

FANIHI: A CULTURAL DIGEST. CANNIBALISM OR CONSERVATION?

by

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ABSTRACT

There is a conflict on the island of Rota in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands between conservationists and the cultural traditions of Chamorro inhabitants. The traditional model of broadcasting media to a wide audience is not effective in intervening in environmental conflicts within indigenous communities compared to an emerging model of filmmaking that embraces local voices and perspectives. Historically, indigenous depictions in media tend to misrepresent “Others” in order to reinforce the imperialist interests of Western society. Within this essay I intend to analyze how Western media suppresses indigenous voice while investigating strategies for the creation of effective environmental films targeted towards specific local audiences. Awareness of the mistakes of filmmakers of the past combined with the availability of inexpensive production and distribution technologies will allow alternative models of filmmaking to portray a diversity of perspectives. Environmental films that feature indigenous voices allow local communities to define and strengthen their own cultural values while creating texts that broaden global understandings of the diversity of the human experience.

INTRODUCTION

The island of Rota is a tiny dot in the Pacific Ocean, part of the chain of islands known as the Mariana Archipelago. Near Guam, it is a member of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The traditional inhabitants of Rota are ethnic Chamorro of Austronesian descent.

Since first contact with European explorers in the 16th century, the island has existed as a colonial territory occupied by Spain, Germany, Japan, and the United States, which currently administer it as part of the CNMI. The sad history of the subjugation of the Chamorro people is typical of the greater story of Western colonization across the globe. The Spanish reduced their populations from an estimated 100,000 Chamorros throughout the island chain in 1668 to 3,678 in 1710 through bloodshed, introduced epidemics, and forced removal of all native populations on the islands north of Guam. By the 1800s, integration with Spanish, Filipino and other island races altered the bloodline of the population and eliminated many Chamorro cultural traditions (Lemke, 136).

Chamorros are known throughout the Pacific for their love for eating the Marianas Fruit Bat (*Pteropus mariannas*), a Flying Fox with a three-foot wingspan, known locally as “*fanihi*.” Renowned for its distinct taste and odor, the consumption of the delicacy is one of the few Chamorro customs to survive since before Western colonization (136). Anecdotal evidence suggests the bats were once common throughout all of the islands of the Marianas; however, their numbers have rapidly declined since 1945 when the U.S. lifted legal restrictions limiting the possession and use of firearms.

Rota currently supports the last remaining significant population of bats (fluctuating between 150-2,000 individuals since the first surveys in 1977 with a current population of about 1,500) on the inhabited islands of the archipelago (137). Despite occasional sightings, they have been virtually extirpated from the islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Aguijan. The single colony of 100-300 bats on Guam relies on periodic migrations from Rota because the introduced brown tree snakes depredate all *Fanihi* pups born on the island (Wiles, 72).

There has been a moratorium outlawing the capture and possession of fruit bats on all islands in the CNMI since 1977, but enforcement difficulties as well as local attitudes (which are mistrustful of the federal government and therefore resentful of the ban) prevent efforts to eliminate the hunting of *fanihi* (Lemke, 138).

Because of my previous experiences as a field biologist working with bats, I learned of the conflict surrounding the species on Rota and decided to produce a film that could be used by local educational and outreach efforts to stimulate public discussion and involvement in the fate of the *fanihi* on Rota. I knew that I was putting myself into a difficult situation as a cultural outsider trying to promote the conservation of a controversial species to an indigenous culture trying to hold onto one of its last remaining customs. However, if the current situation doesn't change, the *fanihi* faces a grim future. Since Rota is close enough to the other islands to provide a source population (if environmental and social conditions improve to allow new colonies to become established), its population is the last hope for reestablishing the species throughout the rest of the CNMI as well.

My goal was to produce the film for the small Rotanese audience. Public discussion of the conflict is largely taboo because of the fundamental interconnectedness of the community and common knowledge that many families support and participate in the cultural tradition of consuming the delicacy, despite the fact it is against the law. The majority of Rotanese avoid open involvement in the conflict, but in order to stabilize *fanihi* populations, the community must intervene against the small number of individuals who invade the roosting colonies and kill many bats at once.

Instead of producing the film for sympathizers who already support wildlife conservation on Rota, I wanted to give voice to a range of the perspectives among individuals on different sides of the conflict. While education about the *fanihi*'s important ecological role in Rota's forests is important to the film's narrative, above all I want its message to appeal to the hunters and elders of the island who are most connected to the demand for *fanihi* and therefore have the most power to shift their behavior towards a less destructive harvest. Early on, I realized that to take a firm stance against the cultural tradition would ensure the failure of my film and guarantee its rejection by the majority of the community as eco-colonial, culturally insensitive propaganda. The investigation of a compromise between conservation and resource use is important to my goal of creating a film that will encourage the Rotanese to assume responsibility for the future of the *fanihi* on their island.

My purpose is not to tell a story about how Chamorro cultural traditions must be abandoned and that hunting and eating fruit bats is wrong; it is to reflect the reality of the conflict on Rota, and to present the topic from as many local perspectives as possible so

that the community can have a voice in the debate about how the resource should be managed. Finally, I want the film to reaffirm Rotanese pride for the beauty of their island and cultural identity as Chamorro.

I intend to investigate an emerging model of filmmaking that targets a specific small community on the island of Rota in order to intervene in the impending extinction of the Marianas Fruit Bat. I intend to explore the possibility that the traditional model of creating broadcast media targeted to a general, global audience is not well-suited to precipitating action where it is most needed in environmental conflicts, within the community where the conflict occurs. I contrast the problems of traditional broadcasts and conservation media with a progressive model of filmmaking pioneered by Cynthia Moses, a successful wildlife film producer and co-founder of INCEF (International Conservation and Education Fund). Her goal is to harness the increasing availability of inexpensive production and distribution technologies to allow local indigenous producers to create relevant and effective conservation films for their own communities.

Because representation strategies are important to my approach I shall analyze travelogues and safari films made by Westerners in Africa to show that the history of racism and derision in the depiction of indigenous cultures has left a legacy of stereotypical perceptions of “Others” and low self-esteem within many native communities. I shall show that “salvage ethnographic” films such as Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922) marginalize indigenous societies by prescribing pathology to cultural evolution among “primitive” populations by situating narratives within a timeless

“ethnographic present” that ignores the history and self-determination of native communities.

I analyze National Geographic’s *Gorilla* (1981), which demonizes Africans while implying that Western research and conservation efforts are the best hope for the future of the species, as well as the BBC’s *Ape Hunters* (2002), which blames Westerners for the bush meat crisis but is not likely to affect local conservation because it is targeted to the wrong audience. I analyze my thesis film, *Fanihi: A Cultural Digest*, to emphasize the importance of allowing a community to express relevant local perspectives and values within a film’s narrative in order to achieve the goal of local ownership, responsibility, and involvement in conservation decisions. I investigate successes in the production of my thesis film as well as difficulties I encountered as an outsider making a film for an indigenous community struggling to balance its cultural identity against the imperialist influences of the modern world. The goal of my argument is to investigate strategies that might be used in the creation of a film for the purpose of initiating action in a community caught in a conflict between conservation and cultural values.

TRADITIONAL MEDIA VERSUS TARGETED MEDIA

One of the primary reasons that influenced my decision to pursue a graduate degree in Science and Natural History Filmmaking is that I aspire to become a filmmaker that is capable of “making a positive difference” in what often seems like a troubled world. While this vague, Romantic statement is a comfortable ideal to strive for in my vocational approach, in practice it is difficult to define both what “making a positive difference” *is*, and if it is possible to achieve this goal on a tangible level. I believe that different forms of this idealism exist within the film industry in general, but especially within the traditional broadcast model of conservation films that are targeted to a broad, general audience.

Although the public generally perceives wildlife and environmental films as valuable to the conservation movement by fostering an appreciation for nature, wildlife, and an awareness of environmental issues among viewers, it is difficult to determine the actual effectiveness of this genre of film for inspiring action in environmental conflicts. In *Wildlife Films* Derek Bousé writes, “How effective any form of mass-market nature imagery is as a means of inducing real social or environmental change on its own, and doing so, moreover, by purposeful design is open to question. So far there has been a great deal of optimistic presumption but a dearth of real evidence about the power of wildlife films to ‘save’ nature” (xiv). It is obvious that the producers of environmental and wildlife media attach great value to the stability of the ecosystems and species they advocate for, but it is difficult to quantify the impact of these films on their

audience, especially when the majority of mass media consumers have no direct connection with their topics. Bousé elaborates,

With content designed to appeal to tens of millions of diverse viewers worldwide, film and television are not precision implements that can be wielded with predictable results. Some wildlife films may influence some people in some ways under some circumstances some of the time, but there is little to suggest that the genre itself makes a significant contribution to protecting the lives of wild animals, or to preserving species or habitat, in the sort of systematic or predictable ways that would prove it an effective tool. (Bousé, xiv)

With few exceptions, the film industry revolves around the creation of content that generates profits, not activism among its audience. Moreover, producing and distributing visual media is an expensive endeavor. Therefore, it is important to the success of a film that it can be distributed to as many profit producing markets as possible. The traditional model of broadcasting media to a multinational general audience may contribute to awareness and empathy for conservation goals, but because many viewers live in an entirely different region or continent than the featured subjects, they cannot join grassroots efforts to implement solutions for local environmental conflicts.

Compounding difficulties of producing effective conservation films, since the 1980s major broadcasters and content generators have mostly come to the conclusion that programs that feature conservation and environmental issues, as opposed to timeless, Edenic depictions of nature, do not generally attract and sustain the large audiences they need to in order to justify financing a film. In his article, *Wildlife Television: Towards 2001*, BBC producer Jeffery Boswall states, “The majority of the world’s wildlife filmmakers still [believe] that most wildlife conservation is boring, worrying and depressing

to the public. They feel that their duty is to show viewers what is there, let them wonder and be enthralled, and then let them decide for themselves whether or not it is worth keeping” (qtd. in Kilborn). Many industry insiders believe environmental films that trouble audiences with environmental conflicts rather than inspire them with natural beauty fail to generate favorable ratings. In *A Walk on the Wild Side: The Changing Face of TV Wildlife Documentary*, Richard Kilborn asserts that many figureheads in the nature film industry, such as the BBC’s David Attenborough, believe that overt conservation messages can lead to “green fatigue” and smaller audiences. It is interesting that wildlife filmmakers attest to the conservation value of their documentaries, yet industry leaders remain weary of media other than Blue Chip productions like the BBC’s *Planet Earth (2006)*, which depict undisturbed wilderness while ignoring widespread environmental degradation. In *Pocket Tigers: The Sad, Unseen Reality Behind the Wildlife Film*, Steven Mills, former chairman of the International Association of Wildlife Filmmakers, identifies the source of the industry’s aversion towards contentious environmental media, “Television, after all, is primarily an entertainment medium, and wildlife films fill an escapist, non-controversial slot” (qtd. in Kilborn). The large audiences that traditional broadcasters target do not want to be overburdened with difficult and controversial material; rather, they tune into television programming for entertainment and if the show they are watching makes them uncomfortable, it is easy to change the channel.

Because of the commercial nature of traditional broadcasting, the high cost of producing content, and the fickle entertainment needs of general audiences, the current

model of nature and wildlife filmmaking is not well-suited to enlighten and motivate viewers towards action on conservation issues at a local level. Furthermore, one might argue that the production of wildlife films can be detrimental to the animals and habitats they feature by promoting poorly managed tourism booms, portraying timeless natural worlds that do not seem to be threatened in any way, and by alienating the indigenous communities depicted in those films.

Filmmaker Cynthia Moses is at the forefront of an emerging model of interventionist media that trains filmmaking teams in indigenous communities to produce and distribute environmental media in remote regions through her foundation, INCEF (International Conservation and Education Fund). In an interview for Jerry Reynolds' article, *Congo Indigenous Make Their Case with Digital Film Production*, Moses explains the origins of her efforts, "Wildlife documentaries entertain, educate and inspire, but as a filmmaker, I wasn't reaching the people whose daily activities have the most impact on already endangered and threatened species" (Reynolds). Because traditional broadcast films are not suited for grassroots conservation at the community level, Moses set out to create effective environmental media by "putting the power of modern digital film production technology in the hands of local production teams and the communities they're part of" (Reynolds). Produced by locals, the films contain interviews with respected members of the community in the language and dialect of the region, and feature easily recognizable situations and circumstances (INCEF).

Strategies for dissemination are fundamental to the planning of any INCEF film. After the completion of an edit, outreach teams go into the field for weeks at a time to

visit villages and show the video repeatedly within the communities. The teams lead discussions about the topics of each film to evaluate solutions and to determine if the content should be adapted (INCEF).

Finally, INCEF extensively evaluates each film and the impact it has on communities through pre and post-screening surveys, reports on group discussion and interviews with audience members. Outreach teams compare their experiences in order to improve the effectiveness of each film and to critique production strengths and weaknesses that will be applied to continuing efforts for the creation of effective community based media (INCEF).

In order to inspire positive attitudes about conservation and the protection of species and ecosystems, filmmakers must embrace a different model for the production of environmental films. This philosophy incorporates harnessing the power of storytelling through visual media with the objective of creating films that reflect the sentiments and sensitivities of a specific target audience with the intention to initiate change at a local level. Additionally, considerations about how the film will be distributed and utilized within the community are important to these goals. By itself, any film is not likely to provide simple solutions that will inspire active conservation among viewers, but a film should promote awareness and analysis of relevant issues so that the community can engage in active conversations and political implementation of conservation goals.

MISREPRESENTATIONS IN SAFARI AND TRAVELOGUE FILMS

In order to approach an understanding of strategies that might be effective for producing media targeted to a specific indigenous audience, it is necessary to analyze some of the gross misrepresentations and offensive characterizations of cultures that occurred in the past. This begins with an analysis of the origins of the commercial film industry and some of the forces that drove producers to negatively depict “Others.”

Members of the scientific community such as Etienne-Jules Marey and Edward Muybridge originally conceived and created the technology that preceded film in the latter half of the 19th century as a tool to improve knowledge about science and locomotion. In *Reel Nature: America’s Romance with Wildlife on Film*, Greg Mitman describes how these photographic pioneers captured and preserved sequential images on film in order “to reveal living processes and movements unobservable to the human eye” (8). However, from this scientific genesis, film has been inextricably linked with entertainment and commercial pursuits.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the development of motion picture technology and the lucrative industry of exhibiting films for profit occurred during a period of time marked by a social crisis brought on by the closing of the American Frontier. At the end of the 19th century Frederick Jackson Turner wrote in *The Problem of the West*, “The free lands are gone, the continent is crossed, and all this push and energy is turning into channels of agitation. Failures in one area can no longer be made good by taking up land on a new frontier; the conditions of a settled society are being reached with suddenness and with confusion” (Turner). As Western society ran out of territory to chart, savages to conquer,

and wild animals to subdue, the population experienced a need to seek thrills and reaffirmation of character in unknown lands. While many Westerners did not have the resources to partake in adventures of this kind, movie theaters provided a novel experience that enabled the masses to join heroes vicariously on quests to new frontiers in exotic regions abroad.

Early filmmakers who produced entertainment that indulged the audience's desire to experience the frontier encountered abundant success. Some of the most popular examples of these films include travelogues and safaris set in the wilds of Africa such as *Paul J. Rainey's African Hunt* (1912), *Hunting Big Game in Africa with Gun and Camera* (1923), and *Simba* (1928). In *Reel Nature*, Greg Mitman explains, "In the motion picture houses, these audiences could flee the artificiality and complexity of modern life and immerse themselves in a wildlife landscape where instincts and behaviors were seemingly more natural, more authentic" (3-4). Safari films set in faraway places temporarily freed urbanites from the stresses of crowded civilization and allowed them to experience a closeness to nature unavailable in their daily lives.

In many of these films, the "instincts and behaviors" that Mitman refers to are not limited to wild animals, but include the indigenous communities that inhabit the exotic landscapes as well. The filmmakers draw this parallel by inserting shots of native people in wildlife sequences and by filming them in the same settings and positions as the wildlife featured in their films (Rony, 86-87). For example, in Martin and Osa Johnson's *Simba* (1928), there is a scene at a water hole that shows Africans washing and drinking followed by a progression of various wild animals in the same location using the resource

in a similar manner. In another sequence showing the entourage's procession of African porters carrying heavy loads alongside camels doing the same, the filmmakers liken natives to "beasts of burden" while they ride in their safari automobile. As the party crosses a river, the film intersplices shots of Africans with hippos and crocodiles, further blurring the distinction between natives and wildlife. By making such comparisons, the storytellers not only denied the human subjects in these films a voice within the narrative, but they stripped them of their humanity by depicting indigenous people as another species of animal to be consumed by the audience for the purpose of entertainment.

Embodied in early films that depict indigenous cultures, the "fascinating cannibalism" that Fatimah Rony defines as "the obsessive consumption of images of a racialized Other known as the Primitive" (Rony, 10) served to help Western audiences define and reinforce stereotypes of superiorities and inferiorities between cultures as well as to build a foundation for domination through film that continues today. One of the best examples of an early film that commodifies "the Other" in order to sell an exotic travelogue is Martin and Osa Johnson's *Congorilla* (1932). The filmmakers glorify themselves as fearless adventurers while depicting Africans as subhuman through sequences and racist comments intended to provide comic relief.

From the opening title, which reads "CONGORILLA Adventures among the Big Apes and Little People of Central Africa," the film embraces a racist tone. In one of the first sequences, the Johnson's hire porters for their expedition, and one gives his name as "Khala Menya." Unable to understand in order to attempt writing it down, the Johnsons make the man repeat his name several times before Osa declares, "Oh, call him Coffee

Pot.” While taking away the power that resides in an individual’s name and replacing it with an object of triviality may be subtle, the blatant racism of comparing the dark skinned African to a smoke-stained kettle is hard to overlook. The marginalization of natives is typical within many travelogue and safari films of the time, which depict African crewmembers as nameless porters and laborers instead of respected members of the expedition.

After chronicling some of their adventures photographing various African animals the expedition moves to the Belgian Congo where, “in the unknown depths of this tangled jungle live the Pygmies. No big people live here, only these funny little savages.” While the Johnsons declare that they became close friends of the Pygmies, it is obvious they had no respect for them as equals. This section of the film focuses on subjecting members of the community to humiliating scenes intended to contrast their “primitive” culture with that of the movie going audience.

In one offensive scene, Martin gives two Pygmy men cigars and a box of matches. The sequence contains no narration, only images and ambient sound during a very long and uncomfortable three minutes of the men awkwardly trying to light a cigar with match after match while onlookers seem to taunt them in their own language. The sequence cuts to a badly staged shot of bare feet, and a ridiculous pile of matches and empty matchboxes before Martin scolds the men for making his “nice cigar look like a cabbage.” Unsurprisingly, he easily lights the tobacco for the men in order to condescendingly reinforce the Pygmies’ lack of sophistication and knowledge of simple modern tools. In *The Third Eye*, Fatimah Rony writes, the “conceit of the indigenous

person who does not understand Western technology allows for voyeuristic pleasure and reassures the viewer of the contrast between Primitive and the Modern” (112). By presenting the dualism of the primitive native with the civilized Western traveler, the film reinforces racist stereotypes of the superiority of Europeans over “Other” cultures.

Perhaps one can argue that despite their racist humor and belittling portrayals, the Johnsons depict the Pygmies as they existed at the time of the film: a people adapted to the forest with limited experience of Western society, customs, and technology. However, the Johnsons deliberately exploit the subjects of their film in order to glorify themselves and the white race by staging scenarios that make “primitive” Africans look ridiculous and inferior to a Western audience. They denied the indigenous subjects of their film dignity and reduced them to sub-human caricatures in order to sell the audience an exotic travelogue.

The belittling portrayals of Africans in films of the early 20th century reflect social attitudes of the time that place “Others” in a position of inferiority compared to Europeans. The acceptance of Darwin’s theory of evolution gave rise to the field of Racial Anthropology, which characterized different races in a hierarchical scale. In *The Mismeasure of Man* Stephen Jay Gould writes, “Racial prejudice may be as old as recorded human history, but its biological justification imposed the additional burden of intrinsic inferiority on despised groups and precluded redemption by conversion or assimilation” (63). Scientific Racism provided a foundation of knowledge that justified European superiority and racist perceptions of the time. Ridiculous portrayals of Africans on film helped to reinforce prevalent stereotypical attitudes.

Whether filmmakers such as the Johnsons were explicitly conscious of their underlying motives or not, the depiction of indigenous cultures in films like *Congorilla* served a purpose beyond the intention to create a commercial success in Western theaters: these films were an extension of imperialism driven by the need to assert cultural domination over all “Others” on the planet. In *Black African Cinema*, Nwachukwu Ukadike writes, “Since the simultaneous inventions of the motion picture in Europe and America coincided with the height of European imperialism, it is not surprising that for many years the dominant image of Africa seen on Western Screens was that of condescension and paternalism” (35). Although such films were not intended or immediately projected for the indigenous African audiences they portrayed, their success embedded a lasting legacy of misrepresentation in global popular culture that continues to the present. Ukadike insists, “This image the filmmakers projected of Africa was to have a lasting effect, haunting not only the black people of Africa but also all blacks in the diaspora.” (36). Filmmaking is an effective way of creating and perpetuating stereotypes across broad swaths of time and space, and negative representations are not limited to any one culture in particular. In *Colonialism, Racism, and Representation*, Robert Stam and Louis Spence elaborate, “Many of the misconceptions concerning Third World peoples derive from the long parade of lazy Mexicans, shifty Arabs, savage Africans and exotic Asiatics that have disgraced our movie screens” (637). These examples are just a few of the myriad stereotypical constructions readily available for popular consumption through film.

My brief analysis of *Congorilla* in this essay serves to show how such films deny their subjects a “voice” in the narrative. The misrepresentations they portray perpetuate negative stereotypes that degrade global cultural perceptions of indigenous peoples and negatively affect how “Others” view themselves. The foundation of racist generalizations in film has led to mistrust and resentment over the presence and influence of outsiders that advocate for conservation within indigenous communities as unwelcome intruders with a history of exploitation and abuse. Furthermore, they potentially contribute to an active rejection of environmental principles that are often innate to the cultures of indigenous communities simply because the desire to rebel against imperialist influences among some embittered individuals supersedes the need to respect underlying cultural values.

SALVAGE ETHNOGRAPHY

While the Johnson's travelogues are flamboyant examples of racist depictions that left an imperialist legacy of low self esteem and mistrust of outsiders among many indigenous communities, they are only one example among many facets in documentary film that deny their subjects a voice. Another notable form is the "salvage ethnography" such as *Nanook of the North* (1922), *Chang* (1927), and *The Lost World of the Kalahari* (1956). These films are self-proclaimed attempts to document and therefore preserve "primitive" cultures that would otherwise be forever lost due to the influence of Western modernization. The Romantic depictions of naive and innocent indigenous characters caught in an eternal struggle against the forces of nature seem to be motivated by an altruistic need to preserve evidence of these cultures on film before they are corrupted by modern society and rendered "extinct." However, when viewed through a critical perspective, it is clear that these films marginalize their subjects by asserting that modern social transformations in indigenous cultures are pathological. In *Ethnographic Salvage and the Shaping of Anthropology*, Jacob Gruber writes, "The sense of salvage with its concern with loss and extinction, stressed the disorganization in a social system at the expense of the sense of community; it stressed the pathology of cultural loss in the absence of any real experience with the normally operating small community" (1297). All cultures continuously change and evolve through interactions with external and internal influences. For the developed world to assert that this process is undesirable among indigenous cultures is to deny "Others" the ideological right to a favorable self-perception of their modern identities.

In *Nanook of the North* (1922), Robert Flaherty went to great lengths to conceal evidence that the characters exist in the modern world. The actors' wardrobe consists of traditional bear skins specially made for the film because inhabitants of the region no longer wore that style of dress. While at the time of the production, the Inuk community used guns to hunt, Flaherty removed them from the narrative in favor of traditional weapons and tools (Grace, 123). Except for one scene filmed at a trading post to draw attention to the characters' lack of modern sophistication (Nanook bites a phonograph record as if this is the best way to discover its mysteries), the film shows no signs of the existence of modern influences in day-to-day existence.

By creating an idealized version of 19th century life in the arctic, Flaherty places the narrative in the "ethnographic present" in which actors reflect the myth of the authentic first man existing in a timeless reality of endlessly repeating archetypal moments (Rony, 102-103). Salvage ethnographic films marginalize their subjects and deny them a voice by depicting variations of romanticized primitives who exist outside of reality and the present. Combined with the tendency of Westerners to view cultural evolution among indigenous communities as pathological, these films erode self-determination among native peoples and place the Western filmmakers in a position of domination by perpetuating misrepresentations of authenticity.

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said argues that the Western study of "Others" embraces prejudicial false assumptions based less on the reality that "Others" experience than romantic Western characterizations. Orientalism "operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even

economic setting” (273). By asserting the need to preserve “disappearing” cultures on film and presenting them as romanticized caricatures, salvage ethnography denies modern indigenous cultures their histories and devalues their cultural adaptations to the modern world. Documentaries like *Nanook* exalt the figure of the Noble Savage while devaluing modern day indigenous peoples as “fallen” from a state of grace. When conservationists perceive “fallen” cultures as a threat to the landscapes they occupy it allows them to remove native populations from their lands in order to restore modern day “Gardens of Eden” through the creation of nature preserves.

ENVIRONMENTAL COLONIALISM

While racist travelogues and romantic “salvage ethnographies” helped lay the foundation of a negative image of “the Other” by treating indigenous people as amusing objects to ridicule and by marginalizing them as stereotypical “noble savages,” the environmental and conservation films of the latter half of the 20th century tend to alienate indigenous communities further by presenting them as a danger to a rapidly disappearing wilderness.

As colonial territories gained political freedom in the 1950s, Western portrayals of foreign landscapes began to emphasize the threats that natives posed to ecological treasures abroad. Greg Mitman writes, “In Africa, native peoples, once an entertaining spectacle of nature for American audiences, became in the 1950s wildlife’s greatest threat” (189). While filmmakers viewed indigenous populations as another variety of wildlife inhabiting the wilderness in early travelogues, the intrusion of Western technology and commercialism precipitated cultural changes that made natives incompatible (from the perspective of the Western patriarchy) with the environment. Many conservationists feared that the rise of agriculture and markets for ivory and wildlife commodities imperiled Africa’s unspoiled wilderness, and that, “Indigenous tribes... lacked the enlightened appreciation of nature found in developed nations like the United States” (Mitman 191). The result of the American and European perspective that Africans are incapable of properly managing their own landscapes gave rise to “Environmental Colonialism” whereby Western conservationists pressured African

governments to remove natives from game reserves and national parks as occurred in Tanzania's Selous and Mkozami Game Reserves (Nelson, 68-70; Garland, 60).

At the heart of the environmental movement lies the mythology of the Garden of Eden and the notion that modern civilization is fundamentally at odds with ecological balance. In *Environmental Colonialism: "Saving" Africa from Africans*, Robert Nelson describes how Western culture sees modern civilization as a corrupting influence that caused "primitive" cultures to fall out of harmony with nature. As indigenous communities acquired the power and desire to subject nature to their domination through agricultural expansion and poaching wildlife for commercial markets, the paternalistic Western culture viewed them as fallen from a state of grace. Nelson continues, "Environmentalism therefore seeks to protect the vestiges of the original natural order and perhaps in some places to restore a 'true' nature—the original Creation, as it is in effect regarded within the movement—that has been lost" (68). While "salvage ethnography" aims to preserve the noble savage, the realization that modernization is inevitable and irreversible motivates the rise of environmental films that intend to remove the threat of the "fallen" communities from the Edenic Paradises they inhabit.

The National Geographic documentary, *Gorilla* (1981), extends environmental colonialism to conservation in Africa. The film opens with a group of white tourists in close proximity to a troop of wild gorillas. The narrator asserts, "These may be among the last people on Earth to see a free roaming Mountain Gorilla alive." The video then cuts to scenes of overweight observers at an American zoo as the narrator states, "Ultimately the only hope for the gorilla may lie at the hands of man." The statements,

combined with the change in setting, convey urgency about the uncertain future of the species while implying that it is the responsibility of Western society to ensure its continued existence. The film reinforces this premise over the next 45 minutes as it documents efforts in America and Europe to develop breeding programs and research related to captive gorillas in zoos and laboratories. By focusing on the success of Western biologists working to save gorillas outside their natural environment, the narrative affirms that even if gorillas become extinct in Africa, at least they will continue to survive in controlled environments for the benefit of future Western generations. The emphasis on ensuring the survival of gorillas in captivity serves to transfer ownership of the species from its historical home in Africa to constructed environments in the West where native Africans cannot threaten its future.

While the majority of the film takes place in the West, the last quarter of the narrative returns to the gorilla's natural environment to educate viewers about the efforts of researchers working for gorilla conservation in Africa. The transition in setting accompanies the narrator's statement that, "Conservation of any animal must begin with a basic understanding of its natural habitat and behavior. Perhaps no one has contributed more to our knowledge of wild gorillas than Dr. Diane Fossey." Fossey speaks about her star research specimen, Digit, and the special bond they formed that allowed her to learn about the behavior and needs of wild gorillas.

The video shows Fossey peacefully observing and interacting with her subject over soothing music; however, the mood of the sequence abruptly changes as the score becomes ominous and we see the film's first clear images of Africans carrying a dead

gorilla on a sling. “On December 31, 1977, Fossey’s world would be forever changed. Her beloved Digit was dead, killed and beheaded by poachers. The harmless gentle digit had been slain for his head and hands, sold to a trader for the equivalent of twenty dollars.” First the narrative introduces the heroic Fossey working to save gorillas through dedicated research, but then shifts for the first time to local Africans as the greatest threat to their survival. The juxtaposition of a gentle white scientist living in harmony among the animals that she studies with the demonization of African poachers as greedy gorilla killers is a powerful inversion of the “noble savage” narrative that demonstrates the evolution of European perceptions of Africans in the second half of the 20th century.

The film extends the threat that Africans pose to wildlife beyond the active aggression of poachers by insisting that indigenous farmers are equally dangerous to the gorillas. The video shows a group of Africans clearing land just outside of Rwanda’s Volcanoes National Park while the narrator informs the audience, “In this most densely populated country on the African continent, the farmer’s hoe may prove as lethal as the poacher’s gun. Today, farms stretch to the very edge of the park and the pressure of human population steadily grows.” The film conveys that overpopulation in the region is out of control and that indigenous expansion into gorilla habitat must be stopped if conservation goals have any chance for success.

Finally, the narrative focuses on educational outreach efforts in Rwanda. European environmentalists hope that by informing locals about the interesting characteristics of gorillas and their similarity to humans, the communities will appreciate the value of the animals and decide they deserve to be protected. A graduate student

doing research in the park states, “Much of the future of the gorillas will depend on Rwandans. It’s their treasure, their park, their land, and it’s going to depend on them.” However, throughout the entire film the audience is not exposed to a single perspective from a Rwandan! Their voices and opinions remain silent, overshadowed by the authority of Westerners working to save the gorillas in Africa and abroad. If Rwandans have any active role in conservation efforts, the audience remains ignorant of them. Although the narrative makes a few token gestures to highlight the importance of local populations for the future of the species, in reality, the film firmly places this responsibility on the shoulders of the Western world.

The BBC film, *Ape Hunters* (2002), seems to fall into a similar pattern of racist attitudes towards indigenous populations and the African wildlife crisis. However, the documentary ends with an interesting progressive twist in which the filmmakers shift the blame to the Western audience for driving the markets that enable poachers to bring animal populations to the brink of extinction.

The film begins by making the scientific connection between the closeness of apes and humans through the explanation that we “share ninety-nine percent of our DNA.” Soon, it cuts to the stereotypical white male conservationist, Chris White, who delivers a clichéd call for empathy towards primates intercut with B-roll of him caring for his cute subjects. White states:

You only have to spend five minutes with these little guys and look into their eyes, they say the eyes are a window to the soul, and you realize very quickly that these are indeed our closest relatives. Many people in Camaroon are unaware of this fact yet. It’s very much our mission to convince them that apes are valuable, not just a meat.

This sequence compares White's perspective to a translated interview of a woman that sells bush meat at a local market who says, "Nobody has ever married a chimpanzee, nobody... They are not our cousins. Can they speak? There is a big difference between primates and people, a big difference." The film makes a point of contrasting an argument of animal rights activists (that we have more commonalities than differences with animals), against the point of view of the majority of the local community that the forest animals are valuable protein for a hungry human population.

Western conservationists seem to think if they can persuade Africans that eating a monkey is like eating a family member they will change their behavior. However, this line of argument ignores a long history of scientific racism that Europeans used to justify colonial pursuits by derisively asserting that other races (particularly Africans) had more in common with apes than they did with civilized white Europeans. In *Primate Visions*, Donna Haraway writes,

In the history of the sciences of man... people of color were constructed as objects of knowledge as 'primitives,' more closely connected to the apes than the white 'race.' The concept of race itself was inextricable woven out of the history of the conjunction of knowledge and power in European and Euro-American expansion and... exploitation of 'marked' or 'colored' peoples. (153)

After generations of Africans fought different versions of racism by invading Westerners, the people of Cameroon are justifiably weary of accepting that they share a close bond with wildlife. Perhaps promoting empathy for apes because they are similar to humans is a good conservation strategy, however, because of the history of racism and colonialism

in Africa, when Western elites present the argument it is not as effective for indigenous communities as when Africans promote the idea themselves.

In another scene, a white researcher elaborates on the problems of habitat fragmentation while an African assistant plays with a troop of monkeys behind a fence. This scene asserts that only educated white scientists possess the qualifications to manage environmental conservation in Africa. It conveys the message that Africans involved with conservation work should remain in the background as voiceless helpers. In *The Elephant in the Room: Confronting the Colonial Character of Wildlife Conservation in Africa*, Elizabeth Garland writes how the inequalities between foreign conservationists and Africans working in the same field derive from a history of racism and Western appropriation of African nature. She emphasizes, “There is not a single African who has achieved the kind of global fame from working with African animals that dozens of Western conservationists have attained... Rarely are they represented as heroic actors on its stage in their own right” (59). Perhaps it is unsurprising that Western environmentalists primarily recognize Europeans and Americans for their work in Africa while Africans remain marginalized, given the patriarchal nature of the conservation community. However, by silencing indigenous voices through narratives that depict Westerners as the primary active agents working to mitigate environmental conflicts abroad, conservation films extend racism, eco-colonialism, and alienate locals who could be allies to environmental goals.

Interestingly, *Ape Hunters* seems to use these racist representations of the relationships between Africans immersed in poaching and European conservation

“saviors” to draw attention to the hypocrisy and insensitivity of environmentalists in Africa by the end of the film. The narrative sets up the conflict of the bush meat crisis and then follows the progress of an African ex-poacher who must navigate the complex world of environmental politics. Employed by conservationists as a tracker/patroller to deter bush-meat hunters as well as to habituate wildlife in order to develop potential for tourism, the character attempts to balance the ideals of his conservationist patrons with the difficult realities faced by his African peers.

While environmentalists widely promote eco-tourism as the most effective way to protect wildlife and habitat by giving economic value to animals and ecosystems through revenue generated by visitors, when critics examine the process with more scrutiny, it becomes clear this is another form of neocolonialism. Elizabeth Garland writes,

Conservationists would say... that ecotourism has the potential to be a more sustainable form of resource use than large-scale logging or bushmeat hunting. Tourism industries often require major investments of time and capital before coming on line, however, and when they do, the gains seldom accrue to the same people who were previously benefiting from the earlier extractive activities.
(58)

Ecotourism seems like the best environmental management strategy to Westerners because they are the ones that benefit the most from the economics of the industry and have the greatest ability to access the protected landscapes.

When a dominant Western culture imposes ecotourism as the best alternative to traditional uses of wilderness, the managers often remove indigenous communities from their lands in order to create heterotopic “Gardens of Eden” that reflect the colonial fantasies of white explorers while overstating the limited benefits to local populations

(Nelson, 77-81). In *Powerful Environmentalism: Conservation, Celebrity and Capitalism*, Dan Brockington argues that the management goals of conservationists don't often intersect with the priorities of local indigenous communities. "The Western wilderness ethic, which values pristine lands untouched and uninfluenced by people, is not compatible with many local environmentalisms. It is predicated upon a separation of nature and culture which is not recognized locally" (556). By creating wilderness reserves devoid of human inhabitants, conservationists appropriate and manage areas primarily for the enjoyment and consumption of the Western tourist market. They exclude locals from accessing resources they previously relied on and stigmatize them as trespassers and poachers that threaten the valuable commodity of pristine nature.

Ape Hunters follows the difficulties that the film's characters face trying to develop ecotourism in their region. With the assistance of outside funding, the ex-poacher tracks gorillas in the forest to see if it will be possible to lead groups of tourists on photo-safaris. However, the forest proves to be too dense to obtain good photos and the gorillas do not show any evidence of becoming habituated to humans after two years of tracking missions. Eventually, the funding runs out and the community isn't any closer to the goal of replacing hunting with tourism.

The film shows that ecotourism is not a sustainable alternative for environmental conflicts while giving a voice to the indigenous perspective that the situation is more complicated than it seems to Western conservationists. In an interview the frustrated ex-poacher states,

Europeans can't only sit and say that Africans are wrong.
You fail to understand that all of us, and the gorillas, were

born in the forest. Sometimes they eat the same food as us and they live beside us. But we don't have any cows here, we don't have any chickens here. So we kill the animals and eat our plantains. We eat them and that's how we stay.

Instead of telling the clichéd story that sustainable conservation can be achieved simply by educating the region's population on the intrinsic value of gorillas as our closest evolutionary relatives and implying that developing eco-tourism to attract Western dollars is the best solution to the conflict, the film does not conclude with a happy ending. It successfully articulates the local perspective that the conflict is much more complex, and the outsiders' efforts to promote tourism ended in failure.

Initially the film seems to conform to the established model of blaming the bushmeat crisis and the impending extinction of wildlife on African culture and their insatiable demand for the forest's limited resources; however, ultimately *Ape Hunters* points the finger at Westerners. The final section of the film illuminates the undeniable connection between bush meat hunting and habitat loss with the logging industry, which is primarily driven by the Western commercial hardwood market.

This film embraces an admirable progression towards giving a voice to indigenous cultures and provides a more equitable assessment of conservation conflicts by demanding that the audience examine their own culpability. However I'm not optimistic about its actual potential to mitigate the crisis. It is valuable to Western popular culture to invert the established narrative of demonizing indigenous communities that are perceived to be the biggest threat to their own environment. However, it targets a Western audience who are not likely to feel any direct connection with the fundamental

conflict. The majority of viewers are likely to forget about its message after a few hours or days, and so the film is unlikely to provoke action at the local level.

TOWARDS REPRESENTING INDIGENOUS VOICE

In *Environmental Ethics for a Postcolonial World* Deane Curtin writes, “If we wish to arrive at a better environmental ethic we need to become good listeners to cultures that are different from our own. We need to decenter ourselves from self-understandings as ‘the experts’ and admit that other cultures could have something to teach us” (9). In my film, *Fanihi: A Cultural Digest*, my goal was to avoid importing the Western conservation ethic of protecting wildlife while alienating the local culture by producing a typical anti-poaching diatribe that demonizes the Chamorro tradition of eating fruits bats. Instead, I attempted to listen to local perspectives and molded the film’s narrative around the voices of Rotanese representatives who are intimately involved in the conflict.

I open the film with a long sequence of beautiful scenery familiar to anybody who lives on Rota. I want to convey that this film is entirely about their island, which has been home to many generations of Chamorros as well as the wildlife they live with. I believe it is important to establish the setting of the film as the home of the Rotanese. The meditative montage primarily serves to help the audience feel pride for the beauty of their land.

Once I establish the setting, I move straight into the conflict. I hope to surprise skeptics with preconceived notions that the content of the film will be overwhelmingly anti-hunting by featuring the voice of a hunter describing the delicacy. “The best way to eat *fanihi*... we just cook it the way it is. We eat everything, from the fur to the meat. It’s something, brother, that nobody imagined of eating, it’s the best and you just cannot

explain it.” My intention is not only to make the audience who crave eating *fanihi* to drool, but also to make it clear, through the speaker’s confidence and pride, that this film will not be the typical anti-poaching diatribe that demonizes local hunters.

After a sound bite that conveys a moderate perspective that eating *fanihi* is part of the culture but that the bats need to be protected, followed by a nostalgic memory of the abundance of the bats in the past and disgust over the commercial harvest that threatens them today, I bookend the film’s opening with a quote from a Chamorro Division of Fish and Wildlife employee, Robert Alloa. He articulates what I hope viewers will interpret as the fundamental motivation behind this film: “The fact remains that people do still go out and hunt fruit bats. This is not about pointing fingers at individuals who are still hunting *fanihi*. It’s about educating ourselves on the importance of the *fanihi* and why we should keep the *fanihi* existing. It’s about time that people should open up.” My purpose is not to tell a story about how Chamorro cultural traditions must be abandoned and that hunting and eating fruit bats is wrong; it is to reflect the reality of the conflict on Rota, and to present the topic from as many local perspectives as possible so that the community can have a voice in the debate about how the resource should be managed.

One of the difficulties I envisioned in conceptualizing my thesis film was how I was going to frame the conflict between hunters and members of the community that support the harvest of *fanihi* against conservationists who are working to save the species. One of the dominant tendencies in conservation and environmental films is to tell the story of a heroic individual crusading to save an imperiled species or ecosystem from the impending threats of overpopulation, ignorance, or commercialization posed by the

human population living in the region. This character is typically exemplified in “the neocolonial figure of the adventurous and self-sacrificing white Westerner whose task is to objectively understand the animal and defend its conservation” (Vivanco, 1199). The popularity of this character isn’t surprising in conservation films targeted toward Western audiences because it is easy for viewers to identify with their personalities and goals.

If I had wanted to echo this narrative, the perfect character would have been my initial point of contact on the island, Julia Boland, who is the resident biologist studying bats on Rota. She is passionate about protecting the threatened bats and absolutely rigid in her commitment against poaching. However, my goal was to deliver a film more appropriate for the Rotanese viewer. While making a story about Julia’s crusade as an anti-poacher biologist would ensure plenty of built-in conflict and entertainment value, the message might doom the effectiveness of the film and create more resentment towards conservation goals. I discovered that in order to gain access to some of the perspectives I wanted to feature, I was going to have to distance myself from associations with her and the Division of Fish and Wildlife. As a white outsider driving a truck that everybody knows used to be part of the DFW fleet, this proved to be difficult. I eventually discovered the widespread rumor that I was an undercover FBI agent on Rota gathering evidence to prosecute illegal hunting activities.

Despite this, I interviewed Julia and even spliced some footage of her into a rough cut because I felt her perspective as a DFW employee and biologist fit into my goal of presenting all sides of the issue. Later, however, I decided to remove her voice entirely because I feel that the film has more potential impact within the Chamorro community if

the story is told entirely through their own words. In *Contested Meanings: The Consumption of News About Nature Conservation*, Jacquelin Burgess writes, “It is important for environmental programming to include or even feature the voice of local ‘ordinary’ members of the community and to vocalize their interpretations of the conflict so that ‘ordinary’ audience members will be able to better identify with the content of the program” (499). In the small community on Rota, the characters I interviewed are recognizable and respected (two members of the local government, a successful businessman and former teacher, an outspoken farmer whose brother serves in the CNMI congress, a DFW employee known in the community for being very moderate, and a hunter who promotes traditional Chamorro lifestyles), so viewers will be able to identify with their perspectives.

By avoiding the narrative of the heroic Western scientist working to save the fruit bats from poachers and making an effort to feature Chamorro characters and voices exclusively, I hope I’ve avoided some of the major pitfalls typical of eco-colonial conservation films. Instead, I tried to frame the conflict as a problem of commercialization fueled by the greed of a few individuals who go to colonies of roosting bats with shotguns and kill many bats to sell. This destructive practice is probably the greatest threat to *fanihi* populations and is the primary reason why their numbers have declined throughout the archipelago.

However, this alternative narrative strategy can be interpreted as promoting “the theme of the ‘green primitive,’ the romantic notion of the ecological noble savage living in harmony with nature,” which Luis Vivanco describes in *Seeing Green: Knowing and*

Saving the Environment on Film (1200). I feel that I am partly guilty of promoting this trope by featuring the film's hunter character, Vincenté Rosario, as a heavily tattooed Chamorro wearing only a loincloth. He laments about traditional hunting techniques that younger generations will lose because of the ban on hunting fanihi. In *Seeing Green*, Vivanco continues, "A central problem with green primitive allegories... is that the overwhelming desire for purity denies the voices and agency of the very people it [sic] claims to represent... eliminating the claims of those who do not conform to idealized images" (1200).

My intention to feature Vincenté as the traditional Chamorro was to tell the history of hunting fanihi and the evolution from slings and nets made of thorns to guns. Because I was unable to obtain an interview with someone representing him/herself as a modern hunter, I fear some viewers may interpret the film's message to mean that hunters should revert to traditional techniques and that modernity and guns are fundamentally wrong for Chamorros. Although I do demonize the commercial shotgun hunters exploiting the colonies, at several points in the film my characters state they are not opposed to hunting in a sustainable way. When speaking about a future in which the bat population has recovered, the anti-poaching character Otton Mendiola says, "therefore, if I like fruit bat, for example, it's right there, and I just shoot what I want." I hope that this statement conveys a respect for modern Chamorro hunters who use guns as opposed to traditional methods.

Although I've emphasized my intention to convey respect for the tradition of hunting and eating *fanihi*, my intention is not to create a pro-poaching narrative. I do not

want to alienate the significant portion of the community that supports these activities, but I also give a voice to individuals on the opposite side of the conflict who feel the species has to be protected. However, instead of asserting this responsibility lies with the institutions of law enforcement and the federal government, I attempt to craft the message that ultimately the community must make the commitment to preserving the species on its own terms. The reality on Rota is that nobody wants to see the extinction of the *fanihi*. Beyond environmental consequences and the loss of a species that has intrinsic value in its own right, Chamorros do not want to lose their cultural tradition of eating the bats.

By acknowledging that the tradition of hunting fruit bats on Rota is unlikely to be extinguished through enforcement by federal wildlife managers, I hope efforts can be made within the community towards curbing the destructive tendencies of a few greedy individuals who harvest the colonies. The film concludes with several of the characters suggesting that the possibility for compromise must exist. While *legally* implementing a solution that satisfies federal wildlife managers and Chamorros may not be possible, opening a public conversation about the complex issues (even if it is only within the context of the film itself) will help the community gain more ownership over the future of the *fanihi* and a greater opportunity to maintain control over the outcome of the conflict.

CONCLUSION

Although analysis of environmental conflicts and the practice of conservation filmmaking are controversial sociological realms (especially within indigenous communities as seen through Western eyes), actively engaging in these activities can provide rewarding experiences both for individuals and their communities. However, because the potential for unintended consequences through cultural ignorance and misguided conservation efforts is high, it is important for modern filmmakers to be aware of the cultural myths and histories that surround the creation of their films. The investigation of strategies that increase the potential of media to have positive impacts on environmental goals within communities while avoiding the mistakes of filmmakers of the past helps us grow as media producers working in the field of conservation and environmental filmmaking.

Perhaps the work of innovative production models like Cynthia Moses' INCEF campaign which allows indigenous cultures to create their own films will help to redefine global perceptions about effective conservation strategies within local communities. Perhaps consistent measuring rubrics like INCEF's system of evaluating the effects of media on the perceptions and actions of the communities they are disseminated into will help set a baseline for measuring the success of environmental outreach efforts in specific communities. Further studies in this practice and analysis are needed to increase the effectiveness of advocacy films on their intended audience.

While the traditional model of broadcasting films to wide audiences may not be effective for grassroots conservation, the development of new technologies like

inexpensive high quality cameras, portable screening systems, and Internet-based media outlets that decrease production costs and increase avenues for distribution will allow non-traditional models of environmental filmmaking to proliferate. Greater access to filmmaking tools and audiences allow indigenous communities to take the power of storytelling through visual media into their own hands in order to tell their own histories and promote their own perspectives instead of only being subjected to the myths and misrepresentations of the dominant Western culture. In *Speaking For, Speaking About, Speaking With, or Speaking Alongside – An Anthropological and Documentary Dilemma*, Jay Ruby writes about the significance of producing subject-generated and collaborative films that do not follow the dominant model of Western media production. Films produced entirely by or with significant contributions from indigenous communities create the potential of “perceiving the world from the viewpoint of the people who lead lives that are different from those traditionally in control of the means for imaging the world. These films challenge our assumptions about the nature of documentary and ethnographic films and potentially offer us insight into the role of culture in the ‘language’ of film” (Ruby, 50). The bright future of alternative models of filmmaking will empower indigenous voices and perspectives in order to define and strengthen values within their own communities as well as to create texts for the global community that will broaden our understandings of the diversity of human experience. I’m uncertain whether the process of Western filmmakers promoting indigenous voice is just another form of “fascinating cannibalism,” however, if local communities have a greater ability to create

texts about themselves, at least they can offer bodies of work to be consumed on their own terms.

AFTERWORD

I delivered *Fanihi: A Cultural Digest* to the island of Rota in November 2009. The film plays daily on the local television station (Channel 5) and my contacts on the island report that the vast majority of Rota's 3,000 residents have seen the film. In addition to its run on television I delivered an initial 100 DVD copies of the film in December 2009 to a local nonprofit group called Rota Conservation and Ecotourism (RCE). I received funding from this nonprofit to deliver an additional 200 DVD copies to the island in November 2010 for use in their education and outreach program. In the spring of 2010 RCE hired four local Chamorro representatives interested in working for bat conservation as educators for its Friends of Fanihi project. The educators learned about the threatened status, ecology, biology and conservation needs of the species and received training on how to disseminate this information to friends, neighbors and community members on Rota.

Rota Conservation and Ecotourism compiled a question and answer survey as well as a teaching guide to serve as a framework for outreach efforts. The educators canvass Rota and visit households in order to talk about the conflict surrounding fruit bats in an intimate setting. They show the film during the visit and give each family a free DVD copy if they are interested. The screening initiates informal discussions about the conflict surrounding the bats, and the educators address the species' ecological importance on the island as well as common misconceptions related to its potential recovery on Rota and the rest of the CNMI.

As of Nov 16, 2010 the group has met with 301 adults on Rota (about ten percent of the total population). At the end of each session the educators ask participants to provide written comments and suggestions. Ninety-seven percent of the 130 comments collected thus far support protecting bats and their habitats, extending education programs, and maintaining vigilance against destructive hunting practices.

In addition to its canvassing efforts, the Friends of Fanihi project conducts classroom presentations at the elementary, middle, and high schools on Rota using the DVD. The educators then take students on a hike to discuss the importance of fruit bats to the ecology of the island. The Friends of Fanihi project will continue into the foreseeable future.

An idea that was strongly encouraged during initial outreach efforts is to establish a facility where the public can become more involved in research, rehabilitation and conservation of the Marianas Flying Fox. Many participants in the outreach campaign suggest that Rota should be the "capital" of *fanihi* conservation. Rota Conservation and Ecotourism is currently working to develop plans and funding for an official Fanihi Research, Education and Conservation center where both Rotanese and off-island visitors can learn about *fanihi* and participate in conservation efforts by helping with population surveys and becoming more familiar with the needs of the species. The facility will screen *Fanihi: A Cultural Digest* as well.

It is too early to be certain, but the delivery of the film, combined with outreach efforts, seems to be making a positive impact on the future of the species on Rota. Between July 2002 to January 2009, before the delivery of the film and the initiation of

the outreach campaign, Rota's *fanihi* population declined by an estimated thirty-five percent. Illegal hunting killed an estimated ten to fourteen percent of Rota's bat population in 2008 alone through five major poaching incidents where up to one hundred bats were killed in each event. In 2010 there has been three poaching events, but they occurred in newly established satellite colonies where only a handful of bats (5-15) were killed. The population has increased from an estimated 1,300 bats in January 2009 to 2,000 in November 2010. The elevated awareness of the plight of the species generated through the delivery of the film as well as outreach efforts have made the topic of fruit bat conservation a common public discussion and increased support for protecting the species. The future of the *fanihi* on Rota is still far from secure but recent efforts show that media targeted to a specific small community can generate positive outcomes in environmental conflicts.

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