briefly refer to the works of Eric Schlosser (*Fast Food Nation* [2001]), Morgan Spurlock (the documentary film *Super Size Me* [2004]), and Michael Pollan (*The Omnivore’s Dilemma* [2006]), to more broadly discuss food issues worldwide. This chapter is a helpful review of the problems and also raises important questions of independence, choice, health, and politics. After all, the authors assert, their job as anthropologists is to “contextualize all these claims and counterclaims” (161), and, for such a complex issue, the contextualization is a complicated and saturated matter indeed.

This book could be a successful supplement for anthropology or Pacific studies courses and for courses on food and globalization. For readers curious about food choices, globalization, and some of the effects of free trade movements, *Cheap Meat* will provide a dense meal of ethnographic data, interesting human stories, and provocative questions about inequality, status-seeking, and lifestyle-related diseases.

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A welcome addition to the small library of comparative work on Micronesia, this book takes full
advantage of Glenn Petersen’s decades of experience studying the region and his expertise in anthropology and political philosophy. It is particularly valuable in its range over time and space, as he examines how traditional Micronesian social organization—with its dispersed matrilineal clans, balanced interaction of chiefly hierarchy and community, and complex intertwining of personal and community ideals—has proven adaptive for the people of these islands, where isolation and fragile environments can make survival precarious.

Petersen describes traditional Micronesian societies in a wide geographic and cultural context, arguing that Micronesia is a genuine culture area, that the islands are linked through matrilineal clans, and that these clans and other key elements of Micronesian social organization serve practical uses in the face of the geographical and environmental challenges of small-island life. His approach is particularly valuable in focusing on the region as a whole and in integrating ethnographic, environmental, archaeological, and historical sources.

It is safe to say that the book has no rival as a broad introduction to traditional Micronesian lifeways. (An obvious comparison is William H Alkire’s *An Introduction to the Peoples and Cultures of Micronesia* [1977].) But Petersen’s goal is not to provide a summary survey of the region. Instead, he takes an integrated adaptationist and functionalist approach to social organization. In the past few decades, this type of analysis has been abandoned in favor of site-specific or topic-specific ethnographies. Valuable as those are, there is also value in a larger-scale treatment that asks questions about the maintenance and change of social organization over long timescales and large distances. As knowledge of Micronesia’s pre-twentieth-century past becomes scattered among specialists in ethnohistory, history, and prehistory, we appreciate books like this for bringing such knowledge together into a single coherent and readable narrative.

The first two chapters of *Traditional Micronesian Societies* claim a clear position. In contrast to the recent habit of deconstructing regional rubrics and emphasizing the individuality of each island or community, Petersen focuses on “commonalities”—shared social organization and “themes” that, he argues, exist in similar form throughout Micronesia for functional and historical reasons (3). “My premise in this book is that in terms of their social organization and a general range of cultural practices, all the island societies of Micronesia have much more in common with one another than they do with societies in adjacent areas of the Philippines, Indonesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia” (19). He argues, “Fundamental patterns of social organization, in particular the dispersed matrilineal clans with their localized, landowning lineages” spread throughout the region because of their value in preserving island communities through environmental fluctuations (19).

The third chapter, on prehistory, argues that matrilineal clanship and the “breadfruit revolution” (hybridization of new forms ideal for atoll conditions) arose in eastern Micronesia and subsequently diffused to central,
Chapters 4 and 5 explore the adaptive value of traditional Micronesian social forms through discussions of “Descent and Descent Groups” and “Household and Family, Land and Labor.” These chapters combine readable summaries of key theoretical ideas in social organization with the practical realities of lineages and households. Petersen emphasizes the dynamic between principles of social organization and the flexibility of traditional systems in response to the demands of daily life and local circumstances.

The same balance between rules and practical action underlies Petersen’s discussion of explicitly political topics in chapters 6 and 7 on “Chieftainship and Government” and “Politics and Leadership.” This leverages Petersen’s particular expertise, as he explores Micronesians’ philosophical and practical approach to governance, comparing it with Western political theory (such as Machiavelli and Locke). He argues that over the centuries Micronesians have built a “deliberate political architecture” that balances effective leadership with ideologies and structures that limit and control chiefly power (147). He sees Micronesian polities exhibiting a dynamic tension between hierarchy and egalitarianism expressed in a theme of competition for social status, a “political culture organized around the dual dimensions of hierarchical chieftainship and lineage autonomy” (232). Like dispersed matrilineages, these political systems are adaptive in precarious island circumstances, with “useful innovations” diffused even to the western islands of the Marianas, Palau, and Yap, originally settled by people of different origins from those in Eastern Micronesia (181). The checks and balances of Micronesian systems, which sometimes appear as contradictions, actually maximize flexibility and adaptiveness. Such an argument is vulnerable to the traditional critiques of functionalism, and Petersen responds to the Panglosian (excessively optimistic) critique by recognizing that individuals do contravene norms, but that the system is sufficiently resilient to manage and recover from disturbances.

Chapters 8 and 9 move from social organization as such to a set of themes in which, once again, Petersen sees the flexibility and adaptiveness of Micronesian sociocultural systems in action: “Aesthetics, Beliefs, Values, and Behavior” and “Some Exceptions to the Pan-Micronesian Pattern.” He looks at Kiribati, Nauru, the Marianas, and Yap to explore historical and geographical elements explaining the exceptionalism of these cases.

The tenth and final chapter, “Epilogue: Traditional Micronesian Societies and Modern Micronesian History,” expresses Petersen’s confidence in the ultimate success of the traditional sociocultural adaptations to continue life on these small islands. He briefly discusses the impact of colonial intrusion on chiefly rule, and argues that the flexibility and resilience of Micronesian communities allow them to retain chieftainship as a viable element of local community organization. In conditions of modern geopolitics, he writes, Micronesians “seek to maintain enough centralized organization to provide themselves with protections from external dangers, even while trying to place
ample checks and balances in the way of potential abuses of power at home. They do not always succeed, but the traditional forms, values, and practices are there for them to draw upon as best they can” (233).

Petersen describes his audience as Micronesians, college or university students, and Pacific Islands scholars. I would add that social scientists who are not Pacific specialists might be interested in the adaptationist/prehistoric approach. As a broad, comprehensive overview of and argument about Micronesian social organization, this volume deserves a place on every Oceanist’s bookshelf.

LIN POYER

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