse for another man or when she was suspected of carrying on an affair with someone. It may be significant that in both Palau and the Marshalls it is regarded as unmanly for a male to show any outward expression of sexual jealousy, even privately towards his wife. This is decidedly not the case in Truk, where women are routinely beaten on the mere suspicion of acting in too forward a manner towards other men. The cultural prohibition of manifestation of male jealousy in the Marshalls and Palau could help explain the extraordinary number of "love suicides" there, if we bear in mind that suicide is generally a strategy for dealing with negative emotions that may not be directly displayed for cultural reasons. Then, too, there are other factors that may be germane here. For a wife or sweetheart to leave her man, as one Marshallese who has devoted some years to the study of suicide noted, will invariably bring shame upon the abandoned man, especially if he initiated the relationship with the woman over the objections of his family. Even "love suicides", this Marshallese suggested, have roots that can sometimes be traced to family problems. This may also be true of Palauan "love suicides," as a celebrated case many years ago attests. A high-born Palauan who married a woman despite strong protests from his family later hanged himself when his wife ran off with another man,

leaving him disgraced in the eyes of his family (Polloi 1985: 125-6).

One final comment should be made on the causes of suicide as shown in Table 5. The sizable percentage of cases for Palau and Yap listed as "non-family" must be understood very differently for each place. Palau, more than any other island group, shows a significant percentage of suicides — roughly one-third of the total, as indicated in Table 4 — that have been attributed chiefly to the psychotic condition of the victim, who often appears to take his own life to put an end to his sufferings. A motivational component of even these suicides, of course, is his anxiety to be free of the chaos in his personal relationships that his illness has created. There are a smaller number of such cases to be found in every island group (Table 4). The relatively large percentage of "non-family" cases in Yap, while reflecting a rather high incidence of psychosis-induced suicide, also points to the apparent importance of extra-familial relationships in motivating suicide. It would seem that in Yap shame in the face of the wider community, especially the village, is a much greater factor in suicide than it is anywhere else.

Social Change and Suicide

Suicide, as we know from historical sources, is endemic to every part of Micronesia. Such cultural features as introversion in the display of anger directed at those of superior status, cultivation of bravery and indifference to death in the young, and the fascination with self-inflicted suffering as a proof of love favor suicidal behavior. Nonetheless, there are important differences between suicide as we know it in earlier times and the phenomenon of the last two decades that it would be well to review here. First, the suicide rate has multiplied dramatically during the 1970s and by the end of that period stood at five times the rate of the previous decade. Second, as the rate has grown there has been an ever greater concentration of suicides among young males. Rubinstein's (In Press) observation that the focus has narrowed in recent years is confirmed by figures for suicides during Japanese administration showing a much wider distribution in terms of both age and sex (Purcell 1987: 4, 6). Third, recent data shows a considerable number of "love suicides" — those occasioned by sexual jealousy or anger at a spouse or sweetheart — in both Palau and the Marshalls, with a few occurring in places like Truk and Pohnpei where this type of suicide was almost unknown previously.

What accounts for the rapid escalation in suicide, particularly among young males, since 1970? In discussions and public conferences on the subject, the blame is usually laid on the social changes that have allegedly turned these island societies upside down. The forces of modernization have created a "youth culture" in present-day Micronesia, unlike anything in the past, that seduces the young while removing them from the normal socialization processes in the family. The complaint is often heard that families have lost their children to this new "youth culture," with its strong peer influence, its emphasis on freedom rather than respect, its long weekend drinking parties, and in the end the sense of hollowness and boredom that it begets in the young. The same social changes that are drawing youth out from under the control of their families, it is argued, generate innumerable value conflicts between young and old, thus adding to the tensions in the family. Under such anomic

conditions, many maintain, it is no wonder that so many young people today seek an escape from this tension through suicide.

In the popular explanation for the suicide epidemic that one so often hears, the forces of modernization, as embodied in the "youth culture," seem to be pitted against the family, representing the core of traditional Micronesian thinking and practice. Yet the data that we have amassed in our research does not confirm this view. In the first place, the victims are not always among the most modernized of the population, at least as measured by conventional standards (Rubinstein 1985: 92-3). Indeed, those most at risk are youth from peri-urban areas and social strata that are midway on the scale of modernization. In the port town of Majuro, for instance, the highest rates of suicide seem to be found not among long-time residents who have become acculturated and achieved a fair degree of affluence, but among relatively recent newcomers to the island from outlying atolls. It is true that those remote islands of Micronesia that have retained more of their old lifestyle – eg, the outer islands of Yap, the atolls to the west of Truk, the Polynesian outliers of Pohnpei State, and the more distant atolls of the Marshalls – show very low suicide rates even today. Yet the most highly acculturated segments of urban centers also show fairly low rates. This suggests, then, that suicide is linked with the transition modernization with the highest rates in the middle rather than at the low or high ends of the scale.

Suicide, we must remember, employs the very traditional Micronesian strategy of withdrawal from a conflict-laden situation, especially one involving the family. Hence, the act as it is practiced even today presupposes some degree of acceptance of traditional values on the part of the victim. Those who take their own lives in Micronesia, far from having shown themselves to be liberated from the control of their family, are asserting through their death that they remain bound to the conventional claims of the family over them. If they had rejected the importance of their family or the authority of parents, they would not have felt obliged to have recourse to such an extreme measure as suicide to show their anger or hurt. Suicide, then, is an indication of the importance that the family continues to have in the lives of contemporary young people, even as it suggests that there is something amiss in the family. Hence, the family should not be seen as a bulwark against change, but as an institution that has itself been attacked by the worm of change.

While inter-generational value conflicts are a reality in Micronesia today, this fact does not appear to constitute an adequate explanation for the suicide epidemic since 1970. The profile of the typical victim is of a generally dutiful and submissive young man who, whatever his difficulties with his family, can not be branded as a rebellious upstart (Hezel 1985: 121) The case reports also indicate that in many instances it is the victim himself who espoused what could be considered the more traditional values in his conflict with his family, as in the example of the young man who ran afoul of his parents for insisting on preparing food for other members of his matrilineage. The most frequent causes of tension reported in our data are parents' denial of food or material support to their children, their refusal to approve a marriage partner, and scoldings or other forms of rebuffs; but these have always been points of conflict between Micronesian parents and their children. Those value conflicts that are a direct outgrowth of modernization have almost certainly contributed to the

tension in the Micronesian family today, but they do not seem to be the decisive factor in the enormous increase of suicide among the young. In the past it was expected that the family would be able to absorb such conflict and assuage the hurt feelings of contending parties. If it can no longer do so, then the problem may well be that the family no longer functions as it once did.

There are any number of reasons for suspecting that changes in the structure of the Micronesian family have played an important part in bringing about the increase in suicide lately. For one thing the importance that the bonds with one's family have for a Micronesian can scarcely be exaggerated. His sense of well-being, or what might be called self-esteem, has always depended to a far greater extent on his acceptance and support from his family than on any other single element. To judge from the patterns that we can discern in recent suicides, this remains true today as well, for suicide is still predominantly a response to the threat of rupture in the family bonds. Over 70 percent of all the suicides since 1960 were precipitated by conflict within the consanguineal family. If the family, which has always served as a buffer for individuals against the vicissitudes of life in society, is no longer able to manage these tensions, this may be due to structural changes in the family that have rendered it less effective. It would seem entirely reasonable to postulate that the key to any increase in suicide, which has always borne such an intimate cultural tie to the family, probably can be found in the family.

Yet, I do not wish to dismiss the importance of other causes, including some of those already alluded to, in the escalation of suicide rates in the last two decades. In any epidemic the very fact of "contagion" serves to explain the rapid spread of the disease, and there is an undeniably strong element of "contagion" in recent Micronesian suicides. Moreover, the status of young men in most island societies has possibly been weakened in recent years, making them more vulnerable to suicide as also to delinquency, alcohol abuse and other forms of deviance. When all is considered, however, I think it likely that the profound change in the family structure almost everywhere in Micronesia was the single most powerful catalyst in the suicide epidemic of the past 18 years.

The Traditional Micronesian Family

As one might expect in an area exhibiting the cultural diversity of Micronesia, the form of the family has always varied a great deal from one island group to another. Hence, before we consider the changes that the family in these societies has undergone and their bearing on suicide, we shall briefly review the traditional family organization in each major island group with a particular focus on the child-rearing mechanisms. Kosrae has been omitted here because of the early disruption in social organization that occurred in the last century as a result of rapid depopulation and missionization (Hezel 1983: 169-70). I have also omitted from this survey the cultural sub-family embracing the atolls of Yap State, which are totally distinct from Yap proper, and the Polynesian outliers of Nukuoro and Kapingamarangi in Pohnpei State, since suicide is still quite rare in these areas. After this survey I shall attempt to make a few pertinent generalizations on the structure of Micronesian families.

Truk. The basic social unit in Truk, one of the least complexified of the Micronesian cultures, was the matrilineage (Goodenough 1961; Gladwin 1953). Comprising as many as 30 or 40 members and headed by a senior kinsman, the matrilineage provided land, a support group and a source of identity for all the children of its women. A woman in the lineage who married would ideally bring her husband to her lineage estate where her lineage mates assisted her in raising her children. Although the father retained considerable authority over his younger children in ordinary matters, they were still subject to the general supervision of older members of the matrilineage. Food was prepared by the entire lineage group, cooked in a common hearth, and distributed to the group by the wife's older brother or whoever had been designated the lineage head. Work tasks were assigned to the children by the maternal uncles or the lineage head himself. As young men grew to adolescence, they were required to sleep outside the house in the lineage uut, or meeting house, where they were instructed together with their peers in the skills and lore a man was expected to possess. During this period they were increasingly brought under the supervision of older lineage members, especially their maternal uncles, while the father adopted a more easy-going attitude towards them. All major decisions, including the choice of a spouse, had to be approved by the seniors in the lineage as well as by their father.

Pohnpei. Like Truk, Pohnpei was organized along matrilineal lines, but residential groups were usually smaller and newly married couples frequently lived with the man's family. Often enough several brothers and their families established separate households on a single farmstead, sharing resources and meals on a regular basis (Peterson 1977: 174-5). The maternal uncle (known as uhlap) exercised authority over his nephews and was expected to be their chief disciplinarian. The father's role with respect to his children, on the other hand, was far more relaxed. By way of illustration, one anthropologist claims that a chief could have his son sit on the platform of the meeting house next to him, even during a ceremonial occasion, while his nephew was obliged to keep a respectful distance (Fischer 1957: 133). Yet the same anthropologist acknowledges that there were instances of a reversal of roles between the father and the maternal uncle, with the maternal uncle at times protecting his nephews from the hard hand of their father. Whatever the case, it appears that the roles of the maternal uncle, who represented the lineage's interest in the child, and the father complemented one another.

Marshalls. The Marshalls too was a matrilineal society with considerable flexibility as to where a newly married couple would reside. It was rare for the entire lineage descent group to live on a single piece of land. More often the residential group was built around a nuclear family and included up to three generations housed in separate dwellings but eating together from a single cookhouse. The size of the residential group could vary from three to 30; but the average size on Majuro in 1948 was nine (Spoehr 1949: 104), while on Bikini in 1963 it was 15 (Kiste 1974: 71-2). Marshallese, however, have always shifted among relatives from one household group to another, even on distant parts of the island, with comparative ease. Marshallese parents disciplined their own young children, but they seemed to establish a more informal relationship with them as they grow older. The mother's brother (known as the wulabe), on the other hand, had a formal relationship with the children, who were expected to show him great deference. He was required to instruct them in customary land law and

provide what the father could not or would not provide (Spoehr 1949: 194). The mother's lineage mates, and to some extent the father's as well, shared authority over the children after they reached adolescence. The young enjoyed an easy relationship with their parents and an even more familiar relationship with their grandparents that allowed them to engage in sexual banter.

Palau. This society was matrilineal like the others described above, but it was normal for a married couple to take up residence on land that the husband inherited from his own lineage. As in so many other features of Palauan society, there was an in-built tension: between affiliation with the father's lineage, in which the young person was raised, and matrilineage, whose claim became increasingly strong on him as he grew older (Alkire 1977: 29). The father took a strong hand in disciplining young children, but the maternal uncle (okdemaol) was the only one entitled to punish severely or beat the child (Smith 1983: 192). A youth living with his father who drank and caused trouble could not easily be corrected at home since his father would risk criticism for taking liberties with the matrilineage's "property." As a last resort, the delinquent youth might be sent back to his mother's kin, who had a much freer hand in disciplining him. The child's ties with his matrilineage were as strong in Palau as in any Micronesian society. The maternal uncle or some surrogate could call on the young man's labor from adolescence on and he was expected to correct any misbehavior, but he was also the one to whom the young person would go if he had a big favor to ask. One anthropologist comments very tellingly that, despite the demands made on him by his matrilineal kin, the young person's emotional ties remained strongly with his matrilineal relatives who would support him no matter what he did and offer him unconditional acceptance (Smith 1983: 45). By contrast, the young person's ties with his father's kin were seen as provisional and had to be maintained by hard work.

Yap. Yapese society is distinctive in that the primary social group was patrilineal, even though the matrilineal descent group formed an important substratum in Yapese social organization. The household in most cases was composed of a nuclear family that resided on the husband's estate, as remains true even today. The father was generally the head of the household and the main disciplinarian of his own children, and it was he who decided whether his children's requests would be granted. The father's brothers and their wives usually lived nearby, and although they had little direct authority over his children, they were regarded as "second" fathers and mothers and provided counsel for their nephews and nieces. When paternal grandparents lived with the family, as happened infrequently, the children treated them far more informally than their father and developed warm and affectionate relationships with them (Lingenfelter 1975: 41-6). The matrilineal group, although possessing less direct influence over the children than in other Micronesian societies, functioned as a support and final safety net. If the young Yapese was ever disowned by his family, as still occasionally happens today, he could fall back on his matriclan as a refuge. There he could be sure of being accepted without feeling the need to reciprocate, much as in Palau; the love and acceptance he received from his patrilineal group, on the other hand, depended in large part on the extent to which he had proven himself an obedient son (Lingenfelter 1975: 50). The mother's brother, known as the wa'ayengin, had a close and informal relationship to the child as his "guardian" and

"navigator," providing advice and support as well as gifts of food and money when needed (Labby 1976: 50).

At the risk of blurring the cultural distinctiveness of these island societies, I will attempt an overview of traditional Micronesian organization. The picture that emerges from this brief survey is of a system that incorporates delicate balances like the most notable artifact of these island societies, their outrigger canoes. The matrilineal side had the dominant claim on the child everywhere except in Yap. These claims were usually externalized and represented by the maternal uncle, whose relationship with the child was important enough to warrant a special kinship term. The child was fully incorporated into the lineage, regardless of where he was actually raised, and from it received his principal social identity (although not necessarily his land). It is important to reiterate that the young person's primary social unit was not coterminous with his household group, which often enough did not even bear a distinctive local term and only later came to be designated by the loan-word "family."

The counterweight to the matrilineage was, of course, the patrilineal kin group, which was usually more shallow generationally and of less importance than its opposite number. As such, it was comparable to the outrigger on a canoe in those societies where the matrilineage could be likened to the hull. Like the outrigger, the patrilineal descent group served to stabilize the family by distributing the weight of authority. Only in Yap did the paternal kin group have the dominant claim on the child. The patrilineal group was represented chiefly by the child's father, although others in this kin group usually exercised some measure of authority over the child.

The precise roles of the maternal uncle and the father, each representing his respective lineage group, were complementary even though they resist easy generalizations. Ethnographical evidence seems to suggest that the nature of these roles not only varied from one island culture to another, but even within a single culture at times. It would be misleading simply to depict one as an authority figure and the other as a friend, even in those societies where the child's relationship was significantly more informal with one than with the other (Sweetser 1966: 1009). Generally, however, it was the father who exercised the most direct authority over his child while young, while the maternal uncle assumed a larger share of the responsibility for the child after adolescence. Yet, even in the young person's post-adolescent years, authority over him was shared by members of his paternal and maternal kin groups.

Within the broad outlines of a family system such as we have sketched, child-rearing roles were distributed among a number of different individuals. There were persons who functioned as disciplinarians, others who acted much more as advocates, and sometimes still others who provided formal instruction in cultural matters. If the young man experienced what he felt was harsh treatment at the hands of one, he could usually find another to plead his cause. Or if the relationship deteriorated to the point where he was rejected altogether by his father's kin group, as we have seen in the case of Palau and Yap, he always had recourse to his matrilineal relatives who would normally offer him refuge with no questions

asked. Then too, the young person had older relatives with whom he could establish a more informal relationship, as was true most notably of grandparents in the Marshalls and Yap. In short, the elaborate system as it functioned in an earlier age was designed to afford the young man or woman, through the partition and distribution of supervisory control, numerous checks against any abuse of authority in the particularly difficult years following adolescence. The system also provided a host of persons who could act as intermediaries to help resolve conflicts, as well as a wide safety net for those who found themselves unable to resolve such conflicts.

Changes in the Micronesian Family

Many critical changes have occurred in the Micronesian family over the past two or three decades. Since there is neither the space nor detailed information to describe these changes island by island, however, I will present a brief picture of the transformation of the family in Truk, the island group that has been studied most intensively, and then offer some general, but admittedly tendentious, observations on the patterns of change in the rest of Micronesia.

Many Trukese, though not nearly as many as formerly, still live on their matrilineal estates, but these now function much differently than they did in the past. Whereas formerly the lineage head assigned and supervised the work of his juniors, presided over the distribution of food prepared from the land, and exercised authority over post-adolescents on a regular basis, this is no longer true today. These roles have gradually been transferred to the heads of the separate households that make up the matrilineage group. As the availability of a cash income increased and household heads (generally the fathers of nuclear families) retained their money and store-bought goods, their dependence on support from lineage land decreased. Social expectations changed accordingly, even in those kin groups that did not have wage-earners or a significant cash income. Consequently, today the father of the family has assumed the principal responsibility for feeding his own household, even though there is still considerable sharing of food and other resources with other households on the estate. The father, too, has assumed final authority over his own children, even after adolescence, and is expected to care for their needs and discipline them when required. With the surrender of much of the authority that lineage heads once held, the father has become the master of his household in a way that was unthinkable only thirty years ago. To be sure, the lineage still functions at times as an economic unit, as when the lineage head marshalls his kin members and resources for a wedding, funeral or some other special occasion. The same may be said of the lineage as a social unit: the maternal uncle or lineage head often is consulted on a choice of a marriage partner and often acts as a spokesman for the entire kin group. But this should not disguise the fact that the household has attained a level of autonomy in daily life that constitutes a social revolution (Hezel 1987: 289).

Throughout Micronesia the intricate family system of yesterday has been greatly modified and its delicate balance upset. The role of the maternal uncle, and the matrilineage he represents, appears to have declined in importance almost everywhere in recent years. In those societies where the maternal uncle once could correct or punish his sister's children, he seldom dares to do so nowadays. His authority to exact labor from his nephews and nieces

has greatly declined. As if in recognition of his diminished role, fewer young people seem to be using the special referential term for maternal uncle; most are apparently content to refer to him as "father," the same term that is used for paternal uncles. This is especially noticeable in Truk and Pohnpei, but the same trend seems to be visible in Palau and the Marshalls also. Many of the functions that were once performed by the maternal uncle have been taken over by the father of the child, as we have seen in Truk. The father and mother are now recognized, everywhere but in the more traditional outlying islands, as the principal, and increasingly the exclusive, disciplinarians of their post-adolescent children.

As the family becomes more nuclearized, some of the large variety of nurturing roles once distributed through the old matrilineal and patrilineal descent groups are being lost, sometimes for different reasons. Although the grandparents still maintain an easy relationship with the young in the Marshalls, they are less frequently present in the household, especially among the many families who have immigrated to the population centers of Majuro and Ebeye in search of wage labor. The same can be said of the matrilineal aunts in Palau that always had such an essential role in supporting the young in times past (Smith 1983: 85). Such changes as these, like the nuclearization of the Trukese family, are in reality a response to changing circumstances in the community today. With the widespread migration to towns during the 1960s and 1970s, these roles fell into disuse because those individuals who would have assumed them often enough did not follow the family into town. Even Yap, traditionally patrilineal and nuclear in family form, seems to have undergone a trimming of family roles. In Yap the support that paternal uncles once provided for their nephews seems to have diminished, while the role of the maternal uncle has been circumscribed in recent years. In the other, traditionally matrilineal societies of Micronesia, the changes have moved towards a nuclearized family, shallower in depth and with differences between matrilineal and patrilineal becoming blurred.

Impact of Monetization

Why such profound changes in the bedrock of Micronesian social organization over the last few decades? The structure of the family, as anthropologists remind us tirelessly, is embedded in and inextricably related to the traditional land tenure systems that govern the allocation of island resources among kin groups and their members. As one anthropologist puts it, "Micronesian socio-political institutions — including the kinship system — are founded on the control of the land" (Alkire 1977: 87). This is understandable in view of the fact that land, always a scarce commodity in the small islands of the area, constituted the only means of survival for traditional Micronesians. Changes in land inheritance, for whatever reason, have always been accompanied by corresponding changes in the social organization. When the German colonial government at the beginning of the century, for instance, imposed a land reform on Pohnpei in which inheritance was to proceed from father to eldest son, residential patterns swung from matrilineal to patrilineal (Peterson 1977: 118-25). We may suppose that an early shift towards patrilineal estates in Yap resulted in the gradual emergence of the patrilineage as the dominant kin group on that island. Land, then, has always been both life and a way of life for Micronesians, to use Alkire's words (Alkire 1977: 88). At least until an alternative to this resource base in the form of wage employment was

introduced in the post-war years.

Much of island Micronesia already had a taste of money as early as the mid-19th century. Pohnpei alone may have been receiving as much as \$8000 yearly during the peak years of its whaleship trade, and the copra industry soon replaced it there and elsewhere as the major source of income (Hezel 1984a: 13-4). Yet this fairly substantial trade in the last century did not, as far as we can determine, effect any lasting changes on the family structure because the income, largely in the form of trade goods, was distributed through the traditional chiefly networks (Hanlon 1988: 70-1). Its short-term effect, therefore, was to strengthen rather than weaken existing socio-political structures. Even those goods that bypassed these networks and went directly into the hands of individuals, as was true in the flourishing trade for women on Pohnpei and Kosrae, could not have represented a threat to the traditional economic mechanisms. The beneficiaries, after all, could not eat the tobacco and gingham and blue serge that they received in exchange for what they were selling. Throughout those years and the period of colonial rule that followed, the land-based economy – and hence, the traditional family – remained unchallenged by the cash flow from without. Exports – copra for the most part – had peaked at the turn of the century, and by the time production increased in the 1920s the market price had fallen so much that there was no appreciable increase in yearly per capita income.

Even at the height of the Japanese "economic miracle" in Micronesia, in 1937, the per capita income from copra amounted to only \$28 in current dollars, or one-fourth of that in post-war dollars (Hezel 1984a: 30). Micronesian participation in other Japanese industries, especially the lucrative sugar industry, was minimal. Although almost 400 islanders were employed in the phosphate mines and another 1100 were employed on a part-time basis by the industrial giant Nanyo Boeki Kaisha, in addition to those working for the South Seas Government, wages were low and the economic impact of the take-home pay was negligible (Purcell 1967: 198). The combined yearly wages of all Micronesian employees, even if all had been working full-time, would have come to only 230,000 yen, or a yearly per capita income of less than \$5 in current dollars (Purcell 1967: 198; Hezel 1984a: 30)

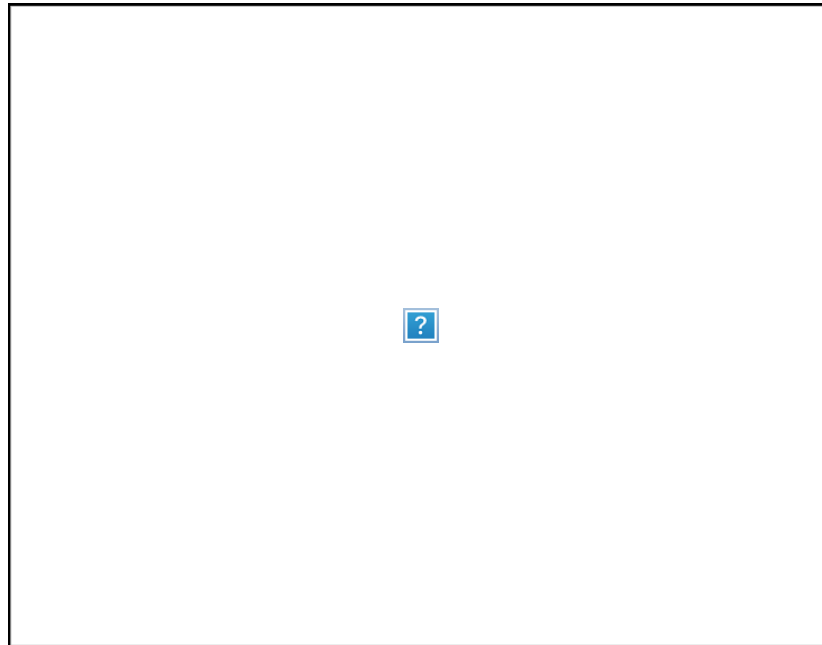
During the early post-war years Micronesians still relied almost exclusively on the fruits of their land, and the traditional family structure remained very much intact everywhere in Micronesia. Lineage groups, or other larger family units, regularly ate together and worked together, providing the labor and supervision for most of the daily tasks necessary for survival, as we know from the ethnographies produced by the CIMA (Coordinated Investigation of Micronesian Anthropology) team at work in the islands at this time. How could this not be the case? The per capita income for Micronesians (with the Northern Marianas excepted) was only \$28, most of which came from the sale of copra, fish and a few other exports (Table 6). Micronesians recall that the copra was produced by traditional kin groups from plots inherited in more or less traditional ways and the proceeds from sales were distributed in traditional ways – ie, through the head of the estate. During the 1950s, with the increase in employment among local people, the per capita income (in 1950 dollars) rose slowly, reaching \$46 by 1962 – a gain of 60 percent in twelve years. Growth of per capita income was much more rapid thereafter, thanks to the liberalization of the US funding

policy for the Trust Territory that began during the Kennedy Administration. Over the fifteen years between 1962 and 1977, the number of full-time employees multiplied sixfold – from 3000 to 18,000 – and the total payroll skyrocketed from \$2.4 million to \$15.8 million (in constant dollars). The real per capita income, as measured by exports and salaries, increased from \$46 to \$114 (again in constant dollars). Despite an annual population growth of over three percent and early stagnation in export production, Micronesia's real per capita income had quadrupled in less than three decades (Figure 2). For the first time ever the cash economy presented a real alternative to the land-based subsistence economy and the age-old modes of production and social organization that the latter implied. Familial change was now both possible and expedient.

TABLE 6: GROWTH OF TOTAL INCOME FROM SALARIES AND EXPORTS, 1950-1977

Total per capita income						
	Total (\$000)	Per capita	Total (\$000)	Per capita	Unadjusted	1950 \$
1950	\$330	\$8	\$972	\$20	\$28	\$28
1954	\$1,000	\$19	\$1,213	\$22	\$41	\$36
1957	\$1,541	\$26	\$1,400	\$24	\$50	\$42
1962	\$2,355	\$33	\$2,000	\$28	\$61	\$46
1967	\$6,713	\$83	\$2,100	\$26	\$109	\$82
1972	\$21,949	\$230	\$2,373	\$25	\$255	\$88
1977	\$42,781	\$388	\$2,606	\$24	\$412	\$114

Source: Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, 1981. *Annual Report to the United Nations*



The same policy decisions that brought about the monetization of the traditional economy spawned a great number of other social changes in the Trust Territory, of course. School enrollments multiplied, new roads and airfields improved transportation within the island societies and beyond, the addition of many more expatriate government employees and Peace Corps volunteers greatly enlarged foreign presence in the islands, and telecommunications intensified contact with the outside world. But none of these other changes reached into the heart of the family with the same force as the expanding cash income available to Micronesians. Indeed, many of the changes had already been felt in the islands during the 1930s, the heyday of Japanese development of its Mandated Territory.

Consequences of Recent Family Change

The nuclearization of the Micronesian family, which I have attributed to the loosening of its roots in the old land system, has had a deep impact on parenting roles today. Now bereft of much of the nurturing assistance that they would have received from matrilineal (and sometimes patrilineal) kin in former times, parents find themselves burdened with unfamiliar responsibilities. What has been written of Trukese parents is probably applicable to those in most other parts of Micronesia today: "They are expected to discipline their children, see to their schooling, attend to their personal adjustment needs during the difficult period of adolescence, decide which of their requests to honor and which to refuse, oversee their choice of companions, and guide them in their search for a marriage partner" (Hezel 1987: 289-90). Most onerous of all is the new responsibility that they must assume over their post-adolescent offspring, especially the males, for here is where the traditional matrilineage intervened most strongly to handle the troublesome years of early manhood. Parents, who were themselves raised within this broader support system, are unprepared to exercise these new and awesome responsibilities. The larger size of today's average family due to higher child survival rates only further adds to the pressure on the parents. In response to the

heavier demands that are being made on him, the father in turn entrusts even greater responsibility to the eldest son.

With this unprecedented concentration of familial authority, there is greater potential for serious conflict in the family circle. This is all the more true when that family structure that once offered its disgruntled members advice and support from other quarters has been constricted. In the past a young man who was denied a request by his father, after all, usually had several alternatives. He could try to persuade his father's brother to intercede for him, especially if he were on good terms with him. Or he might run to his maternal uncle with the request denied by his father and so call on the support of his own matrilineage. Or he might just pour out his annoyance and grief to an older lineage mate whose function was partly to provide reassurance in just such times as those. If the young person who experiences tension in his family does not have the same options today, it is because so many of these roles have been abrogated by members of the extended family in deference to the authority of the master of the household.

The fate of the young person who is adopted by his kinfolk seems to be no easier than those who remain with their natural parents. In the study of child abuse and neglect in Micronesia done two years ago, mention is made of the resentment that adoptive parents, even matrilineal relatives of children, betray at having to provide for those placed under their care (Marcus 1986: 12). Demands on them that they would have assumed as a matter of course some years ago are now often seen as an imposition, and the resentment is manifested in frequent beatings or inattention to the material needs of the child. Cases of gross child neglect in similar situations were reported from Pohnpei and Truk. Even in Yap, where the traditional family appears to remain rather strong, there was a report of a ten-year old boy who was neglected by his grandfather upon whom he was forced to depend for support after his father died. Later the boy moved in with his mother, who had since married, but his step-father disliked him from the start and began beating him severely, causing the boy to run away from home and wander from place to place (Marcus 1986: 11). This has lately become an all too familiar tale in Truk, too, especially in the case of women who remarry and bring their children by their first marriage with them to their new spouse's estate, where these children are the victims of discrimination and often enough are subjected to harsh scoldings or beatings by their step-father. In an earlier time such children would have been assured a secure home and unqualified acceptance among their own matrilineal kin. Cases like these are a measure of just how much expectations have changed: today the child's home is with his parents rather than with the matrilineage that once held primary claim over him and stood ready to fulfill its obligations towards him.

Summary

The fact that Micronesia has been experiencing a suicide epidemic, unparalleled at least in the present century, is indisputable in the light of the data presented here and in previous studies. Suicide rates in each of the major cultural areas of the area have risen unevenly but markedly since the early 1970s. Although suicide was undeniably a feature of these societies for as far back as records and memories extend, this in itself offers no explanation as to why

the rates have suddenly risen well above the rather low level of pre-war years. This article has been an attempt to provide a social explanation, however hypothetical, for a phenomenon that has shaken these islands in the past two decades and which, although seemingly on the wane, remains a major social problem today.

Any attempt to provide an explanation for a social problem of this complexity, particularly one that cuts across cultural boundaries, always runs the risk of over-simplification. Yet, there are reasons to support the legitimacy of a broad approach in addressing the problem of suicide in Micronesia. The striking epidemiological similarities of suicide throughout Micronesia – the concentration of suicide among young males and the rapid increase in rates – suggest the possibility of a common cause or set of causes throughout the area. The rather tight cultural patterning of suicides that is found in all parts of Micronesia and the shared cultural meaning of suicide only confirms this possibility. There are some differences in these patterns from island to island – the most notable of which is the frequency of "love suicides" in Palau and the Marshalls – but these appear to be variations on a common theme or overlays on a basic transcultural pattern.

Our previous analysis of the Truk suicides, which admittedly show a simpler causal typology, revealed what seems to be a strong correlation between the onset of higher suicide rates and the breakdown of the matrilineage as the fundamental unit of social organization in the more acculturated islands of the Truk Lagoon. Although the precise steps in this gradual process cannot be fixed with chronological certainty, the volume of anthropological literature from the late 1940s documenting the strength of the traditional system at that time leaves no doubt that the transformation occurred within the last 40 years. During that period fragmentation of the matrilineal unit advanced to such an extent that today the head of the household (designated by the English loan-word faamenj) has assumed the major responsibility for feeding and supervising household members, tasks that had always been the role of the lineage chief. This change, which brings with it new and more intense parenting responsibilities, was probably precipitated by fundamental economic changes that created a new resource base for Trukese. It is likely that this was the direct effect of widespread access to salaries as employment opportunities multiplied during the 1960s and 1970s.

In this paper I am suggesting that what demonstrably happened in Truk may well have occurred in other parts of Micronesia as well. Although the baseline data on social organization in these other island groups is often less reliable than for Truk, a comparison between the ethnographic literature and the family forms seen today reveals significant changes that are confirmed by Micronesian informants. Even if the data is not as tidy as for Truk, there is strong evidence for maintaining that there have been discernible shifts in the patterns of basic social organization in the area. As in Truk, there appears to be a tendency towards nuclearization of the family, a corresponding attenuation of the role of the matrilineage in child-rearing, and a concentration of authority in the parents. We can only assume that these shifts, like those documented for Truk, have their roots in the economic changes that have revolutionized these societies in the last two decades. In view of the fact that the forms of social organization and the management of the slender resource base in

the islands have always been so intimately connected, it is difficult to imagine what else might have caused the breakdown of the most basic social unit.

What conclusive proof is there that these changes in the family structures throughout Micronesia are in fact the main cause of the suicide epidemic? None at all, but there is a considerable amount of what might be called circumstantial evidence. Micronesian suicides have always been and are still primarily responses to family disturbances, so it stands to reason that any malfunctioning of the family might have a direct impact on the suicide rate. On the other hand, the recent transformations in the Micronesian family appear to have resulted in an increase in intergenerational tension and a loss in the family of just those resources that had helped it in handling such tension. The effect of the recent structural changes in the family is to have left it at one and the same time debilitated and more conflict-laden – more susceptible, therefore, to generating just those situations that lead to suicide. Other factors have undoubtedly also contributed to the high rates of suicide in recent years, but probably less decisively than the family changes themselves.

Finally, it is my belief that this analysis of suicide in Micronesia, tentative though it is, may well have a broader applicability than to Micronesia alone. Western Samoa, among other places, has experienced a suicide epidemic similar to that of Micronesia since 1970, with the circumstances surrounding the suicides and the emotions displayed bearing a remarkable similarity to those in Micronesia (Figure 1). In Samoa there have been notable changes in social organization in recent years as chiefly titles have proliferated, the number of households multiplied, and the average household size dropped. Could the multiplication of titles for political reasons have had much the same effect on the Samoan family that the growing cash income has had on the Micronesian family? Is it possible that the well-publicized high suicide rates among some Native American peoples, whose suicide patterns have much in common with the Micronesian patterns described in this article, might be rooted in the same causes? In the light of our research findings on Micronesia, these questions would seem to deserve closer examination.

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