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COMMAS IN MICROCOSM: THE MOVEMENT OF SOUTHWEST ISLANDERS TO PALAU, MICRONESIA

Robert K. McKnight

INTRODUCTION

In order to create a model industrial nation in Micronesia it has frequently been suggested that the small, outer-island populations should be relocated to reside on the few larger high islands. This, it is argued, will provide the proper market and labor conditions from which industrialization can emerge. A concentration of Micronesia's dispersed populations is a key recommendation in one of the recent economic surveys of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, the Nathan Report or, more formally, the *Economic Development Plan for Micronesia* (Nathan 1966). Aside from the economic advantages of a labor pool and an enhanced market, relocation is advocated as a means to accomplish ethnocide and engineer Micronesian unity. The following is a typical passage in which these social objectives are associated with the economic advantage of relocation:

The economic development advantages of being able to pull together a labor force from throughout Micronesia . . . will also be of benefit to the people—both those who move and those who stay at home. This kind of mobility can facilitate the creation of a Micronesian unity to replace the present somewhat artificial association of a dozen or so somewhat similar nevertheless distinctly different cultural, political and economic entities. Increased mobility can speed the replacement of local particularism with a cohesive Micronesia. [Nathan 1966: 100]

Elsewhere the plan calls for the introduction of non-Micronesian labor, presumably Asian, and the continued long-term supervision of the developmental process by American administrative and managerial personnel in increased numbers.

The Nathan Report, one learns from various sources in the Trust Territory administration, is gathering dust, its specifics largely ignored. Nonetheless current practice, planned or adopted out of convenience, provides maximum public service (hence assorted ancillary "urban" conditions) only at the six district administrative centers in the Trust Territory, all but one located on a high island. This practice closely resembles the relocation tactic urged in the Nathan Report. The motives voiced by advocates of relocation and concentrated public services are also likely to be identical; aside from logistic convenience, the concentration of the various populations in a few locations, it is believed, will enhance Micronesian unity and, as the Nathan Report suggests, speed the disappearance of "ancient customs and traditions" (Nathan 1966: 100).

This model, whether it is a conscious adaptation from the Nathan Report or not, embodies assumptions that are theoretically unsound and are contradicted by data in Micronesia and elsewhere (for instance, the resettlement scheme for Tokelauans in New Zealand).

First, the notion that the association of Micronesian cultural, political, and economic entities is "artificial" belies the historical facts of colonial experience. Colonial systems, however contrived and arbitrary they may once have been, are in fact systems. As such they effect changes and realignments in contact and communication among the various sociopolitical systems they subsume.

Second, a well-recognized feature of colonial systems is that they tend to maintain, by implicit or paralegal policies of administration, indigenous sociopolitical units (tribes, clans, villages, castaways, or whatever) which might otherwise have disappeared through violence, absorption, or assimilation by dominant groups or as a result of their own internal processes. In this sense, colonial systems might be thought of as artificial. The colonial situation in Micronesia is not exceptional; rather than homogenization, more sharply defined ethnic boundaries are evident and may be expected to continue as a feature of population concentration.

Third, it follows therefore that it is difficult to assume that ancient customs and traditions will disappear or that changes in these customs and traditions will in fact somehow correlate with the disappearance of "extra-legal restrictions to individual mobility within the Trust Territory" (Nathan 1966:100). Such restrictions on movement are normative and are the consequence of ethnic boundaries regardless of the changing content of such ethnic entities. Barth (1969) has demonstrated that the maintenance of ethnic boundaries is quite independent of the nature of the cultures, or the changes in the cultures, of the ethnic groups involved. Furthermore, Leach (1954) has shown that the maintenance of ethnic boundaries is independent of the extent to which people regularly cross such boundaries, even though the mobile ones may elect to "change" their ethnic identity as they move between groups.

These three points are obviously closely related. Critical to each is a recognition that colonial administrations inhibit the emergence of various asymmetrical relations among independent social units and impose another kind of asymmetry, the subordination of all such units to the colonial administration itself. By assuring peace and protecting the identity of each social unit, not only is assimilation of one unit by another highly improbable, but the former asymmetry among the various units involved is diminished. Each group under the colonial umbrella will be engaged in a process of relatively autonomous adaptation to the colonial administration and its policies, mirroring, perhaps, the colonial power in some respects but also reflecting its own cultural past. Ancient customs and traditions may or may not disappear; certainly adaptive changes may be expected. However, ethnic boundaries will remain intact and the anticipated ethnocide will not occur. It follows, then, that the kind of happy homogenization portrayed in the Nathan Report is, in fact, not possible in Micronesia as long as the colonial administration maintains itself as a dominant system controlling the social system it has created or, in the case of Micronesia, inherited.

This chapter demonstrates these theoretical formulations through a study of the relations between Palauans and a resettled community of people from the islands southwest of Palau, as these relationships have been mediated by the colonial governments that have controlled Micronesia.

THE CULTURAL SETTING

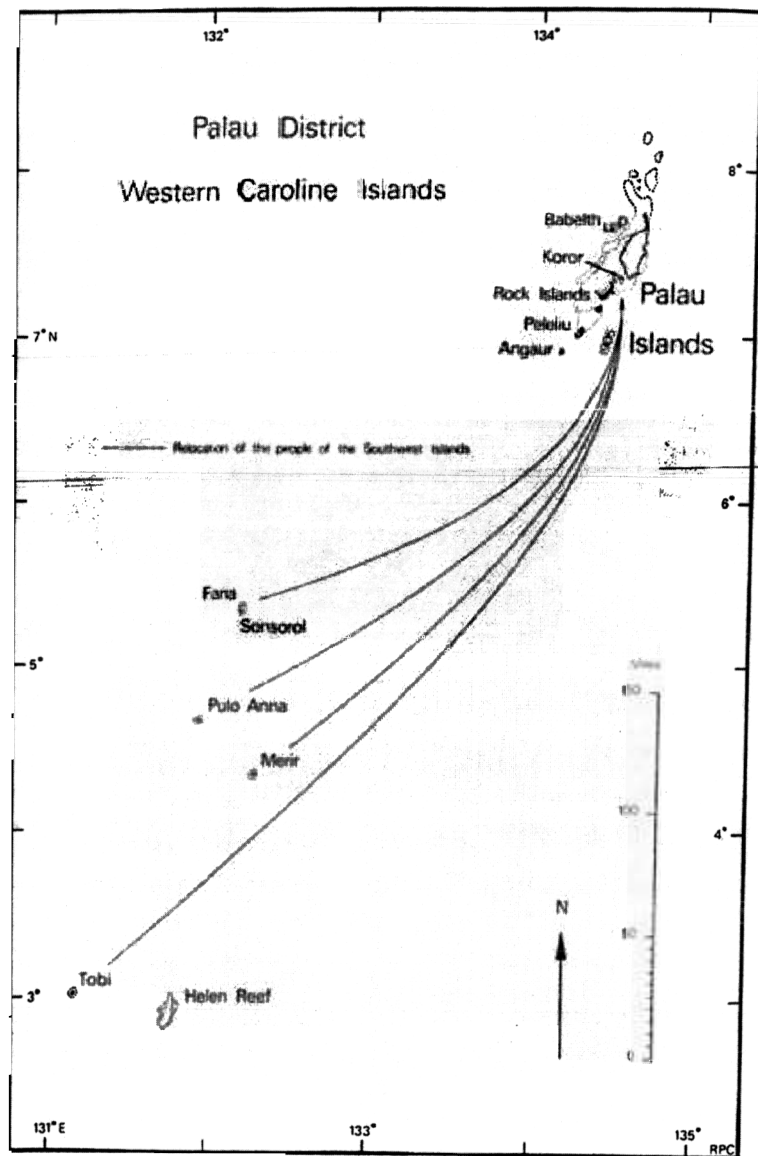
In the sea to the southwest of the Pelews there are a number of isolated small islands concerning which little is known. Their lack of importance commercially and politically is indicated by the fact that they have not even received a group name to characterize them, and their positions upon the chart are only approximate. Their individual names are North and South Sonsorol, Warren Hastings, Current and Lord North Islands, with some alternative names given them by different navigators who have sighted them. [Hobbs 1923:105]

The five islands and an atoll south of Palau in the southwestern corner of Micronesia remain almost as remote and nameless today as they were when described by William Hobbs some fifty years ago. As last known to the writer in 1965, the islands and their populations were as follows, moving generally southward from Palau: Fana, about 8; Sonsorol, about 70; Pulo Ana, about 10; Merir, uninhabited; Tobi, about 100; and Helen Reef, uninhabited. (See map 1.) Populations change, as we shall see, through the movement of people to and from Palau. Visits from island to island among the Southwest Islanders are rare.

Yet the Southwest Islanders do share a sense of commonality. Though their languages differ in dialect, they can converse with one another. Though there are evident physical differences (Tobians tend to be short and slight, Sonsorolese are taller and fleshier), they recognize a common ancestral origin. Furthermore, they are very much aware that they are viewed as a group by visiting Palauans and they can validate this view, in many respects, by common contrasts with Palauan society.

Within the range of variation characterizing Micronesian societies few boundaries are wider than that distinguishing the social systems of Palau and the Southwest Islands. To put the Southwest Islands on a more familiar cultural map, they are linguistically and, for most purposes, culturally derivative from Ulithi. Specifically, the differences between Palau and the Southwest Islands may be highlighted as follows.

Palauan political organization, with elaborate dual organizations at all levels, from the 'side-thighs' of the resident clans to the 'side-heavens' of the island groups, and with a host of specialized political functionaries, culminates in an arrangement that approaches a semistate with numerous communities bound loosely



Map Movement of Southwest Islanders to Palau.

MOVEMENT OF SOUTHWEST ISLANDERS TO PALAU

together under the dominance of certain ranking villages (see McKnight 1960). If the Palauan population, prior to contact and decimation, numbered fifty thousand persons, then rather tightly controlled village collectivities (three to seven or more villages) comprehended as many as three to four thousand persons, while wider and looser patterns of political domination comprehended one-half or more of the total population.

The Southwest Island societies are best represented as communities of lineages. Each lineage maintains considerable autonomy in a network of inherited, lineage-based specializations and economic reciprocities. On each island the community is bound together loosely through recognition of a *tamol* 'head' who bows to the consensus of lineage leadership. Populations on any one island probably never exceeded three hundred persons. In contrasting the political characteristics of Palau and the Southwest Islands, spokesmen for the latter sometimes refer to the political structure of a large ship as suitable for the Southwest Islands. Debating the merits of an administered program of political development calling for the election of magistrates, a Sonsorolese spokesman pondered the propriety of electing the captain of a ship.

Of structural importance in both Palau and the Southwest Islands are matrilineal descent groups. However, Palauan matriliney extends to the inheritance of political titles while this is generally not the case in the Southwest Islands. In condensed terms, the *dui* 'title' in Palau passes from holder to sister's son and the authority of political office remains in the maternal clan. Among the Southwest Islanders the island 'head' position is inherited by the holder's son; hence the authority of political office moves from one matrilineage to another with each succeeding title generation. The Southwest Islanders have argued that their political system is more democratic than the American and Palauan systems, since the authority of a group does not extend beyond the tenure of one 'head'.

As the Western court system becomes institutionalized, with community judges bound largely to Western law, comparisons between the societies in terms of resolving civil disputes will become more important. In Palau such disputes (now more often handled by Western courts) were formerly adjudicated by a special titleholder in large communities or, in the case of small communities, by a council of titled elders. Elaborate payments of money (*ceram-*

ic bracelet pieces or glass beads) were called into play as part of the settlement when violence could be avoided. In the Southwest Islands, individual disputes (adultery is the usual context) are disposed of with considerable informality (no community judges have yet been installed). The offended party is expected to attract community attention with considerable noisemaking and shouted threats, gathering a host of attention before he confronts the offender. Under these circumstances, a crowd gathers and the principals are restrained until elders of the community, through the council of lineage leaders, arrive at some solution. Payment in red ocher may occur in the resolution of disputes, but the use of red ocher is far more specialized and restricted than is Palauan ceramic and glass money.

Cross-cousin marriage, considered appropriate in the small Southwest Island communities, may be outlawed as incestuous in Palau. In one instance, Palauan courts ruled that a Pulo Ana couple could live together as husband and wife on their native island but must live separately when residing in Palau.

Marriage in Palau initiates an exchange of money and food centered on the wife, who is successful in her role insofar as she intrigues and seduces her husband and his clan into generous payments of money to her clan. A Palauan marriage to a Southwest Islander precludes the emergence of the economic cycle on which the success of the Palauan nuclear family depends. Generally speaking, a marriage in Palau to a near relative, affinal or otherwise, tends to be viewed as economically nonproductive and to a certain extent incestuous. Hence while Palauans regard some Southwest Island marriages as incestuous, Southwest Islanders view marriage in Palau as a rather exploitive economic relationship.

In Palau, the division of labor between the sexes is more specialized than in the Southwest Islands. In Palau, for example, women are the agriculturists. Palauan men may enter the taro gardens only with the consent of the women working there. Male agricultural labor in Palau is restricted to major construction or maintenance tasks associated with complex irrigation systems in the taro gardens. In sharp contrast, the man in the Southwest Islands is a competent gardener and works the crops by himself or in the company of his wife. This fact contributes to the wide cultural gap between Palauans and Southwest Islanders. Palauans do not believe

that Southwest Island men can match the agricultural competence of Palauan women and consider them in general to be careless, primitive agriculturists.

The contrast between the Palauan and Southwest Island societies is most succinctly summarized as that of a large, complex, and differentiated social system opposed to small and relatively undifferentiated ones. The contrasts of scale and complexity are clearly recognized by the Palauans and have become the bases of the Palauan image of the Southwest Islanders.

RELOCATION IN PALAU

The Southwest Islanders are not strangers to the idea of relocation. Their creation myths are not tied to their present island homes; rather, the folk histories of the present populations trace various original navigator-founders back to Mogmog islet in Ulithi Atoll and to Yap. Versions of the migration story differ from island to island, though the overall impression received from informal inquiries is of a single migration that split up after arrival first at Sonsorol and subsequently at the southerly islands. At Merir, for example, the narrative recalls a separation of the founding party into one group that could not abide the heavy mosquito population and another that remained. On Pulo Ana the cult of the original navigator-founder has remained as the essence of the native religion.¹

In more recent times most (perhaps all) of the inhabitants of Fana, Sonsorol, Pulo Ana, and Merir were brought to Palau by the German colonial administration in about 1905 in the wake of a typhoon that is said to have ravaged all four islands. The typhoon, however, was probably not the whole reason for this relocation. The islands lie scattered along a distance from Sonsorol to Merir of about 70 miles, a rather wide swath for a typhoon, particularly this far south in the western end of the Pacific. The German administrators probably viewed logistics and economy in terms similar to those of many contemporary American administrators and used the typhoon as the decisive argument for relocation. The islands are relatively flat, particularly Sonsorol and Tobi; they are small (one-half mile long at most and a few hundred yards wide); they have a fringing reef rather than a protective lagoon; thus they give the appearance of great vulnerability to typhoon damage.

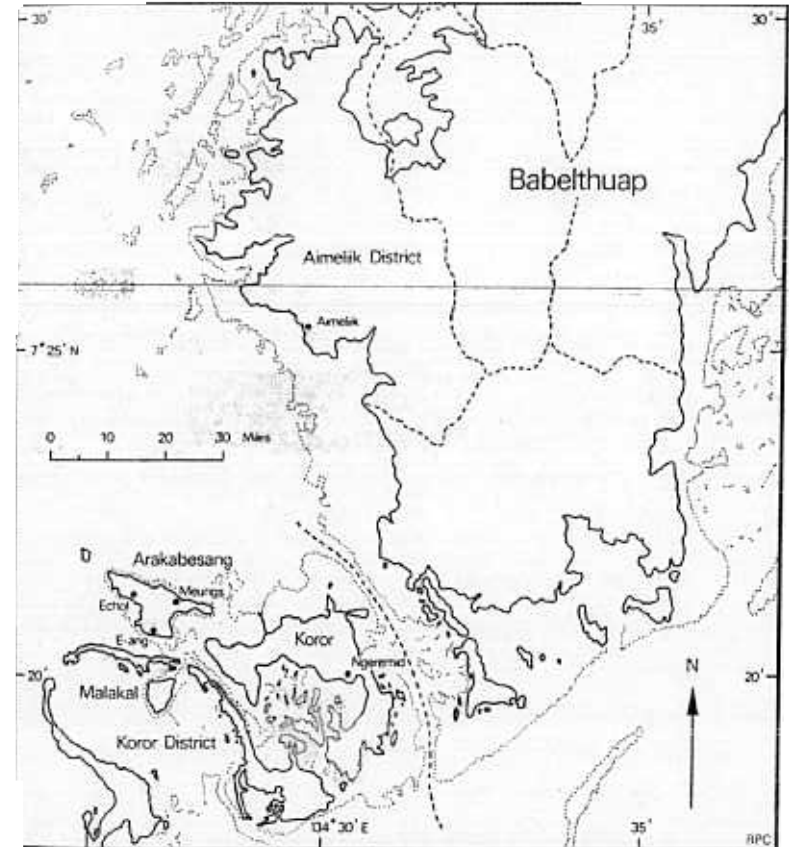
Although Tobi Islanders did not figure in the original relocation, they, too, soon appeared as individual migrants in the Palau community.

These islanders were granted land defined as public on the southern coast of Babelthuap, the largest island of the Palau group. What Palauans call *chutem era buai* 'public land' comprised almost the entire island except the built-up village areas and cultivated gardens. It was viewed as belonging to the ranking clans of the local villages, held as a reserve against unspecified public and private needs. Thus, while lacking well-defined boundaries, such land was not without local "ownership." All 'public land', however, was claimed by the colonial administration for the German government.

The location selected for the Southwest Islanders was in what is now Aimeliik Municipality (map 2), where the coast is deeply forested with mangrove. The soil, red clay with bauxite and minimal pockets of alluvium, contrasts sharply with the sandy and phosphate-rich soils of the Southwest Islands. In addition, the Aimeliik coast, with its dense mangrove fringe, was "inside out," for the islanders had lived close to the shore on their home islands with the mangrove forests behind them in the inland swamps. It would be hard to imagine two tropical coastal environments with greater ecological differences. It appears, in fact, that adaptation to this new setting by the Southwest Islanders was unsuccessful. In time, according to Palauan sources, it was noted that the transplanted community was dying. Another location was sought which would more nearly resemble the home environment of the relocated islanders.

This new locus was Echol, also defined as 'public land', on the western shore of Arakabesang Island, one of three inhabited islands of what is now Koror Municipality in central Palau (map 2). This area is practically devoid of mangrove forest and has sizable, intermittent beaches and some sandy soils. The beaches face a lagoon fringed by a reef and are backed by rather steep slopes with clay soils and volcanic rock outcrops. Ecologically, the region would seem to allow a more familiar kind of adaptation, and indeed the community survived there until World War I.

Repatriation to the Southwest Islands occurred early during the Japanese mandate administration. However, a community of Southwest Islanders remained in the Echol region until World



Map 2. Southwest Islander settlements on Palau.

War II when, along with all native residents of the southerly islands in the Palau group, they were dispersed by the Japanese military to security encampments throughout Babelthuap.

After World War II, as the scattered populations of central and southern Palau returned to their homes, the Southwest Islanders formed a community about a half mile from Echol, at a place called E-ang. The new location was more attractive because of the survival of Japanese-constructed homes, a dock, and a stream dam, but it has much the same general environmental characteristics as Echol.

Some time following World War II, a second small community, comprised mainly of Tobi Islanders, formed in a new location on Malakal Island (also within Koror Municipality). Although the legal status of both communities is questionable, the Malakal community has the more tenuous position of the two. Since about 1963, the American administration has considered zoning the whole of Malakal Island nonresidential in anticipation of industrial growth around the island's deep harbor, which services Koror Municipality. The Trust Territory's largest non-Micronesian commercial fishing operation is located on Malakal not far from the Tobi community, as are the district's fisheries cooperative, boat-building association, and fisheries training school facilities. Plans exist for developing a marine resources research institute on the same island. These facilities, in time, would doubtless crowd out the Tobi community regardless of zoning regulations.

Both of the Southwest Island communities in Palau are quite small. The larger one, at E-ang on Arakabesang, comprises about ten houses with a population varying between twenty and thirty. The smaller one on Malakal consists of three houses with fewer than ten residents.

The legal status of the present E-ang community is quite complex. As with the prior locations, Echol and coastal Aimeliik, the E-ang area appears to have been claimed by the German colonial administration as public land. Such lands were appropriated, in turn, by the Japanese government and, at the end of World War II, by the American government. Yet this appropriation of public lands has never been fully acknowledged by Palauan leaders who, in their own view, can transfer only use right in peaceful negotiation. Thus a conception of Palauan ownership persists through these various transfers from colonial to mandate to Trust Terri-

tory administrators. Though there has been no actual Trust Territory grant of use right to the Southwest Islanders for E-ang, recognition of the community by the American administration is fostered by contemporary Palauan leaders who continue to honor the original agreement made for the Southwest Islanders by the Germans. In Palauan terms, the use-right agreement for Echol has been transferred to E-ang.

Palauans realize that they have little real control over decisions regarding the use of government land. They are not, however, without some influence. In 1959, some residents from Tobi and Merir tried to gain land through the Trust Territory homestead program of government land in the region of Echol. Had they succeeded, the Southwest Island community in Palau would have achieved a permanency far beyond the present use-right concept. From the Southwest Islanders' point of view, they would have begun the process of establishing a new and separate segment of their home societies in Palau, a colony. The homesteading transaction was successfully opposed by local Palauan leaders. The Palauan reasoning is clear enough if one bears in mind the concept of clan ownership that precedes the Trust Territory concept of government land. Homesteading would alienate clan land and, in this instance, with Southwest Islanders rather than Palauans becoming the owners, the alienation would be total. Palauans are bonded to other Palauans by a complex network of relations including far more than land rights alone. Palauans who gain individual property through homesteading of government land can be relied on to conform to various social and economic constraints retaining, in most respects, their fit in Palauan society. No such constraints link Southwest Islanders to their Palauan hosts. Southwest Islanders in Palau are subordinated to neighboring villages by the fact that they reside on land that, in the Palauan conception, is owned by clans in the region. Hence the only formal control that Palauans have over the E-ang community has to do with land. No other significant structural feature mediates Southwest Islander and Palauan.

In Palauan terms the E-ang community is a use-right grant on clan land falling within the jurisdiction of the leadership of Meungs, a Palauan village on the opposite side of Arakabesang Island. The Palauan chief of Meungs village is recognized as the ranking chief of Arakabesang, including the Southwest Island

community at E-ang. The Southwest Islanders contribute food to feasts held at Meungs village and there appear to be some individual patterns of food gifts from Southwest Islanders to members of the Meungs community. This kind of gift, involving garden produce, is in keeping with the ethic of reciprocity as supported by both Palauans and Southwest Islanders and expresses compensation for the use of Palauan land. Beyond this, at least in Palauan political theory, the Southwest Islanders gain representation and protection through the authority of the chief of Meungs village in transactions with other Palauan communities. It should be emphasized that this is a form of political representation that the Southwest Island minority in Palau does not enjoy in the emerging Western political system.

In this context, if the Southwest Islanders were to acquire land through the mechanism of homesteading (which is gaining recognition in Palau as a form of individual ownership), the Palauan capacity to control the Southwest Island community, in a manner consistent with Palauan ideas about assimilation, would become negligible.

The effect of all this is, of course, a general sense of transience that is not really satisfactory for either party but is viable given the presence of the American administration. Excessive exploitation of the Southwest Islanders is inhibited and, as long as Palauans exercise some control over homesteading, the E-ang community is no particular threat. In the present context, no final solution is readily apparent. The presence of the American administration diverts the migrants and hosts from one another since each relates more to the American administration. The status quo, such as it is, persists.

THE PLACE OF THE SOUTHWEST ISLANDERS IN PALAU

Members of communities on Malakal and at E-ang return periodically to the Southwest Islands or are temporary visitors to Palau. The communities are not, therefore, fully detached from their home islands. Southwest Islanders in Palau retain the language and behavior relevant to their home communities, despite adapting as necessary to the fact of their residence in Palau.

E-ang and Malakal serve many purposes for the residents and transients. Perhaps the most evident function of the community

pertains to hospitalization. As in other parts of the Pacific, patients from outer islands are seldom sent alone to the hospital in Palau. An attendant or two from the home community accompany the lone patient, bring familiar foods to the hospital, and provide necessary attention during the period of recovery. After the patient is released from the hospital, he (more often she) and the attendants stay in one or the other Southwest Island community. Because of the considerable period between field trips (as long as four or five months), this stay in Palau can become quite extended. Both Southwest Island communities provide a base for subsistence gardening and fishing.

Pregnancies constitute a large proportion of hospitalizations. Pregnant women are generally accompanied by husbands and other immediate dependents and must remain in Palau for the three or four months between field trips. This may have quite an effect on home island populations. In 1959, for example, the community at Merir had a population of six—four elderly persons and one young married couple. When the young wife became pregnant, the elders, unable to attend to their own subsistence, accompanied the couple to Palau (completely depopulating Merir). Their return depended on the young husband who, up to the present, appears unwilling to leave Palau.

Schools in the Southwest Islands, always difficult to staff with teachers, are conducted through grade six only. Intermediate and high school students must reside in Koror, in Palau, during the school term or remain the year round since field trips are so widely spaced. Hence schoolchildren form another component of the Southwest Island communities. The majority (except those from Pulo Ana) attend the Catholic mission schools. They are not formally segregated, but the Southwest Island youths form a separate social group, walk to the schools as a group apart from Palauans, and interact with Palauan children mainly in conjunction with curriculum requirements only. Separation appears to be reinforced by parental attitudes in the home communities. In the Southwest Island communities a passive, almost submissive, adaptation is fostered as appropriate to the role of outsider and guest. In turn, Palauans have stereotypes of the Southwest Islanders as a subordinate minority group. It should be emphasized, however, that the social separation of Palauan and Southwest Islander, even if it is mixed with myth and untruth, is reinforced by and has the

effect of reinforcing real cultural differences which are maintained even as both groups take on the appearance of westernization. While they share roughly the same developmental goals (for instance, a strong determination to provide their children with maximum education), they approach these goals from their own cultural perspectives and structures. In what is essentially a colonial system of administration, development has mainly to do with the administering authority; each group relates to that authority separately and with a distinctive style.

Two of the Southwest Island communities, Tobi and Sonsorol, were chartered as municipalities in about 1959, with elected magistrates and with legislators seated in the Palau Legislature. The E-ang community frequently hosts political representatives from the home islands who must remain the several months between field trips to attend a week or two of legislative or committee meetings. The elected representatives are usually middle-aged adult leaders in their communities and typically express anxiety about the effect of prolonged absences on various home island programs: the school, the chronic drive to increase copra production, the pressure to succeed in cultivating newly introduced crops, and new opportunities in craft production. It may be noted here that the role of these legislators with respect to the E-ang and Malakal communities in Palau is ambiguous. From the standpoint of cultural identity, the Southwest Islanders in Palau are clearly constituencies of the elected representatives from the Southwest Islands; however, as we have seen, Palauan political practice tends to designate the Southwest Islanders in Palau as wards of the Palauan chief of neighboring Meungs village. In practice, in the emerging Western political system the interests of these communities will be, at best, underrepresented.

Field trip vessels serving the Southwest Islands bring with them a small assortment of retail goods for sale via Koror-based merchants, and both Sonsorol and Tobi have intermittently maintained island-based retail stores. However, special purchases or major buying (for example, lumber to build a house) must be undertaken in person in Koror. Hence another transient at E-ang is the buyer who must remain in Koror simply to make some complicated or major purchase. One such person was a Sonsorolese who resided in Koror, working odd jobs with the Catholic mission

long enough to purchase lumber from the Koror mills and return to build a Japanese-style home on Sonsorol.

Aside from hospitalization, school, legislation, and purchasing, there are many other reasons for visits to the E-ang community, including a sojourn with relatives who have remained in Palau on a more permanent basis. One final category will probably become more important in the future: cash employment. A pull toward economic opportunity in Koror reflects the forecast of economic studies such as the Nathan Report. What is perhaps less apparent is the characteristic structure of this employment. Southwest Islanders are not readily employable in the private, Palauan sectors of the economy (for instance, in the many wholesale and retail outlets for imported goods), and their opportunities for employment in agencies controlled by Palauans, whether private or public, are poor.

The Catholic mission, recognizing that the Southwest Islanders are generally Catholic, has made a special effort to provide jobs for those who want to or must spend time in Palau, but the potential is small and thus far limited largely to unskilled labor. Janitorial and yard work can sometimes be obtained with the Trust Territory administration or with American families. One islander has long been employed in the government hospital as a janitor and, when needed, as an interpreter. One or two others have found employment in other sectors of government where they are disadvantaged by the fact that their supervisors are most likely to be Palauan. As long as governmental services continue to expand within the context of American administration, however, the small number of Southwest Islanders who are pursuing college degrees can probably anticipate government employment on their return to the Palau District. Recently, one man returned to Palau from medical training in Fiji and is apparently being accorded respect as a medical practitioner in the highly westernized context of the hospital program.

In the private sector, no more than one or two persons have gained employment intermittently with the trading companies that purchase copra from the outer islands. Significantly, in this kind of work they find themselves in the difficult role of cultural intermediary in frequent disputes arising between merchants and the producers and exporters of copra on the field trip visits to the

islands. As employees, hence agents, of the trading companies and as members of Southwest Island societies, they are seldom able to maintain the trust of either side.

In E-ang itself some visitors and residents turn to handicraft, using Palauan hardwoods, as a source of income. The rigid ethnic boundary between Southwest Islanders and Palauans is reflected even here in the distinctive products and craft styles. In the main the Southwest Island artisans produce figures known throughout much of the Pacific as "Tobi monkey men." They do not produce, or attempt to imitate, the popular Palauan storyboard; conversely, Palauan artisans who occasionally sculpt humanlike figures, or post figures in the Palauan style, very seldom make monkey men.

In summary, the position of the Southwest Islanders' community in Palau is ambiguous for several reasons. From the point of view of the Trust Territory administration the legal status of the community is at best informal; neither the E-ang nor the Malakal settlement is formally recognized by lease, use right, or any other enforceable claim. Yet, interestingly enough, *vis-à-vis* Palauan society the legal status of E-ang is somewhat more explicit, as the use right of clan lands under the suzerainty of the chief of Meungs is at least recognizable within the context of Palauan custom.

Politically, the situation of the community is even more ambiguous. Given that the community is differentiated internally by island of origin and that two of the islands are municipalities, some community members may be said to be directly represented in the district legislature while others are not. This, of course, depends on whether residents of E-ang identify themselves as members of the out-island or of the E-ang community, a matter which is unclear even to the residents. At the same time, the E-ang community is considered by both the residents and the Palauans to be a political dependent of Meungs village and its chief, but whether this relation applies to temporary residents as well as the more or less permanent residents is ambiguous.

The transience which characterizes the E-ang population creates a further source of ambiguity and instability with regard to the Southwest Island populations themselves. On islands such as Merir and Sonsorol which have or have had very small populations, migration to Palau, even in small numbers, can seriously affect the home island either through total depopulation (as on Merir) or through removal of a significant proportion of residents.

This depopulation is bound to affect educational, political, and economic development programs for the home islands.²

The ambiguities of the situation of this relocated community are inherent in the fact of a simultaneous involvement of the community in two different systems of relations—a colonial system and the indigenous Palauan system, neither of which is totally independent of the other. Historical evidence indicates that in the absence of a colonial system, the Southwest Island community could never have survived in Palau as a distinct social entity. Moreover, although the appearance of outsiders in a Palauan community was, before contact, occasional and often unpredictable, the integration of outsiders into the community was a regular, predictable process (from a Palauan point of view). In short, there is a Palauan model of assimilation of outsiders, which, although its operation as a social strategy has been curtailed by the colonial administration, continues to influence relations between the relocated community and the Palauans.

BOUNDARY DISSOLUTION VERSUS BOUNDARY MAINTENANCE

Narratives of persons drifting in from "someplace else" are abundant in the Pacific and, in Palau at least, a fairly specific protocol for dealing with such strangers has been described by older residents. Palauan practice demanded that such persons be conducted, with no delay, to the nearest village chief. In every region of Palau, villages are part of a collection or coalition with one among them superordinate. The strangers might therefore be conducted first to the local village chief and then to the chief of the superordinate village of the collection. Such collections were themselves ranked; hence the transaction might well go on another step, terminating in one or another of the four or five historically elite villages throughout Palau. In short, the transfer of the strangers up the steps of village ranking would end when the leaders of a village were in a political position powerful enough to detain them. Several reasons can be given for this treatment of the immigrant in Palau. The factors involved demand some preliminary explanation regarding the Palauan conception of the cosmos and Palauan social structure.

Public ideology in Palau had the end of the world placed somewhere just beyond the horizon. Contradictory information made

public by newcomers would pose a threat to the social order. The elite in Palau, particularly the historians of the ranking lineages, were privy to a wider scale of geographic knowledge that included information about the actual place of origin of many lineages outside Palau. Such knowledge was, however, maintained as private property among the trusted elders of the lineage or clan. As the Palauan might put it, such information was known only to those 'for whom the doors had been closed' in secret sessions of instruction by elder historians.

There were only two possibilities for dealing with strangers—they could be absorbed into the village community and, eventually, into the clan structure, or they could be put to death. Which alternative was chosen depended on the potential usefulness or the potential nuisance the strangers represented. In any case, no outsiders would be permitted to remain within or near the community and maintain their ethnic and cultural identity.

Becoming a true member of a Palauan community, with minimum qualifications for gaining a title, involves passage through three or four recognized grades of residency. The newly arrived immigrant would be designated *omengdaki* (probably derived from *omengd* 'to lean against' or *ultechakl* 'driftwood'). Whether conceived as one who 'leans against' an adopting lineage or as 'driftwood', the status implication is that of servant or slave. In time, the immigrants or their lineage descendants would be designated *beches el yars* 'new sails', would gain some access to land, and would begin to shed the stigma and obligations of servitude. The next designation would be *muchut el yars* 'old sails'. Members of such lineages would be considered long-term residents and would be eligible for lesser offices such as the leadership of their clan within the village club to which they were assigned. Finally would come the designation *techel a miich* 'core of the tropical almond tree'. The tropical almond, with its brilliant red leaves and tasty nuts, is an elite tree often prepared as a gift for elders. Persons of lineages so designated would be given public recognition as having an ancestry that reached back to the origin of the community. Generally speaking, high titled positions in a community are granted only to persons in lineages of the 'tropical almond' status of residency. Congruently, however, any individual, regardless of residency status, who gains high office in the community is publicly acknowledged to be of this elite residency designation

and, publicly at least, the person so titled will carry others of the lineage to this highest residency status. Within the present century, in view of the drastic depopulation that occurred during the 1800s in Palau, upward mobility through the residency ranks has often been accelerated for capable persons, and the historical facts of residency rank have been questioned for many community leaders. But such questions are asked only in private. In public, to be elite is to be 'the core of the tropical almond tree' or at least 'old sails'.

In every Palauan community another formal ranking system exists that is more nearly ascriptive in character. In ideal terms, each Palauan community is composed of ten rank-ordered clans that, with their several lineages, make up the entire community population. The top-ranking four clans in a village constitute the local elite—the 'cornerpost' clans. Again, in ideal terms, the highest-ranking clan and four lesser clans form one house in a political balance against the second-ranking clan and remaining four village clans.³

Immigrants to Palau, as we have seen, are conducted to the chief of the ranking clan of the ranking regional village. Such individuals would be assigned to and, perhaps, adopted by the clan of this chief. This clan, however, might be one of the four clans allied within the village with that of the ranking clan. In any event, the leadership of the ranking clan would have a hold on the newcomers via clan membership or interclan bonds. An essential feature of this aspect of assimilation is that the actual history of migration, with whatever knowledge it might contain about regions beyond the popular Palauan cosmos, would be retained (if at all) in the archival memory of the historians of the elite with a minimum impact on the ideology of the people. We can refer to this as a cultural constraint maintaining a reduced geographic scale. Newcomers and their offspring learned that their security and status in the adopting community depended on shedding, as rapidly as possible, the stigma of their non-Palauan origin.

The rate at which newcomers, and their lineages, progress from 'driftwood' to 'tropical almond' is related to the community's need for leadership and the ability or willingness of lineage members to serve the community. The most important factor, in the Palauan conception, is the loyal service to the lineage, clan, and community—in short, recognized achievement.

A congruent feature of this assimilation process is that the immigrant, in whatever capacity he or she might prove useful, would be immediately available to the village chief. If the immigrant had no apparent skills, the chief or a relevant clan would gain some additional labor. If the immigrant turned out to be hostile or a nuisance, the chief could arrange for disposal. If, on the other hand, the immigrant had some skill of apparent value to the community (such as medical knowledge), this skill would be available to the chief and would be put to use through his office.

In summary, the essential features of the Palauan model of assimilation are (1) a constricted popular conception of the cosmos, maintained by a political elite, (2) appropriation of the newcomer, either as laborer or as innovator, by the elite, ultimately the chief of the adopting community, and (3) the incorporation of outsiders into the clan and community structure in a series of steps based on their achievements within the community. Most important, the Palauan model of assimilation assumes that the category of stranger or outsider or non-Palauan is, within the Palauan social context, temporary. The prescription of a specific mode of ethnic boundary dissolution (through assimilation or death) implies a further assumption—that ethnic boundaries within Palauan society do not exist. Thus a permanent community maintaining a non-Palauan ethnic identity is, at the outset, unreal from a Palauan point of view.⁴ The nature of the threat that the relocated community necessarily presented—a threat to the order of Palauan reality—cannot be overemphasized, especially when we consider the Palauan response to the relocated people.

The Palauans were presented with an administration demand for land to domicile an ethnic group distinctly non-Palauan and over whom they had no real control. Assimilation according to the Palauan tradition was impossible within the context of the relocation since the newcomers were under German protection. Thus the newcomers were to be a permanent ethnic community in Palau and, as such, a challenge to the Palauan order of reality by their very existence. The Palauan response was, predictably, stigmatization of the Southwest Islanders in Erving Goffman's sense of the term (Goffman 1963). By characterizing the Southwest Islanders as somehow subhuman, the threat to the Palauan social order is minimized while a symbolic asymmetry between the two groups is

maintained. In face-to-face relations with Southwest Islanders, Palauans manifest the stigmatization by subtle condescension; in talking about them, they express overt contempt.

The stigmatization takes several forms. First, although the relocated community comprises people from several islands, Palauans ignore these distinctions and characterize the Southwest Islanders as a single group—Merir people. They label Southwest Islanders as "primitive" and "backward" and cite their "incestuous" marriage patterns, their informal political organization, and their scrupulous religiosity as evidence. Palauan children who walk barefoot are teased for walking "Merir style." Palauan children do not mingle with Southwest Island children at school, and the two groups do not speak when walking to or from school, even when going in the same direction.

In both cultures, sharing cooked food symbolizes social closeness. In Palau, Palauans will accept cooked food proffered as gifts by Southwest Islanders, but they will never eat it. After the giver leaves, the food is thrown away. On field trips to the Southwest Islands I observed that Palauans never accepted cooked food offered to them on the islands, although they would accept uncooked food such as coconut, crabs, or dried tuna. The meaning of their refusal is obvious to both sides.

On serious reflection, the Palauan will intellectualize about the differences between Palauan society and the Southwest Island communities. The much smaller populations of the Southwest Islands hardly necessitate the elaborate political and economic institutions evident in Palau. Southwest Islanders are respected as hard workers, apparently as an extension of the male agriculturist role, and on the individual level, especially between women members of the same (Catholic) church congregation, close friendships may be formed. Certain skills and characteristics are admired: Southwest Islanders are good fishermen; their dried tuna is a favored food; their canoes are readily sold in Palau; their children are recognized as quiet but capable students.

Generally speaking, however, Palauans express the same paternalistic, depreciative, and racially toned attitudes that characterize much of Western interaction with Micronesian and other non-Western societies. Young Palauans familiar with American racist stereotypes through college attendance in the United States draw a

direct parallel with the Palauan attitude toward the Southwest Islander. On an individual basis, a Southwest Islander may be accepted as competent and as a friend; as a group they are viewed as childlike and naive with a few specialized skills.

CONCLUSIONS

ism *and* congestion with the emergence of rigid ethnic-class structures and accelerated intergroup tension is the more likely prognosis.

NOTES

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