

## OH, THOSE POOR ISLANDERS AND THREATS TO AN IDYLIC LIFE ON A BEAUTIFUL ISLAND!

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ANTHROPOLOGISTS MAY ARGUE THAT INDIGENOUS GROUPS are not passive pawns at the mercy of outside forces but active agents who creatively incorporate outside institutions for local purposes and influence the course of their lifeways (e.g., Sahlins 1999), but as Lutz and Collins (1993) indicate with *National Geographic* photographs, popular media representations are another matter. Such representations tend to reveal more about the cultural beliefs and attitudes of the media and its audience than they convey about the reality of another way of life (Desmond 1999; Kahn 2011). This is certainly the case for internet information, blogs, and news articles about Pollap, a Micronesian atoll in Chuuk State. These are the sites people would find by conducting a basic, nonacademic, nonscholarly search for information about the place; collectively they present a composite representation of the island through popular media. This is a relatively new source of representation; previously information about this part of the Pacific for general audiences would have been available largely through *National Geographic* and perhaps occasional newspaper articles. Visitors could share photographs and stories with a circle of friends and acquaintances, but now these can be widely disseminated over the internet. Furthermore, islander voices and their own representations can be shared and communicated to fellow islanders scattered throughout the United States as well as to outsiders.

Aside from a few sites with geographical and tide information, and references to some academic publications, Google searches on Pollap yielded

primarily articles about disasters, references to the traditional art of navigation, a few Peace Corps volunteer reminiscences, a scattering of entries by Pollapese, a few travel promotions, and photographs. Entries by Pollapese tend to focus on the beauty of the island and feeling connected with family back home. Peace Corps entries highlight an idyllic way of life not available in the United States. They evoke stereotypical romantic images of Pacific islands with pristine beaches, kindly natives, exotic dress and dance, a simplified way of life free of the stresses of the modern world, a warm and benign environment, and a set of customs unencumbered by Puritan morality. A couple of articles relate to Pollap's heritage in regard to the art of navigation and, thus, recognize the existence of a traditional store of knowledge. These, together with the travel descriptions and photographs, all in one respect or another romanticize the island way of life and appear to fulfill western dreams and fantasies about islanders living more closely with nature in some sort of paradise (Gillis 2004). The articles about the disasters, however, portray the islanders as helpless victims in need of assistance from the outside, without agency themselves. When there is discussion of a response to the event, the actors are outsiders; nowhere have I found a discussion of how islanders themselves have attempted to cope or deal with these problems.

### **Tiny, Remote, and Isolated**

Pollap (formerly officially spelled Pupalap, and still showing up as such in some articles) is part of a coral atoll in the western part of Chuuk State in the Caroline Islands chain. It is admittedly tiny, and from a western perspective at least, isolated and remote. A typical description from a website depicts the atoll as "a ring-shaped coral reef which has closely spaced islands on it encircling a lagoon."<sup>21</sup> The lagoon measures about twelve square miles, and Pollap, the northernmost of three islets along the reef, measures only 0.262 square miles in area (Bryan 1971). The land supports horticulture, with taro and breadfruit as the major crops, and the reef, lagoon, and surrounding ocean provide a range of marine resources. Although still largely oriented toward subsistence fishing and gardening, islanders increasingly consume imported rice and purchase foreign goods such as cloth, lanterns, building supplies, and even motor boats in recent years. Lacking significant cash crops, paid jobs (aside from school teachers), or industry are certainly characteristics that can contribute to an image of being obscure with little, if anything, to offer the outside world. It may be deemed primitive, lacking modern amenities, or representative of a simpler life, more closely connected with nature. In either case, it is remote from western existence and obscure.

The earliest written representation of Pollap and a name still occasionally seen is “Los Martires.”<sup>2</sup> This was the result of the first recorded foreign interaction with people of the atoll in 1565 when, in an encounter with the islanders, a couple of Spanish sailors were killed and the place was named in their memory (Anonymous 1887), leaving an image of the islanders as savage and warlike. It was more than 200 years before another recorded visit, but the name “Los Martires” still recurs from time to time. The only other historical reference that surfaced in the Google search was one about the sinking of a Japanese ship that took place not too far from Pollap, but the focus is on the ships involved rather than the islands.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the place is historically obscure.

The lack of western contact can be explained in part by the relative remoteness and tiny size of the island. For some, such as Peace Corps volunteers and occasional tourists (and for me, an anthropologist), the remoteness is part of the charm. In other contexts, however, remote translates as obscure, with negative connotations. In one instance, Pollap was even used to represent the epitome of obscure. A 2004 *Daily News* article skeptical of the value of educational toys used the game GeoSafari World Challenge and the tedium of 7,500 questions with the comment, “How fascinating is that 6,784<sup>th</sup> query about the Pulap Atoll?” as the example of useless information about unimportant and irrelevant places in the world.<sup>4</sup> Pollap wasn’t even intriguing enough to warrant being the 7,000<sup>th</sup> or 7,500<sup>th</sup> question. Furthermore, a site about the atoll’s geography, with data from the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency,<sup>5</sup> cites “no data” for several categories, such as population figures and elevations, thus contributing to the small and obscure image.

A Micronesian government site describes the island group Pollap as being part of “small, low-lying atolls reachable by field trip ships and small plane by some”<sup>6</sup> (though Pollap is not reachable by plane). Being a tiny place presumably contributes to obscurity, as does the fact that it is not readily accessible. A wiki article points out that travel to the area “is difficult due to the lack of reliable transportation.”<sup>7</sup> Again the implication is one of being remote, without any frequent or predictable ship or plane schedule. No mention is made in either site of the possibility of islanders traveling in their own canoes, only via field trip ship or airplane. The article also focuses on transportation from center hubs to outer islands rather than the many ways islanders are connected with each other in a complex web of regional relationships. The US Department of Health and Human Services lists the atoll (with the old spelling and, thus, not current with the accepted local style) as an isolated/hardship site,<sup>8</sup> and the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources lists it as a protected area (Dahl 1986, 30). These all lay out a picture of a small, remote, obscure place isolated from much of the rest

of the world and in need of protection. From an outside perspective, at least, this is certainly a version of the reality of Pollap and neighboring islands, especially in comparison with many other parts of the world.

One might even construe the references to my anthropological work and the work of others scattered on the web as further evidence of the remoteness and obscurity of the island tinged with the notions of it being an exotic place.<sup>9</sup> After all, that's the stereotype of what anthropologists do. Furthermore, even though much of this scholarly work examines culture change and the impact of contact with a series of foreign administration, there is still a strong thread of tradition and emphasis on local efforts to retain an older way of life that runs through those publications. The stress tends to rest on what is unusual and traditional about the island. At least it accords some agency to the islanders with analyses of ways they have been negotiating a position for themselves in the contemporary world, something that is absent in more popular representations.

### **Unique and Traditional**

These days it is not just outsiders posting on the internet. Pollapese themselves have taken advantage of internet opportunities to reflect on their home and articulate their vision of their way of life. Many have been immigrating to the United States for schooling and for work and learning to use the internet. Their voices become mingled with others when examining imagery on websites. Obscure is certainly not the way the place is represented by the islanders themselves unless one thinks of "unique" or "special" as connotations of obscure. Certainly for Pollapese, obscure does not imply irrelevant but exceptional. For example, one site extolls the island of Pollap as follows: "Our way of living and lifestyle is very far different from all places' and island's lifestyles. . . ."<sup>10</sup> The same site highlights a sense of island unity: "there is one culture, one religion, one traditional lifestyle, one language." From my own ethnographic experience, I have learned how Pollapese present their community as being unified, in contrast to other places, where, for example, a community may be divided into different religious groups. They also speak with pride about having retained traditional ways that others have lost. Specific symbols Pollapese included on the web are their canoes and the style of dress, the latter of which is described as "the simplest way." We will see that the style of dress—loincloths for men and lavalavas for women—recurs in many non-islander representations as well, as do canoes along with navigational skill. The small size of the island is acknowledged on the islander site, but it is coupled with comments about the beauty of the place and the hospitality of the islanders: "you will find friendly people offering you the best

of our local food and coconuts. . . . So, come and enjoy visiting our small and beautiful island, Pollap Island.”

Other postings by Pollapese focus on longing for home and the beauty of the island, with “I miss my very beautiful island” being a common lament.<sup>11</sup> Although most postings are in that vein, an intriguing variant by one islander pointed out that they were going to lose their home once it sank (presumably referencing their awareness of news about global warming; see below) and that they should, therefore, return at least to visit and drink coconut toddy (for an extended discussion of media representations of climate change, see Kempf, this volume). Specific evidence for beauty tends to be beaches: “your sparkling white sand,” for example, and “your white beaches.” Peace emerged a couple of times: “your peaceful sweet touch” and “the most peaceful island that no one compares to.” I know from fieldwork that maintaining “peace” (i.e., fostering harmonious relationships) is highly valued. Pollapese often tout their unity, and they believe this to be a sign of their ability to maintain such good relationships. Pollap as a place, as an island, appears also to subsume people such that the land is said to be “the place for dad and mom” and “the place of my ancestors.” It is also a “place of tradition,” in line with the idea that their ways are unique and special, in part because of having retained traditional ways. (See McGavin, this volume, on the influence of non-Pacific-Islander imagery of the Pacific on Pacific Islanders.)

In a posting by islanders about Pollap’s first Peace Corps volunteer, islander traditional dress emerges again as a key symbol, as does the contrast between Pollapese and other islanders.<sup>12</sup> The article points out that volunteers were warned not to return to the port town wearing a loincloth, the Pollapese male dress and a custom abandoned years earlier in the central islands. Yet the volunteer nonetheless followed Pollapese custom, not only wearing the loincloth on the island but also on the ship as it arrived at the dock, marking him as at least partially Pollapese. According to the post, although the man “was white on the outside, he was definitely brown on the inside. He loved Pulap and never forgot it!”

Not surprisingly, Peace Corps volunteers themselves comment on customs contrasting with their own. Generosity unlike what is found in capitalist America is one example; a returned volunteer described the “odd custom on Pollap which goes something like—if a person of higher status tells you they like something of yours, you are obligated to give that something to the person.”<sup>13</sup> In shorter postings, others commented on the generosity of their host families and the relationships built with them.<sup>14</sup> I found a few attempts to connect with other volunteers and discuss potentially shared experiences and relationships.

These attempts to connect along with other aspects of postings by and about Peace Corps volunteers imply or outright state that their relationships and experiences with Pollapese changed them, especially the extent to which they adopted Pollapese ways. The volunteer who arrived in town with a loincloth is, in another posting, described by islanders admiringly for violating Peace Corps policy by sailing with Pollapese.<sup>15</sup> This is one of the articles that explicitly mentions a spiritual change: “His life, view of life, the way he lived his life; it all changed as a result of his living and teaching there. . . .” And “Pulap became [his] ‘spiritual home’—as it did for many of the first Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) who were fortunate enough to have the gift of living in remote islands with knowledgeable people who are kind and gracious.”

A former volunteer who worked both in the Western Islands, which includes Pollap, and Namonuito, to the north, in describing the area also focuses on its difference from other places, at least in Chuuk, pointing out that others have great difficulty understanding their language and that the islanders retain traditional dress (Ridgell 1991, 3). Dress is often cited as an example of retention of tradition (as is navigation), perhaps because it is so visible and because it violates western notions of modesty. The male loincloth reveals a man’s buttocks, and the female lavalava reveals a woman’s breasts. What better symbol of difference? Furthermore, the way of life is presented as “simplified” (Ridgell 1991, 3), lacking electricity, plumbing, toilets, and telephones, and with little access to money. The description verges on romanticizing a simplified way of life rather than decrying the poverty of the islands.

I was a Peace Corps Volunteer myself, although not on Pollap, but Onoun, in the Namonuito Atoll to the north of Pollap. Many of my students were Pollapese, however, as was the principal at the junior high school where I taught. My own writing in the form of letters, journals, and a brief discussion in one publication (Flinn 1998:97–102) reflects many of the same themes. I wanted to live in the most “traditional” site and to work with people as different from me as possible, living another way of life, and in a remote site. I conflated being remote with being more traditional and having undergone less change through contact with western change agents. Ideally I wanted to work on Pollap or one of the other Western Islands, but those were not options. Onoun was spoken of as the most traditional of the available sites, and one of the major pieces of evidence provided had to do with dress: women still wore lavalavas and men still wore loincloths.

These texts from Peace Corps volunteers say at least as much about their writers as they do the islanders. Pervading these texts runs a yearning for an idyllic alternative to American life, for a simpler life less encumbered with

material goods and more laden with warm, generous relationships (see Lutkehaus, this volume). Furthermore, the Peace Corps volunteer texts in particular resemble aspects of the text written by the Civil Affairs Officer in the Marshall Islands, discussed by Carucci (this volume). The authors tend to idealize a way of life unavailable in the United States, a way of life steeped in traditions in danger of being lost or overtaken by western ways, and a place inhabited by gracious and considerate native people. They posit a people living out of time in spiritual harmony and innocence.

### **Timeless and Exotic Tourist Paradise**

Exotic locales draw more than Peace Corps volunteers and anthropologists; they also draw tourists (see Pigliasco, this volume). Places such as Hawai'i and Tahiti are the well-known Pacific tropical vacation spots, but little-known places have allure for tourists as well. Obscure may well even be part of the attraction for some. Pollap is not a common tourist destination, small and remote as it is, but one site touting a cruise that would include it, describes the beauty of the island in ways that evoke a tropical paradise: "a perfect islet with a shallow aquamarine lagoon to our right and the deep indigo Pacific to our left."<sup>16</sup> A mention is also made of the place being "traditional," but the main point about their tradition is Pollapese skill in navigation and canoe construction. Mention of Pollapese expertise pales in comparison, however, with commentary about the "men of Satawal, famed for their mastery of ocean navigation without the use of instruments, [who] still voyage between the islands of Micronesia in outrigger canoes, steering by the sun, stars, and swells," probably because of the fame of Mau Piailug. Pollap is portrayed as part of the area in which these skills are still alive and practiced. Mau Piailug shared this knowledge with Hawaiians and made possible the famed voyages of the Hokule'a. Thus at least the navigational skills of this obscure part of the world became both noticed and valued by outsiders.

The remoteness may be framed as an attraction for some travelers as "remote" becomes cast as "exotic": "Exotic Micronesia Cruise Tours Departing Soon."<sup>17</sup> In this particular article, the cruise becomes labeled an "expedition," and "each far-flung island destination offers rare opportunities for discovery, including historical sites, incomparable diving and rarely visited cultures." In other words, isolated, remote, and obscure all become opportunities for tourists to join the ranks of explorers (for a discussion of one such explorer, see Lepowsky, this issue), because the text hints at a relatively untouched and unchanging way of life in these places. A description of the atoll found in a couple of travel sites likewise implies tradition, exotic ways, and timelessness: "Aside from being renowned navigators, the inhabitants

of Pulap Atoll are known for their colorful time-honored dances and finely made handicrafts. Go snorkeling and diving and scan for inhabitants of the reef including sharks, turtles, manta rays and a profusion of brightly colored fish.<sup>18</sup>

Even a commercial company with tours focusing on diving advertises in the same vein, speaking of the outer islands, including Pollap, as “abound with the pristine beauty and isolation of Oceania,” again turning isolation into an attraction and romanticizing a “pristine beauty” supposedly untainted by the outside world. In fact, the ad continues with, “Each island awaits our visits with welcoming anticipations and are ready to show onboard guests the magic and wonders that hold these people to their distant shores so far removed from the intense bustle of a modern world.”<sup>19</sup> These conditions supposedly then create a “dream cruise.” The islanders are romanticized as well: “Make new friends with the warm, easy-going natives of Pulap Atoll, . . .”<sup>20</sup> Reports about one of these dive trips very explicitly describes dancing and “traditional” dress, with the suggestion of the exotic, and in much more detail than the diving:

The complete populace of about 800 Pulapese gathered at their field & meeting house, & shortly afterwards a big group of male dancers led off with traditional chanting & dancing, dressed in various attires of coconut fronds & the male ‘thu’ or loin cloth. The dancing soon picked up tempo & got everyone stirred into cheering & applause. The men were followed by a large group of approximately 30 women. This group continued the entertainment for another 1½ hours dressed in hand-made lava-lava’s around their hips & many types of mwar-mwars on their heads & over their bare breasts.<sup>21</sup>

Mentioning women’s hips and bare breasts heightens not only the exoticness but implies some sort of natural sexuality.

In the same vein, Zegrahm Expeditions touts its company’s ability to take people to “remote and intriguing destinations,” including Pollap, where tourists can have an “adventure” and find “tiny islets” (where small becomes an attraction in and of itself) and “emerald lagoons.”<sup>22</sup> At times, descriptions given for Pollap have even been applied elsewhere—to more developed and less isolated places such as Tonowas, in Chuuk Lagoon—presumably to heighten the appeal of the latter.<sup>23</sup>

Other types of sites reinforce this timeless, traditional, and exotic image: one displays a pounding stone with a note about “traditional” uses,<sup>24</sup> and other sites with photographs for sale portray an idealized exotic tropical paradise. Most of these photographs are by Wolfgang Kaehler,<sup>25</sup> with some by Anthony



Marais,<sup>26</sup> and they present an image of Pollap as a traditional place seemingly untouched by the rest of the world and full of almost stereotypical exotic Pacific Islander imagery: the bare-breasted maiden, the man in a loincloth, dancers in grass skirts and flowers, a thatched boathouse. The captions routinely speak of “traditional” and “native”: traditional dance, native boys, traditional dress, native girl. Each caption has at least one, if not both, of those labels. There are only rare photographs of the cement or wood houses and none of the Catholic church or elementary school representing the influence of the outside world. Rather, coconut trees along the beach with the lagoon in the background, smiling girls wearing flower garlands, other girls assembling garlands, a canoe being built, thatched roofs—these are the selections portrayed along with dancing and “natives.” A minor point but nonetheless telling is the old spelling of the island, “Pulap,” in each caption rather than the up-to-date “Pollap.” The message is of a place lost in time, unaffected by the outside world.

The Google search also picked up the use of one of Kaehler’s photographs in a psychology textbook in a chapter on emotion right beside the section labeled “Happiness.” Although the photo itself is not one of domestic life but rather of islanders hanging out intrigued with the visitors who have presumably arrived with the photographer, the caption nonetheless explains that “domestic violence is rare” probably because “family life takes place in the open” and “relatives and neighbors who witness angry outbursts can step in” (Myers 2004, 522). This certainly romanticizes the situation, especially as the photo sits next to the word “happiness,” and it ignores the complexity of who is entitled to “step in” to deal with domestic abuse. This is all aside from the fact that the scene—abounding with people—is not one of domestic life and does not portray an extended family.

These photographs by professional photographers, many of which are for sale on the internet, stand in marked contrast to those taken by a Peace Corps volunteer and to the captions he chose. First of all, specific names are often attached to the people in the latter photos rather than the label “native.” And even when the volunteer visited nearby islands and did not record people’s names, the captions became “woman weaving a lavalava” or “man shaving” rather than “native woman in lavalava” or “native man shaving.”

Movie and television representations of Pacific Islanders discussed by others in the volume (Lipset, Schachter, Pearson, this volume) carry some of these same images of the tropical paradise, “native” customs, and family relationship. For example, movies display men in loincloths, topless women, outrigger canoes, generous chiefs, and a man kneeling to his sacred mother. These seem to be typical images of Pacific Island tradition, with an implied promise of a paradise—at least before being contaminated by outsiders—with

happy natives, a more free and open sexuality, and people busy with their quaint and colorful ways riding in canoes, dancing, and weaving flower garlands.

### Source of Expertise

Many of the travel sites reference the atoll as a place where traditional canoe building and navigation are still practiced, and a number of other sites not explicitly dealing with travel focus on the navigational tradition of the island, thus recognizing at least this area of expertise on the part of Pollapese. Pollap is mentioned as the founder of the Werieng school of navigation, such as in a 2007 Hawaiian newspaper article about Hawaiians to be initiated as navigators on Satawal, Pailug's home island.<sup>27</sup> The same article acknowledges that this master navigator learned from the Werieng school. A religion wiki mentions Pollap ("or nearby islands") as the place where the initiation ceremony originated,<sup>28</sup> and an article from the Bishop Museum also mentions Pollap as where a school of navigation originated,<sup>29</sup> but there is otherwise no mention of the island's connection with navigation or its recent ceremonies. Rather, the emphasis is largely on Mau Pailug of Satawal and his teaching of Hawaiians.<sup>30</sup> A Wikipedia article about Chuuk<sup>31</sup> has a brief mention of Pollap. Although it points out the remoteness of the place, the main point is navigation: Pollap and nearby Polowat "are considered to have some of the best navigators and ocean-going outrigger canoes in the Pacific," and the area has two ongoing schools of navigation, including Werieng.

A ceremony that took place on Pollap to initiate navigators was reported at least by the Micronesian government in 2006.<sup>32</sup> Reference can also be found to earlier ceremonies beginning in the 1990s, decades after the practice had seemingly been abandoned. The ceremony had been deemed pagan, but with resurgence in pride in their island's heritage and perhaps also because of outside recognition of the value of their expertise, the ceremony had been revived. The language in the web article is revealing, however, because the verb used is "ordained" rather than the word "initiated" that I'd heard used by Pollapese speaking English in connection with this ritual and in at least some articles.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps "initiation" has too many connotations of paganism whereas "ordination" implies a consistency with western religion. The word "tradition" is used several times, reinforcing the image of the place as a repository of old customs.

Although the traditional navigation is a type of expertise, the emphasis in the websites is on the knowledge almost as an abstract entity and one that has been passed down unchanging, almost mechanically, from one generation to

the next. A sense of agency seems to be lacking, and there seems to be no place for creativity. It verges on condescending about these clever natives who have held on to exotic customs.

The only other mentions I found of islander expertise recognized twenty-five years of service of a Pollapese nun<sup>34</sup> and the linguistic work of Paulina Yourupi at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. At least in these two instances, we see a focus on individual Pollapese and their accomplishments. The latter woman has posted some information about herself and the Pollapese language.<sup>35</sup> A couple of articles about the language based on work she supervised appear,<sup>36</sup> as does an article about her being a recipient of an Endangered Language Fund award to develop a Pollapese orthography and a database of Pollapese language materials.<sup>37</sup> This certainly acknowledges agency on the part of an educated islander while at the same time highlighting the remoteness of the place. At least in this context of endangered languages, obscurity does not equate with irrelevance.

### **Impoverished and Helpless**

In other types of articles, however, Pollap is portrayed as poor, endangered, battered by natural disasters, susceptible to epidemics—and essentially powerless to deal with these problems on its own. Apparently lacking in relevant abilities, the islanders are in need of external assistance and expertise. Outer Islands Partnership, for example, mentions how remote and isolated places such as Pollap have “very little contact with the outside world except for the occasional government-run boat that comes twice a year,”<sup>38</sup> seemingly oblivious to the very navigational activity touted by other sites. The “outside world” doesn’t even appear to include neighboring islands or other outer atolls. Instead, the nearest “outside” locations seem to be the westernized port towns. Furthermore, Pollap, along with its neighbors, is listed as among “the most impoverished.” As evidence, the islanders are said to “have very little access to the educational, health care, and economic development opportunities which are concentrated in the main commercial centers.” About the only positive statement, and one that posits at least some agency, concerns family: “Their strong familial ties enable them to thrive amidst the poverty.” “Lack of jobs” is cited as a sign of poverty, but without mention of their ability to feed themselves with subsistence horticulture and fishing or to build houses from local materials. “No health clinics” is cited as another sign, despite the presence of trained health aides and an array of indigenous medications and therapeutic practices. There is also no mention of efforts of local islanders to secure funds for local development projects, such as the desalinization pump Pollapese leaders managed to obtain and have installed

to contend with the possibility of another drought. Here obscure implies non-western, lacking western markers of societal well-being, and therefore poor and in need of external assistance.

A mission website lauding the efforts of one of their doctors in saving the life of a Pollap child wrote that since the parents were “living on an isolated island, they had no way to communicate their need for help.”<sup>39</sup> This is despite the fact that the islanders can radio the main island for assistance, which may come in the form of medical advice, a physician sent to the island, or a ship called to bring a patient into the hospital. Pollapese also consult islanders with medical training on their own and nearby islands.

Pollapese are also portrayed as helpless victims of disasters in websites and news articles on the web. For example, a storm “battered” the island, the ocean “washed over” it, and an epidemic “hit” the community. These articles tend to use strong verbs for an external force acting on the island, and usually the object is indeed the island rather than islanders. In an article about a typhoon (*New York Times* November 29, 1990, p. A17), the typhoon “hit Micronesia homes,” “battered” the islands, and “destroyed nearly every home on Pulap.” And the only mention of the impact on the people was that the islanders were left “homeless.” Even more telling, however, is that there was no mention of efforts islanders took to protect themselves or to recover. They were victims and nothing more.

Even though Pollap is cited as the origin of a school of navigation in many sites and its islanders touted as knowledgeable about canoes and navigation in the travel sites, sailing disasters in which Pollapese had to be rescued are highlighted in other sites.<sup>40</sup> Strong, active verbs are again associated with outsiders and with forces—but not with the islanders: “Misadventure Overcomes Twenty-five Canoemen from Pulap: Tragedy at Sea” and “a heavy storm struck,” for example. About the strongest statement made with Pollapese as the subject is that “the men bailed frantically,” in which “frantically” serves to weaken a sense of deliberate Pollapese agency. And rather than explore any focused, strategic, deliberate actions, based on knowledge, skill, and experience that the sailors made, the article instead characterizes them as passive: “the crews were forced to lash down their masts and sails” and “all were half swamped by the waves” and the “canoes were scattered.” When action is actually ascribed to Pollapese, it trivializes the them: the sailors “indicated their preference to proceed to the Truk District center rather than to be dropped at their home island, as they wished to procure cigarettes.” An article from 1999 mentions the National Guard “rescuing” four Pollapese, again without any reference to actions on the part of the sailors themselves to contend with their predicament.<sup>41</sup> Similar language can be found with regard to an attempted rescue in 2009.<sup>42</sup>

Another type of disaster, discussed in analogous fashion, is epidemics. One article references the 1982 outbreak of cholera which began on Pollap and neighboring islands and in which eleven people died.<sup>43</sup> The language of the article is almost exclusively passive so that it is unclear who has agency. For example, it mentions “control measures” but not who promulgated or implemented them. A flu outbreak was discussed in much stronger language: it “hit” Pollap in 2003 and “more than a hundred and sixty people . . . are said to be suffering from the illness,”<sup>44</sup> and no mention is made of local efforts to deal with the situation. Rather, only an external foundation on Guam is mentioned as addressing the problem by raising money to send drugs. Even when the islanders are spoken of in active terms, they are still portrayed as victims: “Pollap residents will have to journey by motorboat to pick up the supplies.” It may be subtle, but “will have to journey” accords less agency even than the simple “will journey” or “can journey.” Despite other articles about the navigational skills of these islanders, Pollapese are here portrayed as having to resort to a difficult endeavor.

Several articles reference global warming, rising sea levels, and disappearing atolls. In fact, searching “Pulap Atoll” on Google news archives yielded eight articles, six of which are from the summer of 2007 and variants on the same story of a global warming problem. The threatened sites are described as “idyllic picture postcard flat coral islets of beach and palm trees.”<sup>45</sup> And a comment following the article lamented that “many a low lying tropical paradise will be sadly lost.” The problem is that “the ocean has washed over Pulap Atoll” and “salt water has killed the taro plants.” Historically when disaster has struck, neighbors assist, but the article only mentions “disaster teams” bringing assistance. External forces strike the island—a place that is isolated and idyllic, inhabited by lovely islanders who care about their children and families but are helpless in the face of these forces. Either they lack western training or their own local ways are ineffective, so that they are in need of outside assistance. It is as though they are children, relatively innocent, unskilled, and uneducated, who need the benevolent caretaking of parents.

Other articles and sites contribute to this image of the islanders being in need. A presentation about “Impacts of Climate Change on Coastal Infrastructures” with some photographs of Pollapese seawalls (deemed inadequate) cites problems with local activity, including “inadequate knowledge,” “crude construction,” and the ineffectiveness of “traditional systems.”<sup>46</sup> Another article reports on outer islanders needing a ship to come provide medical and dental care.<sup>47</sup> Yet another laments the situation of an elementary school Pollapese girl in Florida being unprepared for reading.<sup>48</sup>

### Conclusion

What sort of composite image of Pollap emerges from these nonscholarly representations? The internet and various websites provide for a wide variety of voices and communication with a vast audience. Some postings may be news articles, others personal musings; some voices come from islanders, others from visitors, sojourners, or even strangers. These sites are likely to be the major source of information about the island, given the role of the internet in our society. Seen through a variety of lenses on the web, then, what sort of a place is Pollap? Certainly it is portrayed as small, remote, and isolated, and these traits lend themselves to both romantic and realistic castings. Pollap at times is obscure in the sense of being irrelevant, but for some people, such as Peace Corps volunteers, it is a refuge from a harried, materialist way of life and a catalyst for spiritual change. One lens reveals a romantic and idyllic island, with the warm, blue waters and stretch of beaches, another a place of intrigue, so clearly representing another way of life, a simpler way of life. The style of dress, with its undertones of sexuality, is a visible symbol, both for outsiders and for islanders themselves. Canoes and navigation represent areas of knowledge and skill valued by outsiders. The place is represented as a repository of traditional knowledge, contributing to a romantic image; it does not mark them as savage or backward but as guardians of knowledge lost to others. Mau and Satawal have garnered most of the publicity, but Pollap's role is nonetheless frequently acknowledged. In the absence of Mau's endeavors and accomplishments, however, it is doubtful the island would have received such attention.

Yet there is almost a museum quality to the navigational abilities. Islander expertise is relegated to a timeless era, with islanders tied to tradition rather than engaged with the modern world, experts in their own ways but unsophisticated in western ones. Furthermore, there is little connection made between the navigational abilities and ties, connections, travel, and trade among the islands. The ocean remains as a barrier, isolating islanders, rather than serving as roadways connecting them. Thus, many other representations of Pollap highlight the backwardness of the island. Using conventional wisdom about modernization and development, Pollap is cast as poor because it lacks so much. A Peace Corps volunteer might romanticize this as a simple life, but missions and development organizations cast it as poverty.

In sum, Pollapese in these articles are not represented as actors. Rather, they are at the mercy of epidemics, global warming, and typhoons. They seem to be incapable of dealing with any of these catastrophes themselves or with the help of neighboring islanders. Active verbs are reserved for the external forces and for the foreigners planning or carrying out the necessary

assistance. Romantic islands with bare-breasted maidens, white beaches, balmy weather, a slow pace of life, exotic customs, sailing canoes, and close families make for great vacations or life-altering experiences for intrepid Peace Corps volunteers (and presumably anthropologists as well), but these islanders are also seen as almost caught in the past, somewhat naive and innocent, living a simple, noble way of life, and thus lacking in the ability and knowledge to contend with problems that threaten this way of life. The beauty of the place is endangered by global warming and storms, the people themselves are susceptible to illness, and traditions are threatened by outside encroachment, and the image emerging from these internet sites is that help—if it comes—arrives from the outside. Like intelligent but innocent children, unskilled in the ways of the world, they need guidance from those with more experience. They are not accorded agency, despite—or perhaps because of—the supposed idyllic, harmonious, and traditional way of life.

### NOTES

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