



Agnes Hannan

Being Rotuman in Australia

Cultural Maintenance in Migration

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BEING ROTUMAN IN AUSTRALIA: CULTURAL MAINTENANCE IN MIGRATION

-1-

INTRODUCTION

Insufficient attention has been given to the personal and collective pasts that constrain invention and interpretation and make them intelligible as historical processes ... memory, whether personal or collective, not only validates people's existence through time, it also sustains their identity in the present.

J.W. Turner, "Continuity and Constraint: Reconstructing the Concept of Tradition from a Pacific Perspective," in *Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 9, Issue 2, 1997, pp. 373-74

My interest in researching Rotuma was sparked by a chance conversation with a Rotuman woman, born in Fiji, who had never been to the island before adulthood and who spoke of her immediate spiritual identification with the land on her first visit. Living now in Townsville, Queensland, she wanted to find out more about her island. She spoke of the stories told in her family about the island and the large Rotuman community in Sydney, Australia, of which some of her close family formed a part. Volunteering to find out some resources she could draw on through the James Cook University library engendered my own interest in the migration of Rotumans.

The more I read the more questions arose about the ways in which these Pacific Island people ordered their lives in their new homes. It quickly became obvious that they were held in high regard, both personally and as workers, by members (employers and others) of the host society in which they lived. They fitted well into the larger communities into which they migrated and were generally employed in responsible positions. At the same time they continued to maintain a strong Rotuman ethos. On commencing research my attention was drawn strongly towards investigating the ways Rotuman culture may have changed over time both on the island since European contact and, more particularly, overseas in the Australian Rotuman communities. The singularly strong determination of older Rotuman migrants to pass on Rotuman culture, values, behaviour and history to the younger generation was of special note. It was evident that while Rotumans made, on the whole, successful and apparently permanent moves when they migrated there was an understanding that loss of culture was likely without a sustained effort in Rotuman diasporic communities to ensure that Rotuman identity and culture were retained. This effort appears to be operating in the

global Rotuman diaspora – thus wherever they go Rotumans maintain an awareness of, and a pride in, their Rotuman-ness.

The question for this work is how the Rotuman identity is shaped and maintained in diaspora, what mechanisms are in place that allow them to live and operate in an apparently seamless way within the cultural milieu of an adopted country – in this instance Australia. It will pay particular attention to the ways the past has influenced their ability to migrate successfully in the late 19th and mid-20th centuries while maintaining a strong focus on their Rotuman-ness. This is reminiscent of J.W Davidson's metaphor of islands: "The indigenous cultures of the Pacific were like islands whose coastal regions outsiders might penetrate but whose heartlands they could never conquer."¹ Their agency in inventing, interpreting, re-inventing and re-interpreting who they are and how they represent themselves has been influenced by a series of encounters with others. Rotumans have taken from each intervention selectively to construct their identity over time. They have woven their identity as closely and skilfully as their women traditionally wove their fine white mats or *apei*.

The fundamental notion of culture used in this work is that it consists in all of the beliefs, behaviours and symbols - "the ideation, actions and manufactures"² - of the group under study. In the past scholars have used this concept of culture as a model of the ways in which people in a particular social group interact. The concept has been under considerable scrutiny in the modern social sciences because of the perception that such a model eschews the influence of regional and global connections.³ The reality is that cultural groups have agency in their interaction with other groups across the globe and external inclusions from outside are often appropriated in ways that fit the cultural logic particular to the group.⁴ Thus this work does not entirely agree with Appadurai's criticism of the concept of culture as voiced by Brightman, wherein the idea of cultural boundaries can no longer be tolerated due to

*their forms and contents ... (being) ... increasingly mobile ... (and) ...because emergent cultural materials are precipitated out of the interaction between collectivities – localised or dispersed – within the global ecumene.*⁵

¹ J.W. Davidson, "Lauaki Namulau'ulu Mamoe: A traditionalist in Samoan politics," in J.W. Davidson and Deryck Scarr (eds), *Pacific Islands Portraits*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1976, p. 267.

² Robert Brightman, "Forget Culture: Replacement, Transcendence, Reflexification," in *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 10, No. 4, Nov. 1995, p. 512.

³ *Ibid.*, p.521.

⁴ See for example, Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann, "Tombstone Openings: Cultural Change and Death Ceremonies in Torres Strait, Australia," in *Kabar Seberang Sulating Maphilindo*, No. 8-9 (July), 1981, pp.1-15 on the secondary mortuary rite, the tomb opening of the Torres Strait, its connection to traditional pre-Christian rites and to the teachings of Christianity.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 521.

Rather it will contend that the efficacy of maintaining a cultural model, despite the fluidity of some boundaries, lies in its ability to assist in the explanation of the nature of what it is to be, in this instance, "Rotuman." It is also my contention that it is what the subjects of a study believe to be the reality, not some external construct, which is important in research such as this and the idea that they belong to an exclusive cultural group is very much alive and well in the Rotuman diaspora. In other words, while geographical and other external manifestations are important as boundaries and qualifiers, it is the self-perception of people that are most important. This is evident in the existence of self-proclaimed Rotuman communities and the growth of Rotuman websites, particularly in Australia, and their function to maintain cultural links within the diaspora.

While members of groups do act within a logic which ensures the communal appreciation of normative behaviour and a common ethos, values and mores, the reality is that members of a group will not always behave normatively, however most will behave in a predictable, normative, way most of the time. This dynamic needs to be taken into account when using modular explanations of behaviour. Bearing in mind the agency of individuals, as well as the groups themselves, the cultural model can maintain its usefulness in illustrating the commonality extant amongst the Rotumans in diaspora. In his 2001 paper Howard discusses his thoughts on the culture concept in relation to Rotumans in diaspora and concludes that rather than "have" culture, they "do" culture.⁶ This is borne out by the research for this work.

Rotuman culture in the diaspora is not the same as it is in Rotuma or, indeed, Fiji and this work does not seek to show it thus. As Howard notes,

people must learn new ways of acting and thinking or reformulate those that derive from their "home" community. They must select which aspects of their culture to preserve and value, and which to discard or place in a mental holding compartment, to be reactivated when visiting the home community or recreating remembered aspects of it with other expatriates. ... Thus, the full and encompassing cultural experience of a home community is often replaced by a radically simplified schema of "traditional culture," based on a few activities like dance and truncated rituals, or selected symbolic elements like special foods or dress.⁷

⁶ Alan Howard, "Where has Rotuman Culture Gone? And What is it Doing There?" in *Pacific Studies*, No. 24, Issue 1-2, 2001.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.63.

In diaspora “culture” tends to become objectified, that is broken down into its composite parts, disassembled and those parts removed which cannot be sustained in migration. For example, due to an absence of chiefs less emphasis is placed on their ceremonial role in Rotuman diasporic communities. Consequently ceremonies are often abbreviated versions of those still practised on the home island.⁸ Following on, this work asserts that Rotuman communities in diaspora maintain core components of the Rotuman culture that contribute to the ability of Rotuman expatriates to maintain a relatively discrete identity in diaspora. These core components are chosen by the diaspora and are the ones that can most effectively be used to bond the group together. In Australia these are demonstrably: the island of Rotuma itself as a common ancestral homeland, singing, dancing, feasting and regularly coming together as a group to practise a dance routine or song, to banter and talk, sometimes in Rotuman, about kinship relationships, the latest news about relatives and to tell stories which pass on knowledge about Rotuma both recent and historic. Videos of visits to Rotuma are valued for their entertainment as well as their educational value, showing as they do local Rotuman personalities, locations and ceremonies and encouraging conversation about cultural matters.⁹ Such aspects of Rotuman culture as kinship, while still important, can take a secondary role in diaspora and this is further explored in the second part of the book.

This study of cultural maintenance in migration contributes to the wider body of data on migration in a rapidly globalising world. It fits well into the recent body of knowledge about the cultural identity of modern expatriate Pacific Islanders that endeavours to see them from their own point of view; to give them agency. Since Clive Moore’s early work on the Kanakas of Mackay¹⁰ and Patricia Mercer’s seminal study of Pacific Islander settlement in North Queensland¹¹ little has been written about the modern Pacific Islander migrants to Australia beyond two other major studies on Tongan and Samoan migrants to this country, Helen Morton Lee’s *Tongans Overseas: Between Two Shores*,¹² and Leulu Felise Va’a’s *Saili Matagi: Samoan Migrants in Australia*.¹³ Much more has been written by New Zealand academics about Samoans, Tongans and Cook Islanders.¹⁴ A detailed study of Rotuman migration to Australia has not been previously undertaken and this work is primarily directed at focusing on the total journey, including the waypoints and endpoints, in order to make sense of the impetus to migration and the methods used by migrant Pacific Islanders

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.78.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 76, Agnes Hannan, interviews and field notes reinforce Howard’s work in this area.

¹⁰ Clive Moore, *Kanaka : a history of Melanesian Mackay* (1985). Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies and University of Papua New Guinea Press, 1985.

¹¹ Patricia Mercer, *White Australia Defied: Pacific Islander Settlement in North Queensland*, Department of History and Politics, James Cook University, Townsville, 1995.

¹² Helen Morton Lee, *Tongans Overseas: Between Two Shores*, University of Hawai’i Press, Honolulu, 2003.

¹³ Leulu Felise Va’a, *Saili Matagi: Samoan Migrants in Australia*, University of the South Pacific, Suva, 2001

¹⁴ Ron Crocombe, Review of Spickard, Rondilla and Hippolite Wright, *Pacific Diaspora: Island Peoples in the United States and Across the Pacific*, in *The Contemporary Pacific*, 16.1 (Spring 2004), pp. 178-182.

to settle and adjust to life in Australian society and to avoid cultural anomie. No other study has been undertaken into the ways collective memory has been used by Rotumans to maintain their identity as migrants.

The argument in this work is presented in terms of “waypoints” – significant points on a journey where a traveller may stop or change course. A waypoint is a navigational term most recently employed in conjunction with geo-positioning systems (GPS) technology. Just as the Polynesian peoples once used stars to navigate from point to point, now mariners use satellites. The history and prehistory, the latter being defined as both the oral history of the indigenous inhabitants and the archaeological record, of the Pacific peoples, inextricably connected to seafaring and journeying, lends itself to the use of such a metaphor. Geographical waypoints are influential in that they provide the point at which information is exchanged, new courses and waypoints set or decisions made to maintain the status quo. As the navigator’s chart is marked to reflect the journey with reference points to past passages and future voyages so the journey of a people through time is marked by reference to the past and projections for the future. The use of the waypoint metaphor to discuss the Rotuman cultural journey signifies social and cultural agency and movement through time and space, maintaining a sense of a people positively navigating their way forward. In that sense geographical waypoints can become social ones as languages are built, cultures influenced and changed and migrations commenced or continued. Given its position at the junction of the Micronesian, Melanesian and Polynesian cultural areas, the geographical location of Rotuma makes it an ideal waypoint and external visitors have been key shapers of Rotuman culture and history.

Thus, in this work, points of interaction with others are equated to waypoints in the social journey of the Rotuman people. For example Rotuman communication with others on inter-island journeys, the settlement on the island by small numbers of Samoans and Tongans and later the movement of Europeans through the Pacific when beachcombers, traders, whalers and missionaries visited, and on occasion took up residence, are all waypoints. Each experience in the human journey of communities is examined and memory of it kept or discarded depending on its usefulness to both physical and cultural survival. In this context the Rotuman origin story of Raho growing the island from baskets of Samoan soil comes from the period of Samoan influence. Similarly the traditional chiefly name *Maraf* is reminiscent of the arrival and period of rule by a group of Tongans from Niufo’ou.¹⁵ Widespread Christianity points to the influence of the missionary period in the island and the more recent proliferation of smaller Christian sects highlights a later wave of missionary activity, from which Rotumans adopted spiritual and moral messages more attuned to the modern

¹⁵ W.J.E. Eason, *A Short History of Rotuma*, Government Printing Department, Suva, 1951, p.2.

needs of those who converted. At the same time the persistence of knowledge about the old spirit world speaks to the continuing influence of the past as stories of *atua* and animistic beliefs are passed down from the older to the younger generations.

The waypoint metaphor is also evocative of collective memory, “the specific recollections that are commonly shared by entire groups,”¹⁶ the process through which Rotuman migration and cultural continuity/discontinuity is being examined here, in that it utilises particular events to lace together the social, and often physical, journey of a community. Eviatar Zerubavel, who specialises in the study of collective memory, expressed the concept most clearly when he wrote,

*(b)eing social presupposes the ability to experience things that happened to the groups to which we belong long before we even joined them as if they were part of our own personal past. Such an ability is manifested in the Polynesian use of the first person pronoun when narrating one’s ancestral history ...*¹⁷

Despite the use of the terminology of “waypoints” or changes of direction this book is not about showing Rotuman migration history as either a “rise and fall” or a “fall and rise”¹⁸ story. It seeks rather to show the continuity of culture and identity involved in the movement of Rotumans to and from their island.

In terms of being Rotuman then, the island of Rotuma is at once an “endpoint” and also a “waypoint”. In its iteration as an endpoint it is symbolic of the culture that is valued by the Rotuman diaspora across the globe. However, it is also a waypoint in that many of its sons and daughters will not return permanently and the majority of Rotuman children born overseas may never visit its shores but they will still know it as a collective memory of their origins and part of their present being.

The work is structured in a generally chronological manner; it looks at the points in the history of Rotuma and its people where collective memory may have been influenced by factors outside Rotuman society. As a consequence of the involvement of collective memory as a process, a set of themes are embedded in the chronology and revisited throughout the book in different contexts. It then draws that information through to a conclusion about the ways in which these re-inventions or re-directions have allowed the transition from an isolated island society to successful diasporic inclusion into a busy, western capitalist society to occur. In other words, it questions how

¹⁶ Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 2003, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁸ See Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 2003, p.19, for a discussion of the ways in which human beings think of and narrate their past.

expatriate Rotuman collective memory accommodates changing circumstances to ensure that continuity of identity is assured. The points at which the collective memory wave encounters a shore are called “waypoints” in this work because collective memory, as part of the dynamic of culture, continues to evolve and change. This work posits that Rotuman culture and collective memory are like the waves of the Pacific that wash around their tiny island home – the forward motion is endless but the wave changes shape slightly as it encounters changed circumstances.

The term “collective memory” needs to be clarified. In researching how Rotumans maintained their Rotuman-ness in Australia it became apparent that remembering in one form or another was extremely important to the process. The celebration of Rotuma Day, getting together in Church services and social gatherings afterwards, the sense of community, reminiscences of the island and Fiji, storytelling, the reiteration of myth and legends all depend on memory and its transmission.

“Collective memory” is a term used by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in 1925 to refer to his understanding of memory as a product of group interaction. For him collective memory is “not a metaphor but a social reality, transmitted and sustained through the conscious efforts and institutions of the group.”¹⁹ In saying this Halbwachs is not implying that there is an overarching “group mind” working autonomously but that it is the individual who remembers in light of the social, cultural or historical context in which they are operating. As Climo and Cattell note,

*[a] proliferation of terms has attached to the phenomenon of collective memory: cultural memory, historical memory, local memory, public memory, shared memory, social memory, custom, heritage, myth roots, tradition.*²⁰

In the context of this work the terms collective memory, social memory and cultural memory are regarded as so slightly different as to be considered interchangeable, except that where the term cultural memory is used the reader should assume it is in the context of memory as a cultural tool – similarly social memory; collective memory should be regarded as the most general term – used to denote the memories, precise and imprecise, that arise from group action and interaction. In this interpretation I follow Bal and suggest that:

*cultural memorization ... [is] ... an activity occurring in the present, in which the past is continuously modified and redescribed even as it continues to shape the future.*²¹

¹⁹ J.J. Climo and M.J. Cattell (eds), *Social Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives*, Altamira Press, Walnut Grove CA, 2002, pp.3-4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2002, p.4.

²¹ Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, Leo Spitzer (eds), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, University Press of New England, Hanover, 1998, p.vii.

In other words, as Rotumans in Australia collectively involve themselves in cultural and social remembering, they are consciously and unconsciously reworking their collective memory to allow them to maintain connection with their identity in the past and into the future, and modify it to suit local/changing circumstances. As Vilsoni Hereniko, a Rotuman academic at the University of Hawai'i has written:

*Our cultural identities are always in a state of becoming, a journey in which we never arrive; who we are is not a rock that is passed on from generation to generation, fixed and unchanging. Cultural identity is process, not product.*²²

Olick and Robbins²³ suggest collective memory is malleable but can also be persistent, and Climo and Cattell note that

*subordinate groups often retain many elements of their history and their culture and traditions, in spite of the efforts of dominant groups to impose change.*²⁴

This work will look at the role of collective memory in Rotuman communities as the prime mover in the retention and rejection of certain cultural mores in given situations. Collective memory is both an agent of change and a champion of cultural maintenance. It is the glue that holds a group together over time. In periods of change it plays a role in maintaining those parts of cultural existence that remain useful in ordering and cementing group solidarity and assists in the introduction of new ideas and ways of behaving that allow the group to adapt to necessary change through "collective forgetting" thus allowing a more flexible adaptation to new situations. For this reason it will be essential to discuss those aspects of Rotuman history that show the effect of certain events and people on the collective memory of Rotumans on the island prior to a discussion later in this book about the way the collective memory of Rotumans has been adapted to allow them to remain Rotuman in Australia.

Methodology and theoretical stance

Primary source research for the work consisted of interviews with ten Rotuman families, a further 20 individuals on the eastern seaboard of Australia and five people of Rotuman descent in the Torres Strait; a four-week visit to Fiji and the island of Rotuma with interviews with Rotumans and government officials on the island and in Suva and attendance at the 2003 Rotuman Day celebration

²² Vilsoni Hereniko, "Pacific Cultural Identities," in Donald Denoon, Stewart Firth, Jocelyn Linnekin, Malama Meleisea and Karen Nero (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p. 428.

²³ J.K. Olick and J.R. Robbins, "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices," *Annual Review of Sociology*, No. 24, 1998, pp. 105-140. Jeffrey Olick is Professor of Sociology at the University of Virginia and while he has published on a wide variety of topics his interests focus particularly on collective memory.

²⁴ Climo and Cattell (eds), *Social Memory*, 2002, p.5.

held by the Brisbane Rotuma Association. This volume of interview material and actual contact is more representative than might at first appear given the small numbers of Rotumans available for interview both in Australia and in Fiji. Its findings are also confirmed by website feedback. Archival research was conducted in Suva and Australia as well as searches of the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau catalogues for material such as ships logs, missionary accounts and correspondence, government correspondence and reports, and commercial correspondence. Material from the Joint Copying Project, available in the microfilm collection held by James Cook University, was also utilised in the chapters on missionary activity. The statistics of Rotuman migration to Australia are unavailable because the Australian Government does not differentiate ethnically within the Fijian populations migrating to this country.

While a great deal of information can be gleaned from researching through the written record, the support of oral history is invaluable when dealing with such a statistically invisible group of migrants. Migration is essentially about people and change – varied people, ordinary people, voluntarily changing their lives while still trying to maintain their sense of identity and their connection with the past. Nothing substitutes for the immediacy of personal and collective memory in dealing with people moving between cultures and geographical locations. The archive contains little about the feelings of immigrants trying to settle in a new land, the bed-time stories once told to them and that they reiterate to their children containing the myth and legend of their home country; the other stories, told to keep children quiet or obedient, that encompass the range of “spirit” stories of their cultural roots; the community commemorations; visits to church; the weddings and funerals; the ache of missing home and the struggle to make sense of new customs, new language, unfamiliar neighbourhoods. This is the stuff of a good “talk” gained in an atmosphere of trust and sensitivity. Indeed, in the case of Rotuma, which had no written language before European contact, there is a rich lode still able to be mined from the memories of the people. As James Hoopes writes, “History, like life, is a test of our ability imaginatively to place ourselves in the positions of other people, so that we can understand the reasons for their actions.”²⁵

Access to the Australian Rotuman community was gained in the first instance through Alan Howard who supplied an initial list of possible contacts. Once communication was established with those people further contacts were obtained from them. The leaders of the Rotuman community have been very keen to assist with the research wherever possible both on Rotuma and in Australia. Attendance at community barbeques, family lunches and dinners and the 2003 Brisbane Rotuman

²⁵James Hoopes, *Oral History: An Introduction for Students*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1979, p. 3.

community Rotuma Day celebration allowed me to meet a wide cross-section of the whole Rotuman community and to forge relationships with them at a more personal level. Interviews were conducted in the homes of the interviewees and consisted of a set range of questions as well as informal discussion on points that arose during the formal part of the interview. Most sessions lasted for no longer than two hours and interviewees were given free range over the information they chose to divulge. This method was considered to be the most efficient and effective given the cultural mores of the people being interviewed, the time frames involved and the need to ensure that the interviewees were comfortable in imparting the information for which they were asked. To ensure that I had a reasonable understanding of the culture of the informants the interviews were not conducted until I had read as much as possible about Rotuma and its history through primary and secondary sources. In this way I believe that the likelihood of misinterpreting information given in the interviews has been minimised. However, it has been important to take account of the possible agendas of the interviewees, which range from a desire to promote and preserve their culture to showing that they have successfully adapted to life in Australia.

The aim of the interview process was to gather first-hand information about what motivated Rotuman migrants to this country to leave Fiji, how they maintained their relationships to each other, to their relatives in Rotuma and Fiji and to what extent they maintained cultural continuity through commemoration, story, music and dance. This information was then analysed to see to what extent collective memory played a role in the process of migration, continuity of culture and adjustment to a new life.

The majority of interviews were recorded on digital media and are stored on CD-ROM. Information required for the book was used directly from the CD-ROM and from rough transcripts due to time constraints. Interviews conducted on the island of Rotuma were not recorded due to technical problems with the recorder and were instead taken as notes.²⁶

Further information was gained through the use of the Rotuma website. Anthropologist Alan Howard has studied Rotuma in great detail over a forty year period. In 1995 Howard set up a website to give diasporic Rotumans access to a forum through which they could maintain contact with other Rotumans around the world. On it he publishes a wide range of information – including the full text of his and his wife Jan's articles, extracts from historical documents, photographs, recipes, proverbs and most importantly a bulletin board and news page on which are published letters and items of interest to the far-flung migrant Rotuman population. Beginning research on

²⁶ The CD-ROMs and handwritten notes of all interviews are held by the author.

Rotuma was made easier by the existence of the website and the wealth of information contained on it.

Howard and Rensel's work has been invaluable in the foundation research for this book, which in turn builds on their work both from a theoretical standpoint and in focusing on the Australian diaspora. This work develops a new perspective on the cultural identity process and structure that provides a fluid, never-ending connection between the past and the present.

The historical material contained on the website, the accounts by early travellers, adventurers, doctors and missionaries from 1791 onwards, provided a glimpse of the Rotuman people on first contact and of the waypoints of the collective memory process after contact. They relate particularly to first hand accounts of the Rotumans from 1824 until the present and variously describe the island, the inhabitants, their mode of subsistence and economy, spiritual beliefs, politics and social organization. The work of J. Stanley Gardiner is regarded by Howard as "the most comprehensive ethnography of Rotuma published in the nineteenth century ... [and an] ... indispensable source for studies of Rotuman culture and history."²⁷

Howard's early work *Learning to be Rotuman*²⁸ is now over thirty years old but it is a valuable resource providing, as it does, a basis for comparison of methods used by on-island Rotumans to socialize and culturally educate their children. It also points up some of the reasons that assist Rotumans living away from the island and Fiji to adjust to change. Howard illustrates this writing,

*In Rotuma we find the individual being shaped by two distinctly different teaching strategies. One employed by his parents, relatives and friends ... is rooted in the traditional way of life and relies upon personalized, informal influence. ... In contrast to this approach are the techniques of the school which are rooted just as firmly in the traditions of western European culture.*²⁹

As well as this dual learning situation Rotuman children who want to further their education beyond the secondary level or to obtain work must travel to the main islands of Fiji to do so. This means that they are obliged to live with relatives, to board or find other accommodation. Living in Fiji means that, in order to communicate effectively, they must become tri-lingual – to learn Fijian and English as well as their native Rotuman.³⁰ This work supports the argument in later chapters of this

²⁷ Alan Howard, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Gardiner/GdrContents.html>, accessed 11/03/01; J. Stanley Gardiner, "The Natives of Rotuma," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, No. 27, 1896, pp. 396-435, 457-524.

²⁸ Alan Howard, *Learning to Be Rotuman: Enculturation in the South Pacific*, Teachers College Press, Columbia University, New York, 1970.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1-2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

book that these previous collective memory waypoints are crucial in the ability of Rotumans to maintain a dual identity in diaspora. This not only allows them to maintain their cultural mores and values but also supports them in their other roles as citizens of their adopted country.

Other primary source documents such as Captain Edward Edwards' log and, later, the *Pandora* surgeon's account, *A Voyage Around the World in the Frigate Pandora*, recount visits to many Pacific Islands including Rotuma while searching for the *Bounty* mutineers.³¹ Later biographical works, for example, *Gods Who Die: The Story of Samoa's Greatest Adventurer*, the story of George Westbrook who travelled the Pacific including Rotuma throughout the last half of the nineteenth century add further insights. Others come through the pens of the various District Officers who were posted to Rotuma and the annals of the churches. All of these portray Rotuma and the Pacific from a European perspective.

The Rotuman perspective on the early contact period is harder to obtain. It can be heard in part through a sensitive reading of the European sources but perhaps the best but more difficult source is through the stories of the people themselves and the myth, legends and beliefs they espouse. *Tales of a Lonely Island* written by Mesulama Titifanua and translated by C. Maxwell Churchward allow some insight into the content of Rotuman collective memory as well as the history, social, cultural and political life of the Rotuman people prior to European contact.³² The publication, *Rotuma: Hanua Pumue, Precious Land*, edited by Chris Plant, with eleven of the fourteen contributors being Rotuman,³³ gave basic geographic, cultural and social information that provided some structure to the understanding of the Rotuman people and the background to migration.

Another essential source of material on Rotuma was *A Bibliography of Rotuma*, compiled by Antoine N'Yeurt, Will McClatchey and Hans Schmidt.³⁴ This bibliography contains a comprehensive collection of some 900 entries covering the period of the last 200 years. It includes books, journals, newspaper articles, microfilm and audiovisual records, dissertations and unpublished manuscripts. It is organised into topical sections from agriculture and anthropology to Rotuman language documents and sociology and is a useful source of information about the location of resources. Similarly, the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau Catalogue of microfilmed

³¹ George Hamilton, *A Voyage Round the World in His Majesty's Frigate Pandora*, W. Phorson, B. Law and Son, Berwick, 1793.

³² Mesulama Titifanua and C.M. Churchward, *Tales of a Lonely Island*, Institute of Pacific Studies, Suva, 1995.

³³ Full list of contributors is: Anselmo Fatiaki, Daniel Fatiaki, Vilsoni Hereniko, Alan Howard, Ieli Irava, Mamatuki Itautoka, Lavenia Kaurasi, Mosesi Kaurasi, Tiu Malo, Aileen Nilsen, Chris Plant, Jan Rensel, John Tanu and Maniue Vilsoni.

³⁴ Antoine N'Yeurt, W. McClatchey and H. Schmidt, *A Bibliography of Rotuma*, Pacific Information Centre and Marine Studies Programme, University of the South Pacific, Suva, 1996.

documents also turned up a large body of information about the Roman Catholic missions on the island and microfilmed documents of the London Missionary Society and United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel contained information on the Protestant missions.

The work done by scholars on migration and the post-colonial Pacific has invoked a wide ranging set of discussions on the topics of diaspora, identity and ethnicity and the social, economic and political ramifications of migration. Paul Spickard, in the introduction to *Pacific Diaspora: Island Peoples in the United States and Across the Pacific* discusses three models by which migration can be understood – the immigrant assimilation, transnational or diasporic and panethnicity models.³⁵ The immigrant assimilation and pan-ethnicity models of migration are concerned with the operation of the migrant group within the host society. The first essentially examines the extent to which people migrate from one place to another and embrace the culture of the adopted land without a backward glance. The second focuses on the inclusion of the migrant into the host society as a hyphenated group – for example, Rotuman-Australian – part of the community as a whole but different from it. The transnational or diasporic model on the other hand emphasises the links between the diaspora,³⁶ and the homeland. Spickard and his co-editors are concerned to set the three models in tension. However he essentially plumps for the diasporic model in discussing the Pacific migrations to the United States of America because of the multi-directional movement typically involved despite his agreement with Sua-ling Wong that it has less relevance for the second-generation diaspora members.³⁷ While mindful of this possibility, there is sufficient evidence to support the role of transnational connections and concerted cultural maintenance strategies employed by overseas Rotumans to ensure the continuation of diasporic Rotuman communities into second and third generations.

At the same it would be incorrect to say that a pan-ethnic “Pacific Islander” identity has not emerged amongst Pacific Islanders who have migrated away from their individual nations. Depending on circumstance Rotumans will identify themselves as Pacific Islanders, Fijians or Rotumans. At the 2002 Brisbane Rotuma Day festivities groups from Tuvalu and Kiribati also performed dances and joined in the celebrations. The leader of the Brisbane Rotuman community welcomed them, saying that it was fitting that the smaller members of the Pacific Island groups get together and support one another. However I would contend that, in the context of this work, pan-

³⁵ Paul Spickard, “Introduction” in Paul Spickard, Joanne Rondilla and Debbie Hippolite Wright (eds), *Pacific Diaspora: Island Peoples in the United States and Across the Pacific*, University of Hawai’i Press, Honolulu, 2002, pp. 9-15.

³⁶ The term diaspora is used here in the sense, not of forced exile, of communities of people who live outside their homeland by choice but who maintain a strong connection to that place and their culture.

³⁷ Paul Spickard, *Pacific Diasporas*, 2002, p.16; Sua-ling Wong, “Denationalisation Reconsidered: Asian American Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads,” in *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 21, Nos. 1 and 2, 1995, pp.1-27, quoted in *Ibid.*, p.13.

ethnicity on the part of Pacific Islanders is more a symptom of non-Pacific Islander classification adopted by Pacific Islanders themselves to avoid the lengthy explanations involved in specifying their origins.

The term diaspora has the potential to become one of the “warm and fuzzy” words of post-modernist literature.³⁸ As such it needs a more precise definition than that applied by Walker Connor, namely “that segment of a people living outside the homeland.”³⁹ William Safran endeavoured to tighten the definition by suggesting six characteristics of diaspora. The Rotuman diaspora in Australia share four of the six characteristics of a diaspora as posited by Safran, namely:

.... 2) they retain a collective memory, vision or myth about their original homeland – its physical location, history, and achievements; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return – when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity, and 6) they continue to relate personally or vicariously to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship.⁴⁰

While no Rotumans were forcibly removed from their homeland, some may feel that they cannot be fully accepted by the host society. The latter feeling, where it is present, is probably more an individual reaction to personal circumstances than a shared feeling amongst the community as a whole.

Well known Anthropologist James Clifford agrees with Safran in seeing the necessity of a tighter definition of diaspora:

Diasporic cultural forms ... are deployed in transnational networks built from multiple attachments, and they encode practices of accommodation with, as well as resistance to host countries and their norms. It involves dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home Diaspora discourse articulates, or blends

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.12.

³⁹ Walker Connor, “The Impact of Homelands Upon Diasporas,” in Gabriel Sheffer (ed.), *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*, St. Martin’s, New York, 1986, pp. 16-46, quoted in William Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myth of Homeland and Return,” in *Diaspora*, Vol.1, No.1, Spring 1991, p. 83.

⁴⁰ Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myth of Homeland and Return,” 1991, pp. 83-84. The two characteristics of diaspora noted by Safran that do not fit into the general form of the Rotuman diaspora are “1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original ‘center’ to two or more ‘peripheral,’ or foreign, regions, ... (and) ... 3) they believe that they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it ...”.

*together, both roots and routes to construct alternate public spheres, forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference.*⁴¹

The Rotuman communities in Australia do not form enclaves – my reading of “collective homes away from home” – but they do conform to the rest of the terms of Cliffords’s definition. In accordance with both of these definitions then, the Rotuman community in Australia can be classified as a diasporic one – maintained in Australia within the family and through regular community meetings, use of the Rotuman language, preservation of strong collective memories, regular contact with relatives and friends in Fiji and Rotuma, sending children back to relatives in Rotuma or Fiji for extended periods, remittances and practical assistance on Rotuma and regular reference to and use of the Rotuma website.

Background and Geography

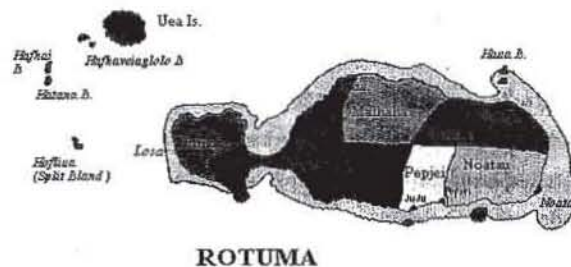
Rotuma is a small island located at 12°S 177°E, approximately 482 kilometres north-north-west of Suva, the most isolated island in the Republic of Fiji. Its nearest neighbours to the north-east are the islands of Tuvalu at 500 kilometres; 1500 kilometres west south-west are the islands of Vanuatu and 500 kilometres south east is the island of Futuna. Rotuma is some 13 kilometres long and 5 kilometres wide at its widest point. It is divided almost in two by an isthmus about 300 metres wide at the western end in the district of Itu'tiu at Motusa. Eight uninhabited islets lie offshore and a fringing reef surrounds the island on an average of about 500 metres from a shoreline that consists of white, sandy beaches with some areas of volcanic rock. Coconut palms and lush vegetation sweep around the beaches.

The island is of volcanic origin with a number of volcanic craters evident among the hills at the centre of the island and at the western end. Over the greater part of the island the soil is extremely fertile.⁴² Most of the 2,500 Rotumans currently on the island live around the seaward edges in seven districts and utilise the fertile interior to grow crops such as taro, yams, breadfruit, cassava, tapioca, ulu (breadfruit) and green leafy vegetables such as *bele*. Coconuts are plentiful and form a large part of the diet as well as the main export – copra. Bananas, of which there are at least seven varieties, pineapples, oranges, melons, pawpaw and mangoes all grow well and are included in

⁴¹ James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the late Twentieth Century*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p. 251.

⁴² Thegn Ladefoged, *Evolutionary Process in an Oceanic Chieftdom: Intergroup Aggression and Political Integration in Traditional Rotuman Society*, PhD Dissertation in Anthropology, University of Hawai'i, August 1993, pp. 67-70 and 81-82.

season in their daily food intake. The reef provides a variety of fish species, crabs and octopus and edible seaweed grows well in particular places between the shore and the reef. Cows, goats, pigs and chickens are kept by most families as food animals for ceremonial feasts such as funerals, weddings, investitures of Chiefs and so on. As some have moved away to the main islands of Fiji or to other parts of the world remittances have become a part of the income source for many families still living on the island and store bought food – canned fish, corned beef, flour and sugar – has become part of their staple diet.⁴³



ROTUMA

MAP 1: Districts of Rotuma ⁴⁴

The island has been governed from Fiji, 482 kilometres south-south-east, since 1881 when the Rotuman Council of Chiefs decided that cession to Great Britain was the only way to ensure social harmony after the religious wars that split the island community in the 1870s. Today there are approximately 10,000 Rotumans world-wide. The majority live in the main urban centres of Fiji and about 800-900 are distributed around the world mainly in Australia, the United States of America and New Zealand. The Rotuman population in Australia is hard to estimate due to the fact that the immigration statistics are not specific as to ethnicity within Fijian emigration to Australia. However, according to informants the Rotuman population in Australia is probably in the range of 300 - 500 people.

⁴³ Alan Howard, *Learning to be Rotuman: Enculturation in the South Pacific*, Teachers College Press, Colombia University, New York, 1970, pp. 10-11; Thegn Ladefoged, *Evolutionary Process*, 1993, p.81; Agnes Hannan, *Field Notes*, 2003.

⁴⁴ Map obtained from <http://www.rotuma.net/os/RotumaMap2.html>, accessed January 2008.

Structure

The work is divided into two main parts – the first “Early Waypoints: the prelude to diaspora” and secondly “Waypoints to and from Australia: collective memory, identity and cultural maintenance.” “Early Waypoints” contains chapters dealing with the period prior to the major migrations of the mid to late 20th century. Thus Chapter Two, “Pre-European Contact”, deals with the initial migration of peoples to Rotuma. While it could be said that all the populations of the world were migrants at some time or other in their journey towards the present, my aim in this first chapter is to posit that the long history of Rotumans as travellers has implications for their ability to draw on collective memory to maintain their cultural base over time and through further migration. I seek to show that the way the Rotuman political and social system was structured allowed a level of flexibility and adaptability that was a positive force in the Rotuman ability to operate easily within other communities and to continue to maintain their own unique identity.

Chapter Three, “Beachcombers, Traders and Whalers,” examines the next major point: the impact of European contact in the early years following 1791, when the British ship *HMS Pandora* first called at the island of Rotuma in search of the *HMS Bounty* mutineers. Beachcombers – men of variable character who had deserted or been cast away by their ships master – arrived on the island, stayed, married local women, some raised families and others died in the violence that regularly dominated their camps; these men were often used by Rotuman chiefs as middlemen in interactions with traders and whalers. Traders introduced the idea of commerce and the world outside the usual sphere of travel for Rotumans. Through them Rotuman men sailed to faraway places bringing back tales of excitement and discovery, new ways of doing things, and engendered a new “rite of passage.” The women who married Europeans were also introduced to the new world through the stories and experiences of their men. The English language – *lingua franca* across the trading world – was quickly learned and this enabled Rotumans to take charge of their own interactions with the strangers arriving on their shores. This waypoint had the effect of giving the Rotuman people the skills and knowledge to enable them to carve a niche for themselves both at home and elsewhere. The work argues that this was another important step in the eventual success of Rotuman migration. The influences of Europeans on the Rotuman culture as well as the use made of the new knowledge they gained by the Rotumans themselves ensured that they maintained control of their own destiny and culture.

Chapter Four, “Missionaries and Foreign Government” looks at the immense change brought about by the spread of the Christian gospel by both French Roman Catholic and English Wesleyan missions and the influence of foreign governments. The Christian missions could be described as

the singularly most obvious and enduring of the “waypoints” given the continuing contemporary involvement of Rotumans with Christianity in all its forms. Initially missionaries had the potential to destroy the people of Rotuma through the several so-called religious wars fuelled by missionary competition and zeal. However, the agency of the Rotuman chiefs, with a little help from the Wesleyan missionaries, ensured that the wars ended with the accession of Rotuma to Great Britain. Christianity can be seen in the context of the book to have been a positive force used by the islanders as a unifier both at home and abroad. It provides a focus for migrant communities, sustaining them spiritually and socially, buffering them when necessary and yet giving them the ability to form part of the wider Christian community in their new land.

Foreign rule continued from 1881 until Rotuma chose to become part of the Republic of Fiji in 1970 when the country was granted independence. This period allowed Rotumans the protection and benefits accruing from inclusion into a wider sphere of influence, at the same time taking away some power from the local people and their chiefs. Described here are the changes that took place on the island between 1881 and 1970 when Britain was responsible for governing the people of Rotuma through the colony of Fiji; and 1970 to the present when Fiji gained independence and Rotumans, with few exceptions, chose to continue their association with that island state. This includes reflections on changes in the cultural and political life that impacted on emigration in both positive and negative ways and how the changes affected the ability of Rotumans to migrate and maintain aspects of their culture successfully.

The second part, “Waypoints to and from Australia: Collective Memory, Identity and Cultural Maintenance in Migration” contains those chapters concerned with the period of migration in the mid to late 20th century and the ways Rotumans maintain their culture as transnationals in the globalized world of today. Chapter Five, “Migration” outlines the migratory pattern of Rotuman migration to Australia. Beginning with the migration of men away from the island to the Torres Strait and their occasional return, it then turns to focus on the later wave of migration begun in the 1960s and 1970s that formed the basis of the Rotuman diaspora across the world. This move was usually from the main islands of Fiji, which were used as a staging point by Rotumans on their move in search of better living conditions, education and opportunity. This is a waypoint of great importance to the Rotuman diaspora and to the families who remained on the island. It marked an era of immense change to the way of life of both communities. At this point Rotumans moved from being Rotuman in Rotuma, surrounded by all the cultural markers of the past, to being Rotuman in Fiji, Australia and other parts of the world where they were surrounded by the cultural markers of others and had only their own memories and the flexible nature of their core culture to help them to

maintain their identity in diaspora. While migration is the underlying theme of this chapter, it also considers the importance of the continual ebb and flow of the diaspora back to Fiji and the island. This continual movement has a strong impact on the cultural continuity and collective memories of both the diaspora and those at home on the island.

Then follow three chapters that deal with the mechanics of the cultural maintenance process. "Community Formation and Collective Memory" examines the ways in which collective memory and group interaction contributes to the maintenance of Rotuman cultural mores in Australia. "Visits, Remittances, Fundraising and Cultural Maintenance" shows the roles played by visits home, sending remittances in the form of money and goods and fundraising to support both the Rotuman community on Rotuma and in Australia. Remittances from the diaspora to family on the island introduced a larger element of commercial consumption than had previously been seen. It reduced the reliance of the islanders on locally produced food, reinforcing the cash economy introduced by European contact where ease of purchase of flour, canned fish and beef and other commodities meant that there was less pressure on men to tend the gardens. Assistance from expatriate Rotumans in the form of money and goods allows their *kainaga*,⁴⁵ relatives to set up small shops, provide generators for villages and to furnish computers for schools that has had the effect of bringing the island closer to modern facilities and the world closer to Rotuma although it still has a long way to go. Finally Chapter Eight, "The Internet and Cultural Continuity," looks at the growing influence of modern technology on the ability of diasporic Rotumans to collectively maintain their culture in foreign lands as well as to influence events on the island of Rotuma through collective action and communication world-wide. The Rotuma webpage connects the filaments of the diaspora allowing discussion to be generated about topics that affect island development and welfare and possible solutions to be found. The World Wide Web is not the only, or possibly the most used, forum for such discussion but it is public and available to all of the Rotuman diaspora, not to mention researchers, with access to a computer and the Web. The Web is also a cultural tool giving Rotumans in diaspora as well as other interested researchers access to a collection of academic anthropological writing on Rotuma as well as early records of European contact, Rotuman proverbs, ceremonial, culture, language, history, maps, photographs, recipes and music.

The formation of the Australian Rotuman cultural identity journey is thus charted through the searlanes of their passage to and from their homeland. In the process of writing about the voyage we

⁴⁵ *Kainaga* in Rotuman equates to clan or tribe. It is used here to denote close blood relatives of either the paternal or maternal affinity.

must go back to the beginning, to the island of Rotuma, and travel forward through time navigating the waypoints to Australia and noting the ways the currents of culture change.