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**Being Rotuman In Australia: Cultural  
Maintenance In Migration**

**Thesis submitted by  
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May 2009**

**For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the School of Arts and Social Sciences  
James Cook University**

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## DECLARATION ON ETHICS

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the *National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Research involving Human* (1999), the *Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practices* (1997), the *James Cook University Policy on Experimentation Ethics, Standard Practices and Guidelines* (2001), and the *James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (2001). The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Experimentation Ethics review Committee (Approval number H1413)

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# **BEING ROTUMAN IN AUSTRALIA: CULTURAL MAINTENANCE IN MIGRATION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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This thesis is about migration and culture change examined through the vehicle of collective memory, which engages with the ways Pacific Islanders think about their culture, identity and history. It examines the ways in which 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.

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, using the metaphor of waypoints and endpoints, in order to make sense of the impetus to migration and the methods used by migrant Rotumans to settle and adjust to life in Australian society and to avoid cultural anomie. It focuses on the ways collective memory has been used by them to fashion their identity in diaspora. The forces for cultural change are enormous in migration but the forces of collective memory are as powerful. The interaction between these two powerful forces has provided and will continue to provide both cultural stability and economic opportunity for Rotumans overseas.



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# BEING ROTUMAN IN AUSTRALIA: CULTURAL MAINTENANCE IN MIGRATION

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## INTRODUCTION

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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, 1997:373-74

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 thesis 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 19<sup>th</sup> and mid-20<sup>th</sup> 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.”<sup>1</sup> 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*.

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 Mackay<sup>2</sup> and Patricia Mercer’s seminal study of Pacific Islander settlement in North Queensland,<sup>3</sup> 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* (2003), and Leulu Felise Va’a’s *Saili Matagi: Samoan Migrants in Australia*, (2001). Much more has been written by New Zealand academics about Samoans, Tongans and Cook Islanders.<sup>4</sup> A detailed study of Rotuman migration to Australia has not been

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Clive Moore, *Kanaka: a history of Melanesian Mackay*, 1985. Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies and University of Papua New Guinea Press, 1985

<sup>3</sup> Patricia Mercer, *White Australia Defied: Pacific Islander Settlement in North Queensland*, Studies in North Queensland History No. 21, Department of History and Politics, James Cook University, Townsville, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Ron Crocombe, Review of Spickard, Rondilla and Hippolite Wright, *Pacific Diaspora: Island Peoples in the United States and Across the Pacific*, *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 16, No.1, Spring 2004, pp. 178-182.

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 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 fashion their identity either at home or as migrants.

The argument in this thesis 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 thesis, 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.<sup>5</sup> 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 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.

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<sup>5</sup> W.J.E. Eason, *A Short History of Rotuma*, Government Printing Department, Suva, 1951, p.2.

The waypoint metaphor is also evocative of collective memory, “the specific recollections that are commonly shared by entire groups,”<sup>6</sup> 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 ... .<sup>7</sup>*

Despite the use of the terminology of “waypoints” or changes of direction this thesis is not about showing Rotuman migration history as either a “rise and fall” or a “fall and rise”<sup>8</sup> 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

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<sup>6</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 2003, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19, for a discussion of the ways in which human beings think of and narrate their past.

they will still know it as a collective memory of their origins and part of their present being.

The thesis 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 thesis 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 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 thesis 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.”<sup>9</sup> 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.*<sup>10</sup>

In the context of this thesis 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:

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<sup>9</sup> J.J. Climo and M.J. Cattell (eds), *Social Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives*, Altamira Press, Walnut Grove CA, 2002, pp.3-4

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

*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.*<sup>11</sup>

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.*<sup>12</sup>

Olick and Robbins<sup>13</sup> 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.*<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, Leo Spitzer (eds), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, University Press of New England, Hanover, 1998, p.vii.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> Climo and Cattell *Social Memory*, 2002, p.5.

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 thesis about the way the collective memory of Rotumans has been adapted to allow them to remain Rotuman in Australia.

### **Rotuman culture**

Before turning to what it is that makes a specifically Rotuman culture it is worth outlining my understanding of the main concept of “culture” as understood by social scientists – in particular those of an anthropological and historical bent. The modern definition of culture I am using, although it is one of many, is that it is an abstract intellectual model, a set of values, beliefs and attitudes contained within a symbolic system which is learned and shared by members of a society and which influences their perceptions and behaviour. The process of social interaction ensures that culture is arbitrary, mutually constructed, patterned and

created by people and, once internalized, is seen by them as normal or natural.<sup>15</sup>

It should be stated that culture in this sense is labile and not static.

In the period since E.B. Tylor coined the concept of culture and Franz Boas developed it further it has faced many challenges from social scientists.<sup>16</sup> In today's world where individuals and whole communities are on the move or exposed to a wide range of "others" culture, as a useful concept, has faced considerable criticism. Despite a considerable muddying of the cultural waters by Bourdieu, Foucault and others it still presents as a useful construct for this thesis. It does so because, to individuals and communities abroad from their "natal" societies, it provides a number of advantages: a stay in times of uncertainty, a flexible base from which to fashion a cultural identity that affords a comfortable fit in a new society and a platform on which to display a distinctive sense of self and identity in a multicultural world.

A description of Rotuman culture must be prefaced by noting that there is a large, off-island diaspora in Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, the main islands of Fiji, which contains the largest concentration of Rotumans, larger than that of the home island itself. The population on Rotuma itself is skewed with more elderly people and children than would normally be expected due to the tradition of parents leaving children with grandparents for periods of time. Other pockets of the

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<sup>15</sup> John Bodley, *Cultural Anthropology: Tribes, States and the Global System*, Mayfield Publication Company, Mountain View, 1997.

<sup>16</sup> George W. Stocking Jr, "Franz Boas and the Culture Concept in Historical Perspective," in *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 68, No. 4, 1966, p.867; see also Robert Brightman, "Forget Culture: Replacement, Transcendence, Reflexification," in *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 10, No. 4, Nov. 1995, pp. 512-526.

diaspora are present in other Pacific islands as well as Australia, New Zealand and the USA. This situation problematizes any discussion of what constitutes Rotuman culture to some extent, in that having three separate groups could conceivably argue for a wide diversity in cultural understanding. However I would contend that there is a set of core cultural values and mores which can be seen, in full or part, across all Rotuman communities regardless of size or geographic placement. The basis of that core in Australia exists in strong links back to *kainaga* or kin groups in both Rotuma itself and in Fiji and in the shared understandings, norms and values, brought about by social interaction across all of the communities at various times and for various reasons.

As Morris notes:

*... values are individually held or commonly shared conceptions of the desirable [whereas] norms are generally accepted, sanctioned prescriptions for, or prohibitions against, others' behaviour, belief or feeling, i.e. what others **ought** to do, believe, feel – or else ... Norms always involve sanctions, values never do.<sup>17</sup>*

Examples of norms in Rotuman culture would be the requirement to show respect to a chief or to share or reciprocate at a ceremonial gathering or feast. Values might emphasize hard work, generosity or a good education.

The cultural core as envisaged by this thesis encompasses the recognition and practice of Rotuman language, ceremony and traditions and the maintenance of

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<sup>17</sup> Richard T. Morris, "A Typology of Norms," in *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 21, No. 5, 1956, p.610.



links with other Rotumans in the diaspora and back to the island itself. The core is flexible in that not all Rotumans in the diaspora speak Rotuman and ceremonies are often constrained by the requirements of the mainstream society in which the diaspora exists.

### **Methodology and theoretical stance**

Primary source research for the thesis 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 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.”<sup>18</sup>

Access to the Australian Rotuman community was gained in the first instance through Alan Howard who supplied an initial list of possible contacts. Once

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<sup>18</sup>James Hoopes, *Oral History: An Introduction for Students*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1979, p. 3.

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 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 thesis 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.<sup>19</sup>

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

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<sup>19</sup> The CD-ROMs and handwritten notes of all interviews are held by the author.

Rotuman population. Beginning research on 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 thesis 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 which 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."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Alan Howard, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Gardiner/GdrContents.html>, accessed 11 March 2001; J. Stanley Gardiner, "The Natives of Rotuma," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, No. 27, 1896, pp. 396-435, 457-524.

Howard's early work *Learning to be Rotuman*<sup>21</sup> 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.*<sup>22</sup>

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.<sup>23</sup> This work supports the argument in later chapters of this thesis 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.

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<sup>21</sup> Alan Howard, *Learning to Be Rotuman: Enculturation in the South Pacific*, Teachers College Press, Columbia University, New York, 1970.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 1-2.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

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.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> The publication, *Rotuma: Hanua Pumue, Precious Land*, edited by Chris Plant, with eleven of the fourteen contributors being Rotuman<sup>26</sup>, provided

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<sup>24</sup> George Hamilton, *A Voyage Round the World in His Majesty's Frigate Pandora*, W. Phorson, B. Law and Son, Berwick, 1793.

<sup>25</sup> Mesulama Titifanua and C.M. Churchward, *Tales of a Lonely Island*, Institute of Pacific Studies, Suva, 1995.

<sup>26</sup> 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.

basic geographic, cultural and social information that gave 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 (1996). 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 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 pan-



ethnicity models.<sup>27</sup> 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,<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> 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

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<sup>27</sup> 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.

<sup>28</sup> 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.

<sup>29</sup> Spickard, 2002, p.16; Sua-ling Wong, “Denationalisation Reconsidered: Asian American Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 21, Nos. 1 and 2, 1995, pp.1-27, quoted in Spickard, 2002, p.13.

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 thesis, pan-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.<sup>30</sup> As such it needs a more precise definition than that applied by Walker Connor, namely “that segment of a people living outside the homeland.”<sup>31</sup> 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*

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>31</sup> 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.

*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.*<sup>32</sup>

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 together, both roots and routes to construct .... alternate public spheres, forms of community consciousness and*

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<sup>32</sup> Safran, 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 ...”.

*solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference.*<sup>33</sup>

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 Clifford’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.

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<sup>33</sup> James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the late Twentieth Century*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p. 251.

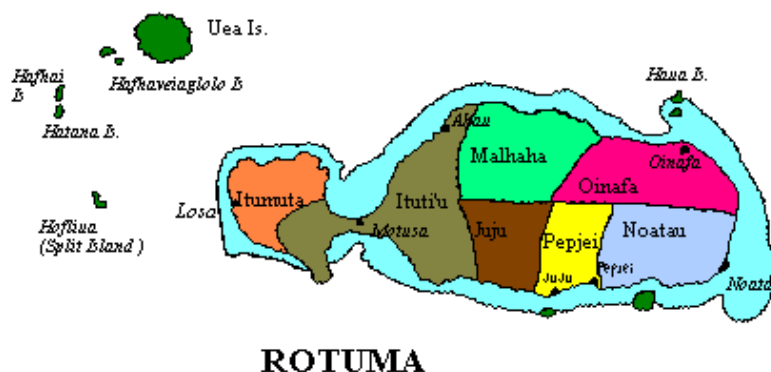
Eight uninhabited islets lie offshore and a fringing reef surrounds the island on an average of about 500 metres from a shoreline that consists of white, sandy beaches with some areas of volcanic rock. Coconut palms and lush vegetation sweep around the beaches.

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.<sup>34</sup> 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 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

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<sup>34</sup> Thegn Ladefoged, *Evolutionary Process in an Oceanic Chiefdom: 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.

and store bought food – canned fish, corned beef, flour and sugar – has become part of their staple diet.<sup>35</sup>



MAP 1: Districts of Rotuma<sup>36</sup>

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.

<sup>35</sup> Alan Howard, 1970, pp. 10-11; Thegn Ladefoged, *Evolutionary Process*, 1993, p.81; Agnes Hannan, *Field Notes*, 2003.

<sup>36</sup> Map obtained from <http://www.rotuma.net/os/RotumaMap2.html> accessed January 2008.

## **Thesis Structure**

The thesis 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 twentieth 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, and their island as a home for other 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 thesis 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 thesis 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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*<sup>37</sup>, 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

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<sup>37</sup> *Kainaga* in Rotuman equates to clan or tribe. It is used here to denote close blood relatives of either the paternal or maternal affinity.

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 sea-lanes of their passage to and from their homeland. In the process of writing about the voyage we 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.

**PART I**

**BEING ROTUMAN**

**PART I**  
**BEING ROTUMAN**

-2-

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**PRE-EUROPEAN CONTACT**

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*... and [Raho said that] he wanted to make a home for his granddaughter, which should be far away from Samoa. Thereupon the twins filled two baskets with earth – a presentation basket and an ordinary basket. .... The twins then put the two baskets on board a canoe of ‘aftea’ wood, and they, together with Raho and his household, got into the canoe and came to found this island of Rotuma.*

*... and Raho with his company came and found in the midst of the ocean a rock of great size the two extremities of which were well above water, while the middle was just awash. So the twins emptied out the presentation basket of earth onto the rock thus forming an island.<sup>38</sup>*

The time of the arrival of the first settlers on Rotuma is unknown but nearby islands in Western Polynesia were settled, according to archaeologist Thegn Ladefoged<sup>39</sup>, in approximately 3200 BCE<sup>40</sup>. The movement of people from South East Asia into the Pacific Ocean and thence, in this instance, to Rotuma was a gradual one. This work views Rotuman migration not only as physical movement but also one that should be seen in terms of collective memory and identity as part of a larger voyage that continues into the present. This chapter highlights elements of early history in terms of waypoints plotted through the people the Rotumans encountered over the years – some deliberate arrivals, some

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<sup>38</sup> Excerpt from “The Story of the Founding of Rotuma,” in Titifanua and Churchward, 1995, p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> Ladefoged, 1993, p.77.

<sup>40</sup> BCE – Before the Common Era. CE or Common Era is also known as Current Era or Christian Era and designates the period of time beginning with year 1 of the Gregorian calendar.

accidental – as peoples of the nearby islands came to trade, to invade and sometimes to stay, marry into the local population and raise Rotuman children. Social relations matter as much as physical location for Rotuman self-identity. Rotumans regard anyone who can trace their lineage back to a Rotuman ancestor as a Rotuman with all the rights and privileges thereof.

From the moment of their arrival on the island until European contact some three thousand years later, the peoples of Rotuma appear to have had a continuous, if small, interaction with other indigenous groups on surrounding islands. Later points on the collective memory and identity chart were marked in the ink of the European “discoverers” of the Pacific. This chapter establishes the foundation of identity and collective memory prior to European contact in the light of the early waypoints that marked the Rotuman journey; a journey that refers back to the past to inform the future.

There is limited evidence regarding the origins of the people of Rotuma except through linguistic and archaeological studies and through Rotuman myth (traditional stories accepted as history which serve to explain the Rotuman world view) and legend (the narrative of human actions that are sometimes perceived as historical but unauthenticated). The linguistic evidence has been unclear for some time despite much work on the part of Pawley,<sup>41</sup> Geraghty,<sup>42</sup> and others but

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<sup>41</sup> Andrew Pawley and Malcolm Ross, “The Prehistory of Oceanic Languages: A Current View,” in Peter Bellwood, James Fox and Darrell Tryon, *The Austronesians: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, ANU, Canberra, 1995, pp. 42, 51, 54.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Geraghty, *The History of the Fijian Languages*, University of Hawai’i Press, Honolulu, 1983.

it is likely that people of the Austronesian Lapita culture settled first and then were overtaken by later migrations from Samoa and Tonga. This is supported by historical linguist Bruce Biggs' 1965 paper "Direct and indirect inheritance in Rotuman," which contends that Rotuman is a member, with Polynesian and Fijian, of a subgroup of the Austronesian language with extensive borrowing from Polynesian.<sup>43</sup> Work by archaeologists, such as Matthew Spriggs, in the Pacific also supports this contention.<sup>44</sup> More recent archaeological fieldwork at Maka Bay at the eastern end of Rotuma has placed settlement at approximately the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE with locally made Lapita style plainware, usually associated with the Austronesian culture, being found in the lower cultural layers of the excavation site.<sup>45</sup> Later contact, probably with Fiji, is apparent in the higher cultural layers of the site dated from about the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE. However, Rotumans mark the start of their history with the arrival of Raho from Samoa.<sup>46</sup> The details of Raho's arrival have been passed down orally in traditional history and legend.

The essence of the Raho legend is that Raho, a Samoan Chief, had a daughter named Vaimarasi who was married to a high chief. She in turn had a daughter called Maiva. At the same time the high chief's other wife had a son. When the boy bullied his half sister she complained to Raho who became angry and swore

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Matthew Spriggs, "The Lapita Culture and Austronesian Prehistory in Oceania," in Bellwood, Fox and Tryon, 1995, pp. 112-133.

<sup>45</sup> Thegn Ladefoged, Jonathan Wall, Philippa Black and William Dickinson, "Exotic and Indigenous: Ceramic Shards from the Island of Rotuma," *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Volume 107, No. 3, 1998, pp. 301-311.

<sup>46</sup> Alan Howard, "History, Myth and Polynesian Chieftainship: the case of Rotuman Kings," <http://www.rotuma.net/os/howsel/12kings.html>, viewed March 2003.



he would find his grand-daughter a land far from Samoa. Twin spirit girls, also daughters of Raho, collected two baskets of Samoan soil and placed them in a canoe into which Raho put his household including Maiva. They sailed for some time until they found a large rock in the ocean and poured the baskets of soil over it, forming the island of Rotuma. Raho marked a tree at Malhaha with a green palm frond to signify ownership. When other chiefs in Samoa and Tonga heard that Raho had found a new land they set out after him. When a chief (no-one knows if he was Tongan or Samoan) called Tokaniua landed on Rotuma he planned a ruse and tied a dried coconut palm frond on Raho's tree signifying his marker was there first.<sup>47</sup> This made Raho angry and he threatened to break up the island with his digging stick on the mountain of Solroroa – the attempt threw off several chunks of rock that grew into the small islets surrounding the island. Before he could break the island up completely he was asked by *Hanit e ma'us*, a woman of the interior (possibly symbolic of the indigenous people) to stop and he did. Raho ultimately settled on the island of Hatana approximately six kilometres northwest of the main island.

According to the late Aubrey Parke, archaeologist and District Officer on Rotuma in 1964, Raho and his people arrived in the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>48</sup> The Raho origin myth and other Rotuman myths and legends can be used to shed light on the historical processes taking place on Rotuma in the early period of settlement while not necessarily recounting actual events. Thus just as Raho, the mythical

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<sup>47</sup> In some versions of the legend the placing of dried tokens on the trees was *Hanit e ma'us* herself.

<sup>48</sup> Aubrey Parke, "Legends, language and archaeology of Rotuma," *Transaction and Proceedings of the Fiji Society for the Year 1964 and 1965*, The Fiji Society, Suva, 1969, p.99.

founder of Rotuma and Tokaniua, his rival, who pre-empted Raho's claim to Rotuma, refer to Samoa, the mention of *hanit e ma'us*, or woman of the bush, in Rotuman legend probably refers to these earlier inhabitants of the island who were in communication with Fiji. As Parke has noted *hanit e ma'us* is associated in some of the legends with Fiji.<sup>49</sup>

Rotuma lies at the junction of Micronesia (Caroline, Marshall, Mariana and Kiribati Islands), Melanesia (Vanuatu, Solomon and Fiji Islands) and Polynesia (New Zealand, Hawaii, Samoa, Tonga, Cook and Society Islands). These areas were first mooted as cultural entities in the writings on the differing customs, linguistic and political practices noted by members of the earliest European voyages into the Pacific. In particular, Dumont d'Urville, in an article in *Bulletin De La Société de Géographe* in 1832 pointed up the differing racial characteristics of the Melanesia/Polynesia divide in terms of a hierarchy of civilisations.<sup>50</sup> More recently, the differences have been discussed in Marshall Sahlins' work on political types in Melanesia and Polynesia.<sup>51</sup> Since 1963, when Sahlins published an article on the topic, there has been some criticism that the stated differences between the two culture areas were simplistic and the Melanesian big-man examples could be counterbalanced by examples of chiefdoms in other parts of the so-called Melanesian culture area.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.100

<sup>50</sup> N. Thomas, "The Force of Ethnology: Origins and Significance of Melanesian/Polynesian Cultural Division," *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 30, No. 1, February 1989pp. 29, 30-32.

<sup>51</sup> Marshall Sahlins, "Poor man, rich man, big-man, chief: Political types in Melanesia and Polynesia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 5, 1963, pp. 285-303.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas, 1989:28; see also Geoffrey Clark, "Shards of Meaning: Archaeology and the Melanesia-Polynesia Divide," *The Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 2003, pp.197-215, Sahlins, 1963, pp. 285-303.

The movement of peoples across the Pacific Ocean through the islands of South East Asia and Melanesia is relatively well documented by archaeologists such as Patrick Kirch and Geoffrey Irwin, yachtsman and historian David Lewis and historian Kerry Howe.<sup>53</sup> Thus the original inhabitants of Rotuma probably arrived via island South East Asia, Melanesia and Micronesia some 3000 years before Europeans sailed into the Pacific. Influences from these areas, as well as Europe, are quite evident in the appearance of the Rotuman people today.

Rotuma is a volcanic island, a small part of which is about 1.5 million years old, with the greater part of the island being formed in the Pleistocene period between 15,000 and 200,000 years ago. Volcanic activity continued into the Holocene period (during the last 10,000 years) with beach deposits laid down in the last 5000 years.<sup>54</sup> This activity was the basis on which the fertile areas of the island formed. This affected the political organisation of later settlers as some areas enjoyed richer soil than others thus creating the opportunity for an imbalance of power due to the inability of the poorer soils to provide sufficient food.<sup>55</sup>

In 1996, excavations on the island, at a site in Maka Bay near the village of Sovaea in Itu'muta, revealed three cultural layers, the earliest of which dated

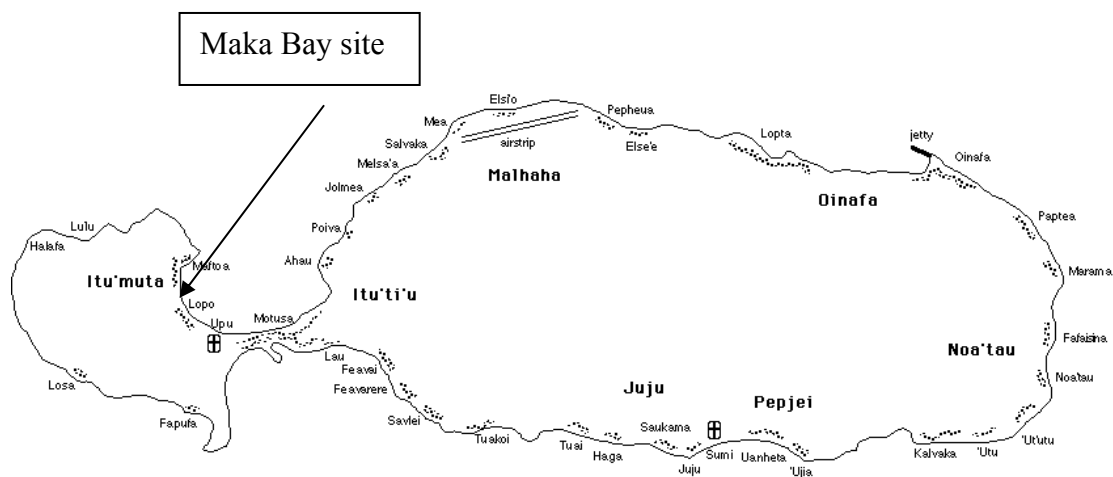
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<sup>53</sup> Geoffrey Irwin, *The Prehistoric Exploration and Colonisation of the Pacific*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992:1-17; David Lewis, *We, The Navigators: The Ancient Art of Landfinding in the Pacific*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 1994, pp. 3-18; Patrick Vinton Kirch, *On the Road of the Winds: An Archaeological History of the Pacific Islands before European Contact*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2000, pp. 6-10; Kerry Howe, *The Quest for Origins: Who First Discovered and Settled the Pacific Islands?*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 2003, pp. 60-91.

<sup>54</sup> Ladefoged, Wall, Black and Dickinson, 1998, pp. 301.

<sup>55</sup> See Ladefoged, 1993.

from 560 to 680 CE and the most modern 880 to 1110 CE. These layers contained a large number of artefacts including pottery sherds of both indigenous and exotic provenance, *Tridacna* (clam) shell adzes, shell ornaments and tools, a hammer and grinding stones. The exotic sherds, one of which had faint paddle impressions, from the more recent culture layers were,



Map 2 Rotuma Island showing 1996 excavation site<sup>56</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Map taken from <http://www.rotuma.net/os/VillageMap.html>, viewed March 2003



Looking towards Sovaea, Itu'muta District and Solroroa<sup>57</sup>

given their mineral composition, tentatively identified by Ladefoged as originating in Fiji.<sup>58</sup> The indigenous material suggested that

*people were manufacturing pottery from perhaps as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century until as late as the 11<sup>th</sup> century ....(and that) ....it is probable that the island was settled by people associated with Lapita ceramics ..... The ceramics recovered from Rotuma are probably a continuation of that pottery tradition.<sup>59</sup>*

Ladefoged<sup>60</sup>, relying on his own archaeological excavation and other data – Pawley for linguistic evidence, Howard for indigenous traditional evidence – concludes that Rotuma was most likely first settled at the same time as other Western Polynesian islands and that there was significant contact between Rotuma and other island peoples particularly those in Fiji, Tonga and Samoa in

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<sup>57</sup> Photograph by Alan Howard, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/pictalbum/Solroroa.html>, accessed 28 March 2008.

<sup>58</sup> Ladefoged et al, 1998, p. 304-307.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* p. 307

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* p. 308; the nature of some of this evidence is not beyond dispute as there is no ability to correlate evidence from these sources.

the period starting around 880CE. Until further archaeological work is done, the late W.E. Russell, Acting Resident Commissioner to Rotuma in the late 1920's, is correct when he aptly summarised the state of our knowledge noting,

*The history of the aboriginal Rotuman appears to be lost to us so far as the pre-Samoan era<sup>61</sup> is concerned. Indeed, apart from the evidence of language, the only trace of these is supplied by the story of the invaders.<sup>62</sup>*

Gradually over time inter-group tensions within Rotuma were reduced by power sharing institutions. According to Ladefoged, the island was politically divided into four portions corresponding to the cardinal points of the compass: Itu'ti'u and Itu'muta in the west, Pepjei and Juju in the south, Noatau and Oinafa in the east and Malhaha in the north. The chiefly strata on the island consisted of three pan-Rotuman leaders, the *Fakpure* (paramount chief), the *Mua* (roughly translated as spiritual leader) and the *Sau* (roughly translated as King by Europeans), who held power over the entire population, and local *ho'aga* leaders, of whom the district chief was the strongest or most influential.<sup>63</sup> There is some disagreement amongst the early sources of information on some of the details of the three pan-Rotuman leaders although most agree that the *Fakpure* was the paramount chief and may have been the most important district chief in any

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<sup>61</sup> The Samoan era referred to here is the time of Raho which is contained in the traditional history of the founding settlement of Rotuma .

<sup>62</sup> W.E. Russell, "Rotuma: Its History, Traditions and Customs" *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Vol. 51, No. 4, 1942, p. 229.

<sup>63</sup> Ladefoged, 1993, p. 142.

current victorious alliance.<sup>64</sup> He was the secular leader of the island and ruled while he remained fair and generous. According to Trouillet<sup>65</sup>, a Roman Catholic priest on the island in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, he allocated food amongst the chiefs while not affecting their autonomy. He was, Gardiner writes, one of the officers of the *Sau*.<sup>66</sup> The spiritual life of pre-Christian Rotumans was closely associated with the *Sau* and the *Mua*.<sup>67</sup>

The *Sau* was regarded by early observers as the chief of Rotuma, although they were not all in accord about the particulars of his election or his domicile. The consensus of opinion was that the position was rotational in terms of its incumbent, who held office from between six months and two years, the district he came from and the district that was charged with maintaining him. However Ladefoged posits that it is possible “that the conception of a rotational *sauship* was only a Rotuman ideal .....”<sup>68</sup> Indeed Ladefoged’s analysis shows that the majority of *sau* were selected from the eastern side of the island which was generally associated with chiefly power. As this thesis will show, this is important in the unfolding of Christianity on Rotuma and the ultimate cession of

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<sup>64</sup> Ladefoged 1993, pp. 144; Alan Howard, “Cannibal Chiefs and the Charter for Rebellion in Rotuma” *Pacific Studies*, Vol. 10, 1986, p. 3; Gordon MacGregor, Field Notes held in Bishop Museum, Honolulu, 1932.

<sup>65</sup> Trouillet, *Historique*, nd. PMB reel 159.

<sup>66</sup> J. Stanley Gardiner, “The Natives of Rotuma” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, No. 27, 1898, pp. 466-470.

<sup>67</sup> An alternative view is offered by Niel Gunson who conflates two of the positions as follows: “In Rotuma, *sau* also became the title of the sacred chief while the older sacred designation *fakpure*, maker of prayers, became that of the temporal ruler or traditional *hau*, a complete reversal of traditional function. Originally the *sau* were appointed for life but soon became nominal and temporary, though still chosen from among the district chiefs by the *fakpure*. On the other hand the *fakpure* was the most powerful of the district chiefs, being the one who had been victor in the last war, and he alone had the right to select the new *sau*.” in “The *hau* concept of leadership in Western Polynesia,” *The Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, 1979, pp. 33-34.

<sup>68</sup> Ladefoged, 1993, p. 147.

the island to Great Britain. The position of *sau* was abolished between 1869 and 1871 after a war between those who maintained their old spiritual ways and Christians.<sup>69</sup>

The *Mua*, while less well documented, is considered to have been the chief priest, his “main task ... [being] ... to bring prosperity to the island by incorporating the power of supernatural beings.”<sup>70</sup> He took an important role in the rituals regarding drought and famine relief and also in ceremonies conducted to ensure good harvests. His position was understood to be rotational and to last for periods of up to a year.<sup>71</sup>

The institution of the *sau* and *mua* gathered the whole together in a loosely unified pan-Rotuman polity. Ladefoged suggests that the political system in Rotuma developed out of “the interaction of indigenous social process and foreign influences in ... (a) ... diverse environmental context.”<sup>72</sup> The positions of *sau* and *mua* were not hereditary and rotated through the districts according to the Rotuman spiritual cycle of about six months. Having said that, the majority of *sau* before 1822 came from the Noatau and Oinafa districts (the east), followed by Itu’ti’u (the west).<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149; Parke, 2003, p. 12.

<sup>70</sup> Ladefoged, 1993, p. 144.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144; Gardiner, 1898, pp. 466-470; W.L. Allardyce, "Rotooma and the Rotoomans," *Proceedings of Queensland Branch of the Geographical Society of Australasia*, 1885-6, pp. 130-144, reproduced at <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Allardyce.html>, accessed 13 January 2006

<sup>72</sup> Thegn Ladefoged, 1993, pp. 80.

<sup>73</sup> Ladefoged, 1995, pp. 341-58, see also Alan Howard, “The Rotuman District Chief: A Study in Changing Patterns of Authority,” *Journal of Pacific History* 1, 1996, pp. 63-64.



Ladefoged's analysis of the early data combined with that of Howard<sup>74</sup> suggests that there are relational connections between certain island districts and the elite – that is, the western end of the island is associated with the indigenous people; the eastern end with the “stranger-chiefs.” Marshall Sahlins addresses this phenomenon in the Polynesian context in his 1981 article where he discusses the idea that chiefs are seen as outsiders who endow the land with their *mana* while symbolically being “captured and domesticated as a god of the indigenous people.”<sup>75</sup> The structure of the Rotuman polity in regard to the *sau* reflects this idea – the *sau* comes from one district and is materially supported, often excessively, in another district. Just as east and west are in opposition, so a similar division exists between the north and south sides of the island – the north being associated with chiefs and the south with commoners.<sup>76</sup> According to Ladefoged<sup>77</sup> the districts of Oianfa and Noatau at the eastern end of the island most commonly supplied the *sau*.

While the political system appears to have been relatively fluid, ethnographic descriptions from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and later show that land rights in Rotuma were vested in *kainaga* or clans, so that the main unit of association was the family. These units of association would prove very important to later migrants in their journey away from the island. The basic unit of Rotuman life, the household or *kaunohoga*, occupies a house site or *fuagri* in communities of kinsfolk called

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<sup>74</sup> Ladefoged, 1993, p. 142; Howard, 1986, p. 4.

<sup>75</sup> Marshall Sahlins, “The Stranger King or Dumézil among the Fijians,” *Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 16, July/October 1981, p. 109.

<sup>76</sup> Ladefoged, 1993, pp. 171-174.

<sup>77</sup> Ladefoged, 1993, pp. 161, 166, 168, 171.

*ho'aga*. A number of *ho'aga* make up a district or *itu'u* headed by a chief – the *gagaja* or *fa-'es-itu'u*. Not all *ho'aga* can lay claim to the chiefly title, or *mosega*, which resides with eligible *ho'aga* in each district. Work required by the district is organised by the chief from the available workforce in his district, while work specific to villages is organised through the *ho'aga*. Individual households who need large scale work done, such as building a house, can technically call on all or any of their *kainaga* for assistance in a system of reciprocity.<sup>78</sup> Strong kin ties persist into the present era, although in some situations such as house building which requires the use of a marketable skill, they have been weakened by the modern money economy.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, social organisation can be seen to be less fluid than political organisation indicating that social relationships matter more than political ones.

There are several forms of relationships of responsibility within the traditional Rotuman *kainaga*. Ieli Irava, a Rotuman educator, writes:

*The nature of the Rotuman social structure must be construed subject to the fact that the Rotuman term for father and uncles are synonymous, as are mother and aunt, brother and sister. This fact further lends meaning to the context of the kinship term 'kainaga': as long as two people are in the same clan or social category they both have the same rights and obligations in relation to other people in the same category or who belong to other categories in their 'kainaga.'*<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ieli Irava, "Kinship, Reciprocity and Society," in Chris Plant (ed), *Rotuma: Hanua Pumue*, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, Suva, 1991, pp. 24-39.

<sup>79</sup> Olafia Atalifo, Interviewed Rotuma, 2003.

<sup>80</sup> Ieli Irava, 1991, p.44.

The synonymous nature of relationship terms in Rotuman society may play a part in the ability of Rotumans to form strongly bonded communities in diaspora using, to some extent, fictive as well as real relationships as the cement. A telling comment by one of my Rotuman informants, that “we are probably all blood relatives somewhere on the family tree, the island is so small,”<sup>81</sup> says a lot about the inclusiveness of Rotumans. That sentiment combined with the belief of descent from a single progenitor and the Rotuman/Christian ethic of kindness and inclusion stands the Rotumans well in migration.

The political and social worlds were connected through the spiritual. The *sau* and *mua* were responsible for the ritual cycle of obeisance to a set of spiritual deities<sup>82</sup> through which, in the pre-Christian spiritual world, *mana*<sup>83</sup> or power was harnessed through the gods and Rotuman culture and society were maintained. According to Gardiner:

*“Tagaloa” was the god of the “sou” (sic) and “mua”; to him and in his honour were probably all their feasts and dances. He was never called upon by name, but he was to them the indefinable something which directs and guards everything. ... The “mua’s” feast and dance on the top of Muasolo was a prayer to him for fruitfulness to the crops and trees; ....*<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Churia Barnes, interviewed Sydney, 2002.

<sup>82</sup> See Alan Howard, “Speak of the Devils: Discourse and Belief in Spirits on Rotuma,” in Jeannette Mageo and Alan Howard (eds), *Spirits in Culture, History, and Mind*, New York, Routledge, 1996, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/howse1/24spirits.html> on 4 January 2006, accessed January 2006 for a discussion of Rotuman spirituality.

<sup>83</sup> *Mana* in Polynesian culture is analogous with respect, but it combines elements of respect, authority, power and prestige. Those who have *mana* have influence and authority.

<sup>84</sup> Gardiner, 1898, pp. 466-470.

As well as Tagaloa there were a number of other lesser spiritual beings which engaged the attention of the Rotuman people. These were the *atua*. Each *ho'aga*, “a localised corporate group composed of a cadre of patrilineally related males and a number of cognatically and affinally related kinsmen,”<sup>85</sup> had its own *atua*. *Atua* is the term used to refer to devils, spirits and ghosts as well as the human soul. The *ho'ag*<sup>86</sup> *atua* punished those who did not give them sufficient food and kava. These *atua* took the form of animals; for example the *atua* of Maftoa is the *tanifa* or hammer-head shark. In times of trouble or war the *tanifa* was given a feast and it would speak through the *apioitu*, or priest, associated with it. Other *atua* were more like devils and enjoyed causing death, sickness and misfortune; *atua* with the least influence were generally thought of as ghosts and could be called on for minor assistance.<sup>87</sup>

Information on the early religion of Rotuma collected by Gordon MacGregor on his six month visit to the island in 1932 shows a different, perhaps less emotive and ethnocentric, picture of Rotuman spirituality. MacGregor was an anthropologist working for the Bishop Museum whose notes were deposited at the Museum in Honolulu, Hawai'i, after his retirement.<sup>88</sup> His writing on the early religion of Rotuma is invaluable, taken as it is from interviews with named Rotumans. Prior to the coming of Christianity, Rotumans believed strongly in the presence of the spirits of the dead – '*atua* and '*aitu* – amongst them and present

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<sup>85</sup> Alan Howard, “Land Tenure and Social Change in Rotuma,” *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Vol. 73, 1964, p. 32.

<sup>86</sup> In certain circumstances the last vowel of a word in Rotuman is dropped see <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Language.html>, accessed 26 March 2008.

<sup>87</sup> Gardiner, 1898, pp. 466-470.

<sup>88</sup> Alan Howard, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Macgregor/Macgregor.html> accessed January 2006.

in people, animals and inanimate objects. “The old religion is primarily ancestor worship,” writes MacGregor, adding that “the Rotumans believed in Tagroa<sup>89</sup> the supreme deity of Western Polynesia but he had rather indistinct qualities.”<sup>90</sup> MacGregor’s information is painstakingly recorded in considerable detail and includes notes about the reliability of his informants. His notes on Rotuman culture and spirituality accord with the work of Gardiner who was in Rotuma some 50 years previously. Thus according to MacGregor, Tagroa “was the god of rain, war, and death ‘and all things that Rotuma (sic) people had’ ... He was the ‘*aitmana*’.”<sup>91</sup>

Rotuman spiritual concepts – the presence of *atua* or spirits of various kinds, free ranging or encapsulated in the beings of certain animals and fish, for example dogs, owls, eels and sharks – are particularly linked to the island and are of strong cultural significance. These concepts are prolific in the traditional history of Rotuma and continue to be remembered today as members of the diaspora talk about “home.”

While the small size of the island encouraged strong social ties it also had the effect of promoting a desire in some of its inhabitants to get away from the web of obligation and restriction that it entailed. That the Rotumans were not confined to their island prior to European contact is shown in the chronicles of

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<sup>89</sup> *Tagroa/ Tagaloa* is the Polynesian god of the sea.

<sup>90</sup> Gordon MacGregor, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Macgregor/McConclusions.html>, accessed January 2006.

<sup>91</sup> Gordon MacGregor, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Macgregor/McReligionTagroa.html>, accessed January 2006.

early European travellers. As late as 1832, seventeen to eighteen large double canoes between sixty and ninety feet long at least one of which was capable of holding 150-200 people were seen on the island drawn up under cover to protect them from the weather.<sup>92</sup> While it was apparent to early 19<sup>th</sup> century visitors to Rotuma, whaler Robert Jarman, George Cheever and adventurer Edward Lucatt, that these canoes had not been used for a considerable length of time, the Rotumans were familiar with the people of the Fiji Islands, Samoa, northern Tonga, Kiribati, Uvea, the Wallis and Futuna group and Tuvalu.<sup>93</sup> MacGregor's field notes describe the large 'ahai which, he was told were plank canoes made with 5-6 planks to each side making them as tall as a man. These double canoes had a deck and deck-house and a mast from which hung a matting sail.<sup>94</sup> Rotumans were reported to have travelled as far west as Tikopia,<sup>95</sup> and Anuta<sup>96</sup> and east to Bora Bora.<sup>97</sup> Some fifty years later C.F. Wood noted that Rotumans had visited Tonga to obtain the white shell *Cypraea ovula* but that the large

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<sup>92</sup> Robert Jarman, *Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas, in the "Japan", employed in the Sperm Whale fishery, under the command of Captain John May*, Longman and Co. and Charles Tilt, London, 1838, pp. 175-187; George N. Cheever, *Log of the ship Emerald*, 1835, Pacific Manuscripts Bureau 223 and Edward Lueckert, *Rovings in the Pacific from 1830 -1849*, Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, London, 1851, pp.157-202. Reproduced at <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Lucatt.html>, accessed January 2006.

<sup>93</sup> Alan Howard in Richard Feinberg (ed), *Seafaring in the Contemporary Pacific Islands: Studies in Continuity and Change*, De Kalb, 1995; Peter Dillon, *Narrative and Successful Result of a Voyage in the South Seas performed by the Order of the Government of British India, to Ascertain the Actual Fate of La Pérouse's Expedition*, London, 1827.

<sup>94</sup> Gordon MacGregor, "Rotuma Notes," <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Macgregor/Macgregor.html>, accessed 28 March 2008.

<sup>95</sup> George Bennett, "A Recent Visit to Several of the Polynesian Islands," in *United Services Journal* 33, 1831, pp.198-202, 473-482; Raymond Firth, *We the Tikopia: Kinship in Primitive Polynesia*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1936, p.33.

<sup>96</sup> Howard in Feinberg, 1995, pp.130-31

<sup>97</sup> Teuira Henry, "The Tahitian version of the names *Ra'iatea* and *Taputapu-Atea*," *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Vol. 21, 1912, p. 77, but bearing in mind that she relied on her father's notes from informants well after European contact with the hindsight of European geographical knowledge.

canoes were no longer used.<sup>98</sup> By the time MacGregor visited Rotuma these types of canoes had not been in use for at least 60 years.<sup>99</sup> Gardiner, in his 19<sup>th</sup> century ethnography of Rotuma noted that “Canoe sailing is a forgotten art, but the language possesses all the necessary terms for it.”<sup>100</sup>

According to Alan Howard,<sup>101</sup> there is little evidence today to support a strong seafaring tradition. Early accounts show that, although they were frequent visitors to nearby island groups such as Wallis and Futuna, Tikopia and Fiji and were visited in turn by their neighbours, their canoes were not particularly sophisticated. In 1791 Edwards reported that “neither sailing nor double canoes came on board, neither did we see any of either of these descriptions.”<sup>102</sup> Their canoes, he said, resembled those to be found at the Duke of York’s and Duke of Clarence’s Islands, located in what is now known as the Tokelau group. However, it is debatable whether large ocean-going canoes would have been employed to go out to a nearby ship, smaller ones being more manoeuvrable in close quarters. It is also possible that the canoes seen by European visitors in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were not indigenous to Rotuma and came with their owners from elsewhere. Assuming this not to have been the case, however, the reasons for the apparent decline in long distance ocean sailing are still purely speculative including the possible dying out of families responsible for canoe

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<sup>98</sup> C.F. Wood, 1875, pp.25-26.

<sup>99</sup> MacGregor, “Rotuma Notes,” <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Macgregor/Macgregor.html>, accessed 28 March 2008.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Howard, in Feinberg, 1995, pp. 114-143.

<sup>102</sup> Edward Edwards and George Hamilton, *Voyage of H.M.S. ‘Pandora’ despatched to arrest the mutineers of the ‘Bounty’ in the South Seas, 1790-91/ being the narratives of Captain Edward Edwards, R.N., the commander, and George Hamilton, the surgeon: with introduction and notes by Basil Thomson*, F. Edwards, London, 1915.

building, navigating and sailing, the lack of tall enough trees on the island or simply that the needs of the population were fully met without recourse to migration or organised trade. Either a seafaring tradition, supported by large canoes, “was (not) as significant as in many other Polynesian societies,”<sup>103</sup> or had been supplanted by agricultural life on an island that supplied all its peoples’ requirements, from garden produce to fish, crustaceans and edible seaweed as well as pigs, which their ancestors had brought with them.

However, the evidence suggests that contact with other Pacific peoples in the near vicinity prior to European contact was constant if not regular. Edward Lucatt reported that he had been told by the Rotumans that whenever overpopulation was a possibility the canoes were used to search for new land. Some of these parties came back while others were not heard from again.<sup>104</sup> The eagerness with which the Rotumans grasped the opportunity to join European whalers and traders as crew supports the idea that their lack of use of large canoes was uncharacteristic and relatively recent.

While Rotumans journeyed out, other islanders came to visit Rotuma. The indigenous populations of the various islands of the Pacific were often washed up, deliberately or otherwise, on neighbouring shores. Some were of a mind to

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<sup>103</sup> Howard, in Feinberg, 1995, p. 114.

<sup>104</sup> Edward Lockett, *Rovings in the Pacific from 1830 -1849*, Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, London, 1851, pp.157-202, reproduced at <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Lucatt.html>, accessed January 2006.



conquer or plunder but most were friendly visits or inadvertent landings due to poor winds or misadventure. Gardiner noted that:

*... only a few voyagers can be remembered, and their approximate date ascertained from the genealogical trees of their descendants. I allow twenty years for each generation, and add the age of the descendant who gave me the information.*<sup>105</sup>

Thus he calculated that the island had been visited by people from Niuafu'ou (1652), Tarawa (1698), and Ruania or Ontong Java (1780) some of whom settled and built families. By the same method, Gardiner was able to place at least three incidences of large influxes of Tongans, Gilbertese and Ruanians (Ontong Javans), between about 1652 and 1780.<sup>106</sup> According to Ieli Irava some Gilbertese landed at Rotuma from Tarawa in about 1720, "one of them – Teaniu - became the ancestress of the chief of Noatau."<sup>107</sup> Other less friendly groups arrived from Tikopia or Ontong Java in 1780 and later a "band of cannibals from Futuna."<sup>108</sup> Following on from these visits Gardiner further documented the Kau Moala expedition from Tonga (1793-1807) and other visitors from Funafuti (1815) and Nui (1830)<sup>109</sup>. Romilly adds Futuna.<sup>110</sup>

External contact was not limited to these few significant intrusions as low level contacts occurred on a regular basis. For example, in 1827 Peter Dillon recorded that Rotumans visited Vaitupu, in modern Tuvalu, to obtain white shells and that

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<sup>105</sup> Gardiner, 1898, pp.402-407

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 1898, pp. 396-435 and pp. 457-524. These people were considered by Gardiner to be Leuanewans or Lord Howe Atoll Islanders, but were most likely Ontong Javans.

<sup>107</sup> Ieli Irava, "History, Superstition and Religion," in C. Plant (ed) *Rotuma: Hanua Pumue*, University of the South Pacific, Suva, 1991, p. 7.

<sup>108</sup> Irava, 1991, p. 7.

<sup>109</sup> Gardiner, 1898, pp. 396-435 and pp. 457-524.

<sup>110</sup> H.H. Romilly, 1882, p.56.

while he was at Rotuma there were natives of both Vaitupu and Nui there.<sup>111</sup> The movement of people in and out of Rotuma during this period ensured that a good number of waypoints were stored in the Rotuman conscious or unconscious journey from the past.

In terms of waypoints, particular groups were more influential than others. In 1652, three hundred people from Niuafu'ou in the Tongan group arrived and settled in Noatau at the eastern end of the island. After assisting the chief of Noatau to gain supremacy over the rest of Rotuma they wrested control for themselves and instituted a period of despotic rule causing Rotumans to unite against them. The Rotumans eventually overthrew the Tongans in their turn. However the Tongan influence lives on in that the current name of the chief of Noatau, *Maraf*, comes from that time. Forty-six years later a double canoe from Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands arrived with men, women and children aboard. These people settled amicably into the island population. Then, in about 1780, one large canoe carrying many people from Ruaniua (Ontong Java) via Tikopia arrived at Hatana off Rotuma and conducted a series of raids on the village of Losa at the western end of the island. After laying a trap for them the Rotumans killed some and captured the remainder. A number of Losa families can claim descent from the survivors of these raiding parties and are regarded by other Rotumans as different because the raiders were believed to be cannibals, although there is no historical evidence to support this contention. One of my informants

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<sup>111</sup> Peter Dillon, *Narrative and Successful Result of a Voyage in the South Seas performed by the Order of the Government of British India, to Ascertain the Actual Fate of La Pérouse's Expedition*, London, 1827.

who came from Losa referred to himself with some humour as “one of the cannibals.”<sup>112</sup>

By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century European explorers were sailing in greater and greater numbers into the Pacific. Captain Edward Edwards of *HMS Pandora* is accepted as the first European “discoverer” of the island of Rotuma. In 1791, a bare three years after the founding of the penal colony at Port Jackson in Australia, Edwards conducted a detailed search of the Pacific for the crew of the *HMS Bounty*. He visited Rotuma, naming it Grenville Island. The coastal fringe was occupied by the modern relatives of the people who had migrated from Samoa and Tonga. These were a light skinned people displaying mainly Polynesian characteristics but also with some influence from other islands in the Pacific and possibly countries of the Pacific Rim. Centuries of visits from these places added a unique caste to the physical and facial character of the people. George Hamilton, Surgeon on the *HMS Pandora*, described their appearance in 1791 thus:

*They wore necklaces, bracelets and girdles of white shells. Their bodies were curiously marked with the figures of men, dogs, fishes, and birds, upon every part of them; so that every man was a moving landscape.....They were great adepts in thieving, and uncommonly athletic and strong.*<sup>113</sup>

He also commented on their “long, flowing black hair” a characteristic unusual in that part of the Pacific as island Melanesians and Fijians tend to have woolly or

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<sup>112</sup> Kapieni Patresio, interviewed Melbourne 2003

<sup>113</sup> Edwards and Hamilton, 1915, p. 13.

frizzy hair, supporting the thesis that today's Rotumans do indeed owe their origins to the more quintessential Polynesian groups in Samoa and Tonga who generally have straight, dark hair. Their language belonged, as it does today, to a Central Pacific subgroup of Oceanic, itself a sub-group of the Austronesian language family,<sup>114</sup> and contained the flotsam and jetsam of loanwords from many of the invading peoples glossed onto the original base. Edwards noted that it "appeared something to resemble that spoken at the Friendly Islands ..."<sup>115</sup> If he saw any of the original inhabitants he did not say but Litton Forbes met two families some 80 years later that he said were "the sole survivors of an inland tribe that once formed the chief population of the island."<sup>116</sup>

Finally, in the years just prior to the arrival of the *Pandora* in 1791, a double canoe from Tonga arrived and left three Tongan women, taking away three Rotuman women. This may well be the "Cow Mooala" (Kau Moala) of William Mariner's 1817 account in "The Natives of the Tonga Islands"<sup>117</sup>. This was the last important waypoint generated from within the Pacific prior to European contact.

Tongan influence still lives in Rotuman collective memory in myth and legend. Gardiner quotes the story, also told in Tonga, of the two giants who were banned from Tonga and, being hungry, strode across the ocean looking for food. One

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<sup>114</sup> H. Schmidt, "Loanword Strata in Rotuman", *Language Contacts in Pre-history: Studies in Stratigraphy: Papers from the Workshop on Linguistic Stratigraphy and Prehistory, 15<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Historical Linguistics, 17 August 2001, Melbourne*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 2003, pp.201-240.

<sup>115</sup> Edwards and Hamilton, 1915, p. 13.

<sup>116</sup> Litton Forbes, *Two Years in Fiji*, Green and Company, London, 1875.

<sup>117</sup> William Mariner, 1817, Vol. 1, pp 322 et seq

killed the other on the way and by the time the survivor reached Rotuma he was tired so he lay down to sleep with his head on Rotuma and his feet on Futuna. Woken by his snoring, the islanders banded together and hit him simultaneously with axes whereupon he stood up and fell stunned into the sea. The isthmus at Motusa is supposed to be where his head lay while he slept, the weight presumably flattening out the land into the low lying stretch approximately 200 meters wide in the centre of the district of Itu'tiu.<sup>118</sup>

What effect did the interaction have beyond adding to the collective memory? The only measures we have at our disposal at this distance in time from the events themselves are the evident additions of Polynesian loanwords to the base Rotuman language, the information we can infer from non-indigenous artefacts found at archaeological excavations and interpretation of local tradition. For many years the Rotuman language was something of an enigma to linguists studying the languages of the Pacific. Originally viewed as genetically distinct from nearby island groups because of “its unusual characteristics in the context of general typological patterns found in the area”<sup>119</sup>, Rotuman, along with Fijian and Polynesian, has been shown by Biggs<sup>120</sup> to be part of a sub-group, called Proto-Eastern-Oceanic, of Austronesian. Biggs shows that indirectly inherited words and word forms in Rotuman were borrowed extensively from Futuna, Uvea, Niufo'ou and Savai'i.<sup>121</sup> Indeed as is shown in Rotuman myth and

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<sup>118</sup> Gardiner, 1898, pp. 396-435 and pp. 457-524.

<sup>119</sup> N. Besnier, “The Autosegmental Approach to Metathesis in Rotuma,” *Lingua*, Vol. 73, No. 3, November 1987, p.202.

<sup>120</sup> B. Biggs, “Direct and Indirect Inheritance in Rotuman,” *Lingua* Vol. 14, 1965, pp. 383-445.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 411

tradition the island was occupied in the past by peoples from both Samoa and Tonga, particularly from Savai'i and Niufo'ou. This suggests "a good deal of movement in certain maritime areas and long continued contact among speakers of related languages and unrelated languages."<sup>122</sup> Thus, in the historical journey of the Rotuman people there had been many waypoints, both remembered in traditional history and forgotten except in language loanwords. The combination of significant external contacts and a distinct linguistic profile shows that contact did not affect cultural shifts. If true this is in keeping with the continuity of culture and choice enjoyed by the Rotuman people.

Archaeologists and linguists, in particular those working in the Austronesian field, posit that based on pottery sherds found in Rotuma and the placing of the language in the Central Pacific subgroup of Oceanic, itself a sub-group of the Austronesian language family,<sup>123</sup>

*.... the general outline of Rotuman history ..... as gathered partly from traditions, partly from known historical facts, and partly from the study of language, shows an original or aboriginal race of unknown origin, then an influx of Melanesians perhaps from Fiji or the New Hebrides, then an influx, or two influxes, of Polynesians from Samoa under Raho and Tokaniua perhaps in the fifteenth century, then another influx of Polynesians from Tonga under Ma'afu early in the eighteenth century.*<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 415.

<sup>123</sup> Ladefoged, Wall, Black and Dickinson, 1998, p. 308, Schmidt, 2001, pp. 229-236.

<sup>124</sup> C.M. Churchward, "The History of Rotuma as reflected in its Language." *Oceania*, Vol. IX, No. 1.

It is through myth and legend that the history and culture of Rotuma is passed down through the generations although most do not analyse the import of these stories. The use of legend and traditional history to recreate Pacific history requires an understanding of the structure and purpose of traditions and is fraught with traps. Not all of these are historical fact in the Western sense of an event that occurred at a particular point in an historical sequence. Take for example the legend of *Hanit e ma'us*. *Hanit e ma'us* was a woman who, in the version of the legend quoted in Aubrey Parke's *Seksek 'E Hatana*<sup>125</sup>, was travelling in a canoe called the *Kaunitoni* with her seven brothers, the original ancestors of the Fijians, towards Fiji. According to the legend, she became pregnant to one of her brothers and they were so ashamed that they left her on the island of Rotuma. She thus became the first inhabitant of Rotuma and lived at Maftoa on the western end of the island. On the face of it this legend links rather well with the excavation site at Maka Bay. However, as Peter France points out, "the Kaunitoni legend was born, of missionary parentage, and nurtured by the enquiries of the Native Lands Commission."<sup>126</sup> The *Kaunitoni* story is part of a Fijian origin myth that has been shown to be of modern origin and Parke is concerned to point out that the increasing contact between Fiji and Rotuma is influencing the Rotumans to "reinterpret and modify their view of the supernatural world."<sup>127</sup> This example shows the need to be aware that legend

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<sup>125</sup> Aubrey Parke (ed), *Sek Sek 'e Hatana: Traditions of rotuma and its Dependencies*, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, Suva, 2001, pp. 43.

<sup>126</sup> Peter France, "The Kaunitoni Migration" *The Journal of Pacific History* Vol.1, 1966, pp. 107-113.

<sup>127</sup> Parke, 2001, p. 276.

and myth are always subject to influence, but ultimately it is what Rotumans believe that is their reality.

While modern scholarship has cast doubt on the key foundation traditions of Rotuma, these traditions remain central to Rotuman self identity. This is particularly true for the Raho story which has been the most persistent, testifying to its importance as a waypoint in the minds of Rotumans. Tongan scholar 'I. F. Helu, in discussing South Pacific traditional history proposes that:

*In preliterate societies, epoch-making events stay with the “collective memory” and in the process of transmission, orality – whose principal power is “elaboration” in the literal sense of the term – goes to work on the historical material until a stage is reached where the originally spatio-temporal events take on surreal and miraculous aspects and they become myth.*<sup>128</sup>

Howard<sup>129</sup> follows Sahlins<sup>130</sup> in suggesting that “the study of myth in Polynesian societies can be viewed as an important means of *organising* and *interpreting* history rather than *chronicling* it (stress in original).” Myth and legend on Rotuma, he says, are used mainly to instruct the people in Rotuman cultural mores and values. For example the behaviour of Tokaniua in deceitfully usurping Raho’s claim to Rotuma illustrates the value Rotumans place on

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<sup>128</sup> I. F. Helu, *Critical Essays: Cultural Perspectives from the South Seas*, Journal of Pacific History, 1999, Canberra.

<sup>129</sup> Alan Howard, “History, Myth and Polynesian Chieftainship: the case of Rotuman Kings,” in A. Hooper and J. Huntsman(eds), *Transformations of Polynesian Culture*, Polynesian Society, Auckland, 1985, reproduced at <http://www.rotuma.net/os/howsel/12kings.html>, accessed January 2006.

<sup>130</sup> Marshall Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1981, p 14.



honesty and the appeal by *Hanit e ma'us* (the spirit woman of the bush) to Raho not to break up the land in a fit of rage after being tricked by Tokainiua illustrates the importance to Rotumans of looking after the land. If, as Howard suspects, by the loss of any real sense of the teller or the context of the telling some meaning has been lost in the translation by outsiders, and lost as well in the memories of Rotuman storytellers, then this has implications for the transmission of collective memory to future generations.

Howard is inclined to see Rotuman myth as written down by Europeans as,

*residues of living performances, recorded by individuals who had particular notions about what was worth recording. They provide virtually no information about the teller and the context of performance, let alone the way the stories were learned or transmitted.*<sup>131</sup>

Rotumans, he says in elaboration, differentiate three different styles of story: *rogo*, mundane talk or news; *hanuju*, a usually fictitious story; and *fāeag tupu'a*, which translates as legend or myth. According to Howard, these Rotuman oral narratives are “constructed out of an extensive array of semiotic codes, which are transmitted in a variety of media.”<sup>132</sup> They use both digital and analogic codes - digital arising from basic oppositions such as “land/sea, male/female, person/spirit, east/west, raw/cooked and so on, ...”<sup>133</sup> and analogic involving “changes in degree of states, such as emotion, potency, acceptability and the like.

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<sup>131</sup> Howard, 1985, also published at <http://www.rotuma.net/os/howsel/12kings.html>, accessed March 2006.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

They are used to convey messages about limits and boundaries, and about the implications of variation within categorical parameters.”<sup>134</sup> Narratives recorded by outsiders are invariably “restricted to certain codes and therefore only represent partial semantic structures.”<sup>135</sup> Consequently the full meaning of some information has been lost and because analogic coding more particularly depends on tone of voice and gesture it is not possible to know if some aspects of a story would, in the telling, be inverted or corrupted in meaning.

The recording of indigenous peoples’ history and myth by outsiders is thus fraught with opportunities for misunderstanding, non-inclusion and placement of incorrect emphasis in recording particular aspects and in this context Howard’s comment holds true. However, in terms of waypoints on the Rotuman journey, ‘I. F. Helu’s point about “epoch making events” is very relevant. While some waypoints in Rotuman history have been lost, for example the manner in which loanwords from Wallis and Futuna Islands were acquired, the major events such as the pre-historical arrival of both Samoans and Tongans on the island are the ones that have the greatest Rotuman emphasis in traditional history and continue to be regarded as important in modern times.

As well as having great importance to Rotuman identity and culture, the Raho legend has been shown to have a substantially factual basis. As mentioned previously, Samoans and Tongans arrived on the island at various times and these incursions, these waypoints, are remembered, in part, through the legend of Raho

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

– the “founder” of the island and his rival Tokaniua. The arrival of the chief Ma’afu<sup>136</sup> in 1652 and his followers from Niuafu’ou in northern Tonga at Noa’tau, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is also remembered in local history and, along with Tokaniua, lives on in Rotuman chiefly families bearing their names.

Another example of the power of traditional history as a waypoint in the cultural journey of the Rotuman people was evident during my field research on the island in 2003. In a one hour discussion session a class of forty senior high school students were asked to write a paragraph about the history of Rotuma<sup>137</sup>. Eighty percent quoted the Raho legend but without any explanation. Another ten percent talked about the “discovery” of the island by Captain Edwards of the *HMS Pandora* in 1791. The rest did not know or were too shy to say. Those who talked about Raho however did not believe that the legend was true in all its detail. Where the legends and myths are concerned all the students needed to know was that they were all descended from Raho.

The social messages of the stories were still imparted whether the students realised it or not. That is the way collective memory works. With the exception of the traditional history and stories told to children in primary school and by their parents in bedtime stories, Rotuman history is not taught in schools, most probably since little of the far distant past is known; since European contact missionaries and teachers have emphasised modern history interpreted in the

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<sup>136</sup> Gardiner, 1898, pp. 396-435 and pp. 457-524.

<sup>137</sup> Agnes Hannan, fieldnotes, Rotuma 2003.

ways of the West rather than Rotuman history interpreted through the Rotuman cultural mindset. Consequently, according to the headmaster of the Rotuma High School, Rotuman children know more about the history of Fiji than about their own island. Soon, with the introduction of videos and ultimately satellite television, these stories may pass from the oral record, existing only in the memories of the old or the books of the young, the nuance of the telling gone. This is the nature of the historical and cultural journey as, from time to time, waypoint references are discarded as they become less relevant to the journey forward. The implications for such a scenario for Rotuman culture and identity at home and in the diaspora will largely depend on the perceived importance of the information to collective memory and the sustenance of the Rotuman community.

In spite of some shortcomings traditional history continues to have significance for this thesis because it continues to provide, as Howard notes, the transmission of at least some of the traditional Rotuman values both at home, in Fiji and also in the diaspora. Thus, as well as factual information about the history and identity of the Rotuman people – their descent from one progenitor – other important messages arising from the origin myth for today's Rotumans both on and off the island and in diaspora are the continuing assertions of cultural mores and values which also contribute to a strong sense of solidarity within the Rotuman community.

The record shows that when the opportunity arose – with the coming of whalers, labour recruiters, missions, traders and other maritime visitors – for the people to

explore new and interesting opportunities, whether by travel or by appropriation of goods through trade, they seized it with both hands. This supports the contention that Rotumans had a stronger seafaring tradition than Howard believed and that its demise was caused by factors beyond the control of the Rotuman people. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century they signed on as crew in ships that called at the island and a few made their way into the Torres Strait pearling industry. Some came home; others did not. Those who did return fuelled the fires of ambition in others to take the same journey. The outflow, especially of young men, coupled with the ravages of the European-borne diseases such as measles, meant that the population growth slowed, halted and then reduced as deaths and a lowered birth rate took their toll.

Howard contends that, in pre-contact times, limited connection with the outside world engendered a weak Rotuman identity vis a vis outsiders and encouraged the focus of their identity to lie in lineage and location.<sup>138</sup> Extrapolating from that, Rotumans before contact with Europeans tended to see themselves as members of particular families resident in one of the seven districts. While evidence of relatively small numbers of other Pacific Islanders arriving in Rotuma prior to European contact has been noted, these people were either absorbed into the Rotuman communities or departed for their home islands without unduly influencing the Rotuman perception of identity. Even the three major incursions, noted earlier in this chapter, which came from Tonga and Samoa appear to have had limited influence on local Rotuman family groups and

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<sup>138</sup> Alan Howard, "Rotuman Identity in the Electronic Age," in Toon van Meijl and Jelle Miedema (eds), *Shifting Images of Identity in the Pacific*, KITLV Press, Leiden, 2004, p.220.

social organisation beyond the survival of their names. Coupled with the fluidity of the political system Rotuman self-identification can be seen to remain strongly linked to the family group.

According to Howard, it was not until Rotumans emigrated to Fiji after 1881 that a specifically Rotuman identity emerged. In this sense Howard posits that identity is a condition engendered through a recognition of one's "otherness" and that there has to be a high level of contact, perhaps even the necessity of being in a minority, with "others" to ensure the development of a strong identity. However, he goes on to argue that the high numbers of Rotumans with European blood, the rise of prestige associated with being part-European and the lighter skin tones of many Rotumans, worked against the growth of a strong Rotuman cultural identity in Fiji. Research among Rotumans in Rotuma, in Fiji and in Australia points to a strong self-identification with Rotuma and Rotuman culture generally. The majority of Rotumans who were interviewed during my research tended to dismiss the idea of mixed-race as an important factor in their lives – to them it was just another facet of their Rotuman-ness. This leads to the conclusion that while concentrated contact with other cultures may prompt a strengthening of self-identity as Howard suggests, my research indicates that it may also blur it, especially in the case of Rotumans who are known to have family connections with Europeans and but who place more emphasis on their Rotuman side than of their European lineage.

This thesis argues that the basis of a pan-Rotuman identity was already well formed prior to European contact. The collective memory engendered in the recognition of Raho and Tokaniua as ancestral figures as well as symbols through which the values and mores of Rotuman society were, and still are, enacted ensures a recognition of group solidarity. The existence of a pan-Rotuman polity evidenced in collective rememberings of myth and legend associated with the first Rotuman Kings or *Sau*, the positions of the *Sau* and *Mua* and the traditions associated with the passage of the ‘sauship’ from one district to another also point in this direction. In the pre-contact period this, as well as visits, and incursions by other groups – in particular the Tongan invasion and settlement of the 15<sup>th</sup> century – and their removal through cooperation between Rotuman clans across the island shows a strong recognition of mutual belonging to Rotuma as a place and hence a recognition of the wider identity of being Rotuman. At the same time it is important to recognise that, due to the affiliation of Rotumans with the land and the law of inheritance through both parents, it is important to Rotumans as individuals to identify spatially as well as through family with particular places.

The flexibility of the Rotuman cultural core, although lending an apparent contradiction to previous interpretations of their self-identity, was a strong factor in their capacity to migrate and maintain their identity. By 1881 as Rotumans began to move permanently out of their island, mainly to the bigger islands of Fiji for work and education but also to elsewhere in the world including the Torres Strait, they did so with a number of advantages. While they maintained a strong

affiliation to the island of their birth and ancestors, the ability to capitalise on Polynesian physical traits of lighter skin colour and straight hair as well as, for some, European family linkages, combined with a strong work ethic and a modicum of ambition ensured them success in migration.

The thrust of this chapter has been to argue that despite its apparent remoteness, Rotuma was visited infrequently by large numbers of indigenous Pacific Island travellers who nonetheless made a significant impact on the collective memory of the people. Today all Rotumans, even those born overseas, know the story of Raho and the story of the Tongan group that invaded through Noa'tau. While Raho, Tokaniua, the two spirit sisters and the baskets of soil are treated as legend, the underlying importance of the arrival of a Samoan group who made the island with their soil on one hand and displaced the original inhabitants on the other demonstrates an ongoing engagement with the origins and history of the Rotuman people told in an easy to remember cultural format. The 1652 invasion by 300 Niuafou'ouans from Tonga lives on today in the name of the Noa'tau District Chief – Maraf – a name taken on accession to the position. Legends also carry within them a library of moral and cultural lessons. For example the Raho legend speaks of consequences – the consequences arising from jealousy, anger and the misuse of power.

Pacific Island visitors and settlers would soon be followed by others. Soon after Vasco Nunez De Balboa first sighted the Pacific Ocean from the peak of Darien in 1513 Spanish mariners were sent to explore the new unknown. European



intrusion then began in earnest with the most detailed exploration being undertaken by the Russians, French, Dutch and British when Captain James Cook was sent to observe the transit of Venus from Tahiti in 1768. European expansion into the Pacific increased in tempo in the late eighteenth century, as the British colonised the east coast of Australia and began the penal, scientific and botanical venture that would lead the *HMS Pandora* to the shores of Rotuma in 1791.

When Captain Edward Edwards sailed into the waters of Rotuma he found the people ready to defend themselves, yet friendly enough to come aboard his ship and attempt to take items that they found interesting or useful.<sup>139</sup> Once the existence of the island was noted on Admiralty charts, there followed a fairly constant stream of European ships – whalers, traders, naval vessels, blackbirders and labour recruiters and missionaries. The island played host to deserters and escaped convicts – the “beachcombers” – sufficient numbers of whom settled into the Rotuman community, married Rotuman women, produced families and left a measure of influence behind them when they died. By the middle of the nineteenth century there were approximately 70 of these men on Rotuma<sup>140</sup> and the next waypoint had been set.

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<sup>139</sup> Edwards, and Hamilton, 1915 (1793), p. 67.

<sup>140</sup> R. Lesson, "Observations on Rotuma and its Inhabitants", in M.L.I. Duperry, Chapter 23, *Voyage Medical Autour du Monde Execute sur la Corvette du Roi La Coquille, Commandee par MLI Duperry Pendant les Annees 1822, 1823, 1824 et 1825*, Paris , Roret Librairie, 1829; C.M. Churchward, 1938

Thus when Europeans arrived at the close of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Rotuman society was organised along the lines of the stratified Polynesian chiefdoms in that there were seven districts ordered in a hierarchical way with the most powerful having precedence and each having a chief and a number of sub-chiefs. However, as this chapter has pointed out the political structure in Rotuma is relatively fluid and flexible, as seen in the periodical movement of the *sau* and *mua* between districts and shifts in power from time to time amongst the districts themselves. The strength in Rotuman culture lies in the social relationships which link individuals and families to one another and which are engendered by a strong and enduring connection back to the waypoints of the past through collective memory and contact, first with other indigenes of the Pacific and then with Europeans. While this was intermittent at first it grew rapidly and prompted a strong Rotuman identity but also a strong desire to look outwards from their island home, to learn new things, new ways. These onward movements, however, involved looking back to maintain a link to the past, “the Rotuman way”, to inform their ongoing journey into the future.

**PART I**  
**BEING ROTUMAN**

-3-

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**BEACHCOMBERS, WHALERS AND TRADERS**

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“Viewed for what they did and not who they were, beachcombers mediated change”<sup>141</sup>.

“Wherever they came ashore, after months of hard, dangerous and at times, incredibly boring work, whalers created a problem.”<sup>142</sup>

“Traders ... were transient, ... Profit made, they departed.”<sup>143</sup>

While indigenous arrivals continued into the era of European contact, the new European presence soon exercised significant influence on Rotuma. As in the past their reference points gradually moved behind them, each one used to advance the forward movement of the voyage through time and space. The reference points for this part of the Rotuman voyage are the beachcombers and traders, both indigenous to the Pacific and European, and the British and American whalers who arrived in the wake of European “discovery.”

The Rotumans learned much from the incursions of their modern waves of visitors - new means of communication, interaction, a greater ease of travel,

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<sup>141</sup> Greg Denning, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas 1774-1880*, 1980, p. 129

<sup>142</sup> Ernest S. Dodge, *Whaling off Tahiti*, 1971, p.7

<sup>143</sup> Philip Snow and Stefanie Waine, *The People from the Horizon: An Illustrated History of the Europeans Among the South Sea Islanders*, 1979, p. 140.

and the introductory lessons of trade as opposed to exchange.<sup>144</sup> Some of the things they learned about their visitors did not please them, for example the drunken dangers of beachcombers and the bad behaviour of visiting whaling men and other sailors. Some of these the Rotumans tolerated and others paid the price of moving these people to anger. All of these experiences were stored in their collective memory, carried onwards on their journey, and used to smooth the way into the future.

Indigenous travellers paved the way for the jetsam of the European shipping trade by creating a mindset amongst Rotumans of expectation, and with this, institutions of hospitality and welcome to those who arrived in peace and who settled amongst them, contributed their skills to the community and also managed to compromise sufficiently to fit in with the local custom.<sup>145</sup> The I-Kiribati who settled in Rotuma in this era were a case in point. They arrived, stayed and married into Rotuman families.<sup>146</sup> As H.E Maude commented,

*The local communities in Polynesia and Melanesia were, in fact, highly receptive to the assimilation of immigrants, whether Europeans, Negroes or other Pacific Islanders.*<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, the difference between trade and exchange is that while both involve giving one thing in return for another, trade is conducted through the medium of money and exchange is the transfer of goods of value from one party to another in return for different goods of value. Exchange can also involve ceremonial transfer of items of cultural value.

<sup>145</sup> H.E. Maude, *Of Islands and Men*, Oxford University Ppress, Melbourne, 1968:148-165; David A. Chappell, "Secret Sharers: Indigenous Beachcombers in the Pacific Islands" in *Pacific Studies*, Vol.17, No. 2., June 1994, pp. 1-2.

<sup>146</sup> Aubrey Parke, *Sek Sek 'E Hatana: Traditions of Rotuma and its Dependencies*, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2001, pp. 34-35.

<sup>147</sup> H.E. Maude, *Of Islands and Men*, Oxford University press, Melbourne, 1968, p. 149.

When Gardiner spoke to Rotumans in 1898 he found that about 30 people claimed descent from two canoe-loads of people from the Ellice Islands<sup>148</sup>. Gardiner was also told that special songs, words and ways of singing were still popular from that time.<sup>149</sup>

The first group arrived in 1815 from Funafuti with both men and women aboard. Fifteen years later more people arrived from Nui in the same island chain. These groups settled on Rotuma and intermarried with the locals. Other islanders also left their mark as Aubrey Parke found in his research on the island. There are a number of “singing” houses – houses built on a site previously occupied by I-Kiribati in which singing can be heard. The singing comes, it is said, from stones or bone built into the walls of the house. Parke comments

*...the accounts of the singing houses show that the living were linked with the supernatural in Rotuma. They also reflect Rotuma's connections with the wider Pacific world, such as Kiribati (formerly the Gilbert Islands). They show how Rotumans adopted stories connected with such places and included them in stories of their own island.*<sup>150</sup>

These borrowings were not indiscriminate. Rotumans who greeted visitors from other islands in the Pacific and the first Europeans had their own agendas. They were, and still are, insatiable in their hunger for knowledge and selectively

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<sup>148</sup> The Ellice Islands are now known as Tuvalu and the Gilbert Islands as Kiribati.

<sup>149</sup> J. Stanley Gardiner, “The Natives of Rotuma,” in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 27, 1898, pp. 396-435 and 457-524.

<sup>150</sup> Aubrey Parke, *Sek Sek 'E Hatana: Traditions of Rotuma and its Dependencies*, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2001, pp. 34-35.

absorbed useful features of the foreign cultures that pitched up on their shores. Many learned other languages, amongst them “trade pidgin” and English; they shipped aboard canoes and trading vessels to see the world; they quickly saw the advantages of learning the nature of these new people from halfway across the globe. They took what they wanted of the language, customs and knowledge and discarded the rest. The adaptability shown by Rotumans in this period is important to this thesis in that it shows their quick response to changing circumstances and an acceptance of the ways of others.

The visit of *HMS Pandora* was to prove of great significance to Rotuma. Captain Edwards named the island he “discovered” Grenville Island although it was recorded by Hamilton, the ship’s Surgeon, that “the natives called it Rotumah.”<sup>151</sup> Edwards noted in the ships log that the natives were friendly and disposed to trade food. The discovery and reports of the hospitality of the inhabitants and their ability to resupply ships travelling through the western and central Pacific meant that it was guaranteed that more white men would arrive and visits to the island by both indigenous Pacific Islanders and Europeans would increase significantly in the coming decades. Despite a good first impression, Rotumans were no more hospitable than others in the area, indeed some European visitors found them to be quite antisocial at times. Evidence from elsewhere in the Pacific suggests that when this happened it was probably because of a poor

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<sup>151</sup>. George Hamilton, (Geoffrey Kenihan, ed.) *A voyage round the world in His Majesty's frigate Pandora : performed under the direction of Captain Edwards in the years 1790, 1791, and 1792 : with the discoveries made in the south-sea and the many distresses experienced by the crew from shipwreck and famine in the voyage of eleven hundred miles in open boats between Endeavour Straits and the island of Timor* W. Torrens, Belair, S.Aust., 1990, p. 58 .

season when food was scarce and thus trade was unwelcome or in response to the threatening behaviour of visitors.

The reception accorded the missionary ship *Duff*, the second European ship to visit the island, was distinctly unfriendly and for a time some whalers were reluctant to stop there due to the murder of Captain Norris of the *Sharon* on Rotuma.<sup>152</sup> However their place in the geographic centre of European interest and later government in the Pacific, their generally peaceful demeanour as well as their

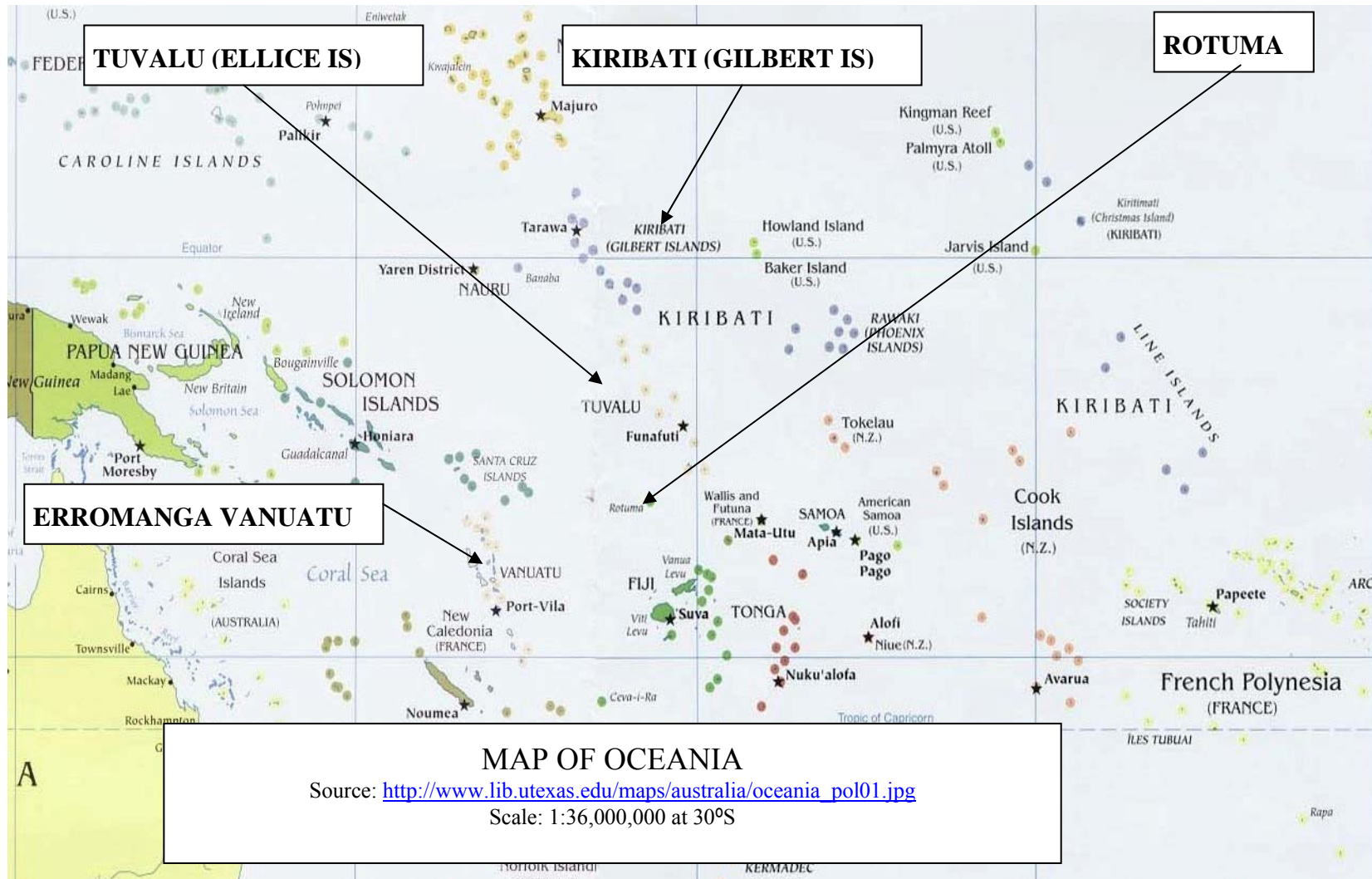
apparent keenness to accept European skills and knowledge encouraged an

increased, on the part of Europeans, to visit. This waypoint in the Rotuman willingness journey is an important one because of the extent of the differences between Rotuman and European culture and thus the potential for dramatic cultural change. It exposed Rotumans not only to European influence but also introduced them to information about the wider world beyond the Pacific. It allowed them to measure their own identity against that of a very different other and gave some an opportunity to interact directly with foreigners on an individual basis through trade and employment in the whaling industry.

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<sup>152</sup> Joan Druett, *Petticoat Whalers: Whaling Wives at Sea, 1820-1920*, Collins, Auckland, 1991, pp. 137-138.







Whaling became an important growth industry in the Pacific from the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century as whale oil and other by-products were used to manufacture fuel and tallow for lighting and cooking. In addition, whalebone was used to make corsets, fishing rods and umbrellas for the populations of Europe and the Americas. As well as chances to work as crew it provided a land based opportunity for Pacific Islanders to provide for the needs of the whaling industry. As the industry burgeoned in the South Seas whalers were able to purchase considerable quantities of bananas, taro, coconut and coconut oil in exchange for whale's teeth.<sup>153</sup> These teeth were considered by Rotumans to be more valuable than iron axes. Strung on a cord around the neck, they were worn intact only by Chiefs in Rotuma but the ivory was used to carve balls for beads worn by the rest of the people. W.L. Allardyce, Acting Resident Commissioner on Rotuma during the year of cession noted,

*Some forty or fifty years ago Rotooma formed a not unimportant whaling station, as yams, fowls, pigs, &c., were always easily obtainable. As many as ten or eleven whalers have been known to have anchored in the lee harbour, Ituteu (sic), at once, and as in those days the abandoning of men and their deserting their ships was no uncommon occurrence, ninety whites have thus been on the island at one time, of whom seventy used to make and sell an intoxicating liquor from the cocoanut trees, known as "Tokelau Toddy," so called because the natives of the Tokelau islands appear to have been the original makers and still manufacture and drink a*

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<sup>153</sup> Jan Rensel, "The Fiji Connection: Migrant involvement in the economy of Rotuma," in *Pacific Viewpoint*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 1993, p. 215.

*considerable quantity. At present ... [1882] ... there is but one of the old hands remaining, an Indian half-caste, who goes by the sobriquet of "East India Jack" and who says he has been here for over fifty years.*<sup>154</sup>

Rotuma became caught up in the modern world as trade with the whalers developed into a relatively prosperous activity.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century sandalwood from the Pacific became an important trade item for both island peoples and the Europeans with whom they had begun to trade. As the sandalwood trade became profitable, two canoes from Tonga arrived in around 1820 and took 100 Rotuman men to Erromanga to cut sandalwood, returning with full cargoes but minus several men who had died of fever. According to Howe, in about 1829 Samuel Henry, an associate of Peter Dillon, left 113 Tongans on Erromanga and went to Hawai'i where news of the sandalwood find leaked out. Boki, Governor of O'ahu, took two vessels, the *Kamehameha* and the *Becket* and sailed for Erromanga via Rotuma. At a time when there were approximately 3000 people on the island the *Becket* took on 100 Rotumans for Erromanga and another vessel hired by British enterprises arrived and took on a further 130. Henry also returned to cut sandalwood in Erromanga with 200 Rotumans. Battle with the Erromangans and fever, probably malaria, decimated the sandalwood cutters and many Rotumans did not return home.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Allardyce, 1885-6, pp. 130-144.

<sup>155</sup> K.R. Howe, *Where the Waves Fall*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1984, p. 285.

Those who managed to return to Rotuma brought back stories of the world outside the tiny island enclave fuelling the interest of others to see the world. More importantly they showed that it was possible to leave, learn and return, and in returning to bring valuable knowledge and wealth back with them. Indeed, to leave became a rite of passage for young Rotuman men who were regarded with some disdain by their fellows if they had not been overseas.<sup>156</sup> Thus itinerant Rotumans as well as indigenous visitors and settlers on Rotuma provided links to other places and paved the way for an ongoing conversation with the outside world.

In the twenty years following the 1797 arrival of the missionary ship *Duff* in Rotuma several American and English whaling ships stopped at the island but recorded no intelligence about the inhabitants. In about February 1824 the whaling ship *Rochester* visited Rotuma for provisions.

*When they sent boats ashore they were well received and went into several villages without insult. ... on the day of departure, at ten o'clock that night, eight men, including the third and fourth officers, set down a whaling dinghy with some books and instruments aboard.... [and] ... set sail back to the island.*<sup>157</sup>

In this instance not only were the whalers well received but so much so that eight of the crew deserted the ship. These were among the first of many to do so. The European beachcombers had arrived on Rotuma.

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<sup>156</sup> Reverend W. Allen, quoted at <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Allen.html#Fauna> accessed November 2004.

<sup>157</sup> Rene Lesson, *Voyage Médical Autour le Monde Exécute sur la Corvette du Roi, La Coquille, Commandée par M.L.L. Duperrey pendant les années 1822, 1823, 1824 et 1825*, Vol.II, Chapter 23, Roret Librairie, Paris, 1829.

Later that year, the island was visited by Duperrey in the *Coquille* and an account of the voyage written and published in 1829 by Rene Primavere Lesson, the naturalist aboard the ship.<sup>158</sup> On its arrival in Rotuma the crew were surprised to hear English spoken from one of the canoes that put out from the shore to greet them. Williams John<sup>159</sup> one of the deserters from the *Rochester* came out with three of his fellows and asked for passage to England for himself – the others choosing to stay behind. Three more from the *Rochester* would ship out in the next three years on visiting whalers. Duperrey left two ex-convicts picked up in Sydney who wanted to stay at Rotuma and Lesson commented,

*...it is disagreeable to know that the criminals of Port Jackson are now poisoning the islands of the South Pacific and that the first use they make of their liberty is to turn the natives against the Europeans who have stigmatised and rejected them.*<sup>160</sup>

By the time Peter Dillon arrived in the *Research* in 1827 as part of his search for the fate of the La Pérouse expedition which had disappeared in the South Pacific, only three men from the *Rochester* remained, including Parker, and Young who appeared to be living in the district of Oinafa. Parker, who had been a ships carpenter, had turned his hand to acting as intermediary between visiting ships and the islanders. He told Dillon that he had watered ships both at Oinafa and in

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> Lesson records the name in this way but it could have been John Williams.

<sup>160</sup> Lesson, 1829.

the bay at Motusa and had a captain's certificate to show.<sup>161</sup> Dillon was unimpressed by Parker and Young, writing:

*Shortly after Parker [one of the mutineers] had come on board this morning, he was followed by Young, the captain's [of the Rochester] brother-in-law; and not withstanding these men's characters were so bad, I had no alternative left but to employ them as pilots and interpreters. I also tolerated them with the view to gleaning such information from them as, if they had but common sense, they ought to have been possessed of, regarding the winds, tides, customs, manners and rites, of the inhabitants, after a residence among them of four years.*<sup>162</sup>

However he may have felt, the role of the deserters or beachcombers as agents of the Rotuman chiefs was quite clear.

Further evidence of the Rotuman penchant, which they held in common with other Pacific islanders, for amassing useful knowledge and embracing new ideas along with the old was noted by George Bennett, a physician aboard the *Sophia* in 1830, who was surprised along with the rest of the ship's crew, to hear good English spoken by the natives.

*A stranger, on visiting this small island, scarcely known to Europeans, is astonished at hearing the English language spoken by so many of the natives, and to perceive them all so anxious to acquire a knowledge of it. I was frequently amused*

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<sup>161</sup> Peter Dillon, *Narrative and Successful Result of a Voyage in the South Seas performed by the Order of the Government of British India, to Ascertain the Actual Fate of La Pérouse's Expedition*, London, II, 1829, pp. 93-94

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*, p. 100.

*by hearing these naked savages attempt a conversation amongst themselves in my own language.*<sup>163</sup>

On this occasion the ship was piloted into her anchorage by a Rotuman and neither Parker nor Young were mentioned.

About a year and a half later Robert Jarman, travelling in the whaling ship *Japan*, noted on their first visit that three canoes came out to meet the ship with an Englishman called Emery, who had been in Rotuma for five years, on board.

Emery had

*once (been) the second mate on the "Toward Castle", but left it at that place (Rotuma) on account of some disagreement.*<sup>164</sup>

He lived on the island of Uea, one of the small islets to the north west of the main island of Rotuma. On the second visit a month or so later the ship was met by a whaleboat carrying a Rotuman chief by the name of "Coutang". The whale boat belonged, he said, to "an Englishman, formerly carpenter of a ship." This was probably Parker who had married and raised a family on the island. Both "Coutang" and Emery were keen to water and provision the ship. Jarman traded one old musket for a large fine mat nine feet long and seven feet wide and two pigs and noted that Rotuman hospitality seemed to be waning due to the numbers of whalers calling into the island and the consequent number of deserters who depended on the islanders for subsistence.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> George Bennett, "A Recent Visit to Several of the Polynesian Islands," in *United Services Journal* 33, 1831, pp. 198-202 and 473-482.

<sup>164</sup> Robert Jarman, *Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas, in the "Japan", employed in the Sperm Whale fishery, under the command of Captain John May*, Longman and Co. and Charles Tilt, London, 1832, pp. 175-187.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

The propensity of the whalers to recruit Pacific Islanders as crew also meant that there were often a number of itinerant indigenous people scattered across Rotuma as well as Rotumans left on other islands throughout the whaling territories of the Pacific. For example Historian David Chappell documents the twenty Hawai'ians left on the islet of "Oahu" in Rotuma after being rescued from Erromanga when the 1829 venture by Hawai'ian high chief Boki left many dead and dying of malaria.<sup>166</sup> These and others added to the pool of understanding Rotumans on the island had of the outside world thus enhancing their ability to negotiate other cultures.

These men were less well documented than the European beachcombers who upset the sensibilities of their more "civilised" brethren and caused much excited debate about the lowering of standards. Historian Ian Campbell is inclined towards the view that beachcombers were, as a whole, not the totally bad men they were painted and that those who were very quickly died as a result of their excesses<sup>167</sup> This is borne out by the constant movement of these castaways around the Pacific and the enduring stays of some. Two notable examples of beachcombers settling down long term on Rotuma are East India Jack and Bill

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<sup>166</sup> David Chappell, *Double Ghosts: Oceanian Voyagers on Euroamerican Ships*, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk New York, 1997, p. 91.

<sup>167</sup> Ian Campbell, *"Gone Native" in Polynesia: Captivity Narratives and Experiences from the South Pacific.*, Greenwood Press, Westport Connecticut, 1998, p. 137.

Ring both of whom spent over fifty years on the island and contributed their own labour and ideas to further the community.<sup>168</sup>

By the time Litton Forbes visited the island in 1875 around 90 white men had purportedly sojourned on Rotuma. Few remained. Ring, an old man of about 70 years, told both Forbes and later Westbrook that when he arrived there were a large number of whites living on the island. He thought them to be mostly runaways from ships and escapees or ex-convicts from Australia. They had constructed a still and made a potent brew from coconuts. According to Ring all of them died violent deaths brought about in fights or drunkenness. Ring was influential with the Rotuman chiefs and acted as a go-between in order to procure seamen, labourers, provisions, water and firewood for visiting vessels. He also made some money from selling coconut oil. Forbes also mentioned another 60 year old white man on the island who had been shipwrecked there twice in his youth and then marooned on the island. He finally decided to settle on the island.

Generally speaking the beachcombers added little to the material culture of Rotuma. Perhaps the most significant result of the European beachcombers' sojourn on Rotuma was their children. Those who mingled freely with Rotumans, married the women and produced children, added a lightness to the skin of the next generation of Rotumans who valued a fair skin tone. In later years, according to Howard, it allowed them privileged access to a society that

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<sup>168</sup> Julian Dana, *Gods Who Die: The Story of Samoa's Greatest Adventurer*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1935, pp. 159-160; Litton Forbes, *Two years in Fiji*, Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1975, pp. 222-248, located at <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Forbes.html> accessed March 2004.



was highly stratified with the European coloniser at the top and the darker skinned Pacific Islanders at the bottom. The already light skinned Polynesian Rotumans fitted neatly into a situation in which their “physical type ... (was) ... closer to that of the stereotypic part-European, making it easier to gain acceptance without resorting to genealogical credentials,”<sup>169</sup> and their part-European children garnered yet more benefits in terms of education, respect and economic and political opportunity in the greater Fijian society.<sup>170</sup> This translated, in turn, into an advantage in diaspora.

By the 1840's the days of the beachcombing population were numbered. The isolation of the islands was ending and with it chances of men being marooned for extended periods in remote villages. Their so-called heathen ways were also under threat with the spread of Christianity and its accompanying missionaries who disapproved of the renegade and alternative way of life led by these men.<sup>171</sup>

Perhaps the most influential of the pre-colonial intrusions by Europeans was the advent of missionaries on the island. The accounts of the reception given to the first missionary ship, which stopped to trade for food in 1797 are confused. According to Wood, “Wilson (the Captain) thought that the remoteness of Rotuma should make it a peaceful place for missionary enterprise.”<sup>172</sup> W. Smith,

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<sup>169</sup> Alan Howard and Irwin Howard, “Rotumans in Fiji: The Genesis of an Ethnic Group,” in M. Lieber, (ed), *Exiles and Migrants in Oceania*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1977, p. 172

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> James Wilson, *Missionary Voyage of the 'Duff,'* referenced in A.H. Wood, *Missions of the Australasian Methodist Church, Vol. III, Rotuma*. 1978, p. 116, fn 8.

a missionary on the ship, seemed less convinced about the peacefulness of Rotuma, as he wrote in a journal of the voyage that,

*After leaving Tonga we attempted to barter for food at Rotuma. About fifty to sixty canoes came off but with scarcely any provisions, and the people seemed ill disposed to trade. As a result we obtained only a few yams at an exorbitant rate. One of them offered a pig in exchange for a knife, but on obtaining the knife, he endeavoured to decamp without giving us the pig. Finally a shot was fired to frighten him, but the only result was that the natives all went to the shore and all trade ceased.”<sup>173</sup>*

Despite the apparent possibilities the Protestant mission showed no strong interest in Rotuma until 1839 – a full forty years later – when the Roman Catholic presence became more prominent in the Pacific with the founding of the Vicariates of Eastern and Western Oceania.

The Roman Catholic church designated Rotuma part of the Vicariate Apostolic of Western Oceania created in January 1836 by Pope Gregory XVI and the evangelising mission was entrusted to the Society of Mary or the Marist Order, founded in that year “in response to the colonial and missionary success of British interests in the Pacific.”<sup>174</sup> In November 1837, after leaving priests on Wallis and Futuna Islands the Vicar Apostolic Jean-Baptiste-François Pompallier sailed to Rotuma, where he met two of the chiefs and, in reply to their request for a

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<sup>173</sup> W.J.E. Eason, *A Short History of Rotuma*, Government Printing Department, Suva, 1951, p. 31.

<sup>174</sup> Alan Howard and Eric Kjellgren, “Martyrs, Progress and Political Ambition: Re-examining Rotuma’s ‘Religious Wars’,” in *Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 29, 1995, pp. 131-152. Also reproduced at <http://www.rotuma.net/os/howsel/22religiouswars.html>, accessed March 2004.

missionary, promised to send a mission in due course. The chiefs' request accords with those of other Pacific islands.

Meanwhile, in 1846 the London Missionary Society (LMS) took the first major step in Christian proselytization in Rotuma. In 1839, on his way to Erromanga, the Reverend John Williams of the LMS arrived in the ship *Camden* looking for an interpreter. Although he did not find his interpreter, he left behind a Rotuman called Foraete, who had been converted to Christianity in Samoa, to help open Rotuman eyes to the new faith. Chief Maraf of Noa'tau joined chiefs Tokaniua and Kausiriaf of Oinafa<sup>175</sup> in requesting Christian teachers in 1840 and three new Samoan teachers, two of whom were married, were left to begin the work of conversion.<sup>176</sup> In 1841, the Reverend John Waterhouse of the Wesleyan Missionary Society arrived in the ship *Triton* with a number of missionary teachers from Vava'u in Tonga. Chief Tokaniua of Oinafa met him with the request for a white missionary to be sent to Rotuma.

After a delay of some nine years two Catholic priests, Fr Pierre Verne and Fr Gregory Villien were landed from the vessel *Morning Star* at Rotuma in the district of Itumuta in December 1846 by which time the Wesleyan Mission had been present on the island for some six years. They received a hospitable enough welcome but were sent to Oinafa in the north east of the island because Tokaniua,

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<sup>175</sup> Maraf, Tokaniua and Kausiriaf are traditionally used chiefly names taken by the chiefs of these districts.

<sup>176</sup> Howard, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Religion.html>, accessed 30 December 2005; Ebenezer Prout, *Memoirs of the Life of the Reverend John Williams*, J. Snow, London, 1843; Eason, 1951, pp. 45-46.

the chief of Oinafa, had recently defeated Konau, the chief of Itumuta, in a war. The priests found themselves unwelcome at Oinafa possibly because of the influence of Samoan teachers from the Wesleyan mission who had arrived five years previously. The priests were expelled and returned to Itumuta. Eventually Catholic missions were set up at Motusa in Itu ti'u district at the western end and at Noatau in the district of Noatau in the south east. Little progress was made in the next seven years.<sup>177</sup>

By 1853, the two priests then in Rotuma received orders to leave Rotuma and they left for Futuna, taking 30 Rotumans with them<sup>178</sup>. Langi recounts that the priests and converts were so badly harassed by the non-Christian Rotumans that they were forced to leave.<sup>179</sup> However Soubeyran's history of the Catholic Church in Rotuma simply records the fact that the ministry had been difficult and unfruitful and that the Rotumans were scornful of them.<sup>180</sup>

It is difficult to say, at this distance in time, why the Rotuman converts left the island with the priests to go to Futuna for 15 years. Speculation may tell us that these people were most likely a family group or groups who had become extremely attached to their faith; as a united group it did not matter where they were located because their cultural mores could continue to be nurtured and their worship continued at the same time in a non-threatening atmosphere. However, it

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<sup>177</sup> Fr. L Soubeyran, *Historique de la Station St Michel Upu, Rotuma*. 1949, PMB 159, located in Pacific Manuscripts Bureau Holdings, ANU Library, Canberra.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> Jione Langi, "The History of the Methodist Church in its Rotuman Setting," in Makisis Finau, Teeruro Ieuti and Jione Langi, *Island Churches: Challenges and Change*, Pacific Theological College and Institute of Pacific Studies, 1992, pp. 21-22.

<sup>180</sup> Soubeyran, 1949.

is an important point as it provides the first example in the historical record of the Rotuman ability to move beyond their shores for a protracted period yet maintain their links to the home island. Records indicate that there was a steady dialogue between Wallis, Futuna and Rotuma in this period with indigenous catechists moving to and fro between the islands when no French missionaries were present on the island.<sup>181</sup> Thus the Rotumans in Futuna would have been in contact with home through these men.

Two prayer communities remained behind, one of seventy members in Noatau in the charge of a blind old man called Mailagi, and a smaller one at Faguta, and were visited twice by Fr Bataille, on the first occasion he was accompanied by a young Rotuman convert, Rafaele (Uafta in other accounts), who was sent to Rome by the church to meet the Pope.<sup>182</sup> The Catholic mission did not officially return until 1868 by which time the Wesleyan ministry had become well established.<sup>183</sup> On their return the Catholic priests commenced a long-term strategy of land acquisition and building that saw large churches, as well as boarding schools for male and female students, built at both Upu and Sumi. While this latter satisfied the desire for literacy it did little to empower the local district chiefs. Indeed given the vows of poverty and chastity taken by the Roman Catholic religious and their tendency not to interfere at the micro level in

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<sup>181</sup> Raeburn Lange, *Island Ministers: Indigenous Leadership in Nineteenth Century Pacific Islands Christianity*, Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury and Pandanus Books, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, ANU, Canberra, 2005, p. 116.

<sup>182</sup> Soubeyran, 1949.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.* The district of Faguta, which figures large in the history of Catholicism on Rotuma was later divided into Pepjei and Juju.

the daily lives of their parishioners they may have had little beyond learning to offer the Rotuman elite.

In the 1850s the newly arrived Wesleyans found that Rotuman conversion was very much on Rotuman terms. In 1854 the Wesleyans sent a Fijian teacher, Eliesa Takelo, to Rotuma; he learned the language quickly but, having not learned diplomacy as quickly as he had conversation, he angered the chiefs by declaring the ceremonies to invest the *sau*, or ceremonial chief, to be heathen. He was quickly expelled from the island.<sup>184</sup> Clearly, at this time the traditional spiritual/political arrangements were still in operation alongside the beginnings of Christianity pointing up the likelihood that Rotuman chiefs were following the lead of Tahitians, Tongans and Samoans and engaging with Christianity for reasons beyond the spiritual.

This point is reinforced by the situation that evolved when the first white Wesleyan missionary, Reverend Carey, arrived in 1858 accompanied by Reverend Moore only to find that the Tongan and Fijian catechists had made little progress. In the decade or so spent waiting for a white missionary the chiefs had changed their minds about receiving Christianity. The so-called heathen chiefs complained to the British Consul on board the *John Wesley* that “the missionaries weakened their power over their people.”<sup>185</sup> The missionaries were forced to leave and they took their catechists with them.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Wood, 1978, pp. 118-119.

<sup>185</sup> Eason, 1951, p. 52.

<sup>186</sup> Wood, 1978, pp. 118-119.

However, the catechists' work had borne some fruit and a few converts led by Zerubabel,<sup>187</sup> one of the sub-chiefs of Noatau, continued to observe and spread the teachings of Christ. The gradual lessening of prejudice and growth in the Christian

community presented an opportunity for the white Wesleyan missionaries to return in 1865. This followed a visit by Reverend Thomas Calvert in 1864 when Maraf, the chief of Noa'tau, was officially inducted into the church and Calvert had the pleasure of conducting his marriage ceremony. With the conversion of one of the most powerful men on the island achieved, the work of the missionaries was assured. By the time Reverend William Fletcher and his wife settled on the island in 1865 there were upwards of 1200 Christians<sup>188</sup> out of a possible population of around 2500<sup>189</sup>. Again the pattern of conversion on Rotuma is strikingly similar to other Pacific Polynesian chiefly societies where concerns regarding power were of paramount importance. According to Eason,<sup>190</sup> the change of attitude may have come about because, along with the death of Rotuman chiefly opponents, long-term European residents on the island,

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<sup>187</sup> This is rendered Sorpapel by Reverend Jione Langi in Andrew Thornley and Taug Vulaono (eds.), *Mai Kea Ki Vei: Stories of Methodism in Fiji and Rotuma*, Fiji Methodist Church, Davuilevu, Suva, 1996, p. 90, and Charles Forman (ed), *Island Churches: Challenge and Change*, University of the South Pacific, Suva, 1992, p. 23.

<sup>188</sup> Eason, 1951, p. 53.

<sup>189</sup> The first official census on Rotuma between 1871 and 1901 showed a population of 2,491 and a further count in 1901 stood at 2,061. Previous figures were estimates by various missionaries and ranged from 5000 (Tromelin) in 1828 to 2-3000 in 1841 (Lucatt). Firm statistics are difficult to provide due to the high death rates due to disease and the exodus of young men as crew of foreign vessels. Howard and Rensel, extrapolating from these figures estimate a population figure of 2250 between 1880 and 1901, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Population.html>, accessed 26 March 2008.

<sup>190</sup> Eason, 1951, p. 54.

including trader Charles Howard who had lived on Rotuma for thirty years and married a Rotuman woman, asked for them.

As Wesleyan Christians, the Rotuman's days of relying coconut oil and turmeric rather than clothing to ward off insect bites and disease were at an end. The Wesleyan missionaries strongly encouraged the wearing of clothing and cleanliness. William Fletcher wrote in the *Wesleyan Missionary Notices* in 1865 and 1866 that "the contrast between skins and garments stained with turmeric and the clean shirts and dresses was too marked to be overlooked" and that the "houses of the heathen part of the village ... [were] dirty. Turmeric was on all sides."<sup>191</sup> Indeed so successful were the missionaries in clothing the converts that George Westbrook notes that the war dress during the religious wars of the 1870's was a European suit complete with starched shirt and tie. They kept a link with their own culture by also wearing unique head dresses of basketry and red feathers.<sup>192</sup>



Rotuman head-dress in Otago Museum<sup>193</sup>

Meanwhile in 1861 Monsignor Bataillon took two Futunan catechists, Simon and Albano, to Rotuma to prepare for the return of the Roman Catholic missionaries

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<sup>191</sup> William Fletcher, *Wesleyan Missionary Notices*, Nos. 31 and 35, April 1865, April 1866, quoted in Howard and Kjellgren, 1995.

<sup>192</sup> Julian Dana, *Gods who Die, The Story of Samoa's Greatest Adventurer*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1935, p. 147.

<sup>193</sup> Photograph by Agnes Hannan, Dunedin, December 2006



and the 30 Rotumans who left for Futuna in 1853. Fathers Dzest and Trouillet arrived at Motusa on 26 January 1868. Over the next thirty years the Roman Catholic missionaries operated between Motusa and Faguta.<sup>194</sup> In 1880 Fr. Trouillet acquired some 40 acres of land through donation by converts to the faith and with 20 acres under coconuts producing 10 tons of copra each year the mission was able to support itself.<sup>195</sup> Two churches, St Michel, at Upu in Ituti'u and the Notre Dame des Victoires, at Sumi in Faguta, were established and built over a period of time by the priests with the assistance of their parishioners.<sup>196</sup> By 1893 the church of St Michel at Upu serviced the districts of Ituti'u, Itumuta, and Malhaha and had about 200 converts.

There were still pockets of unconverted Rotumans who continued to believe solely in the traditional spirits and gods. Savlei once having the largest population of Catholics sported only 46 by 1893, the rest being apostate and returned to the old ways. At that time, the village of Tuakoi in the south was entirely Catholic; both Catholics and Wesleyans lived in Feavai, Motusa and Itumuta villages while Losa, Fapufa, Tsolmea (Jolmea), Malsa'a and Salvaka

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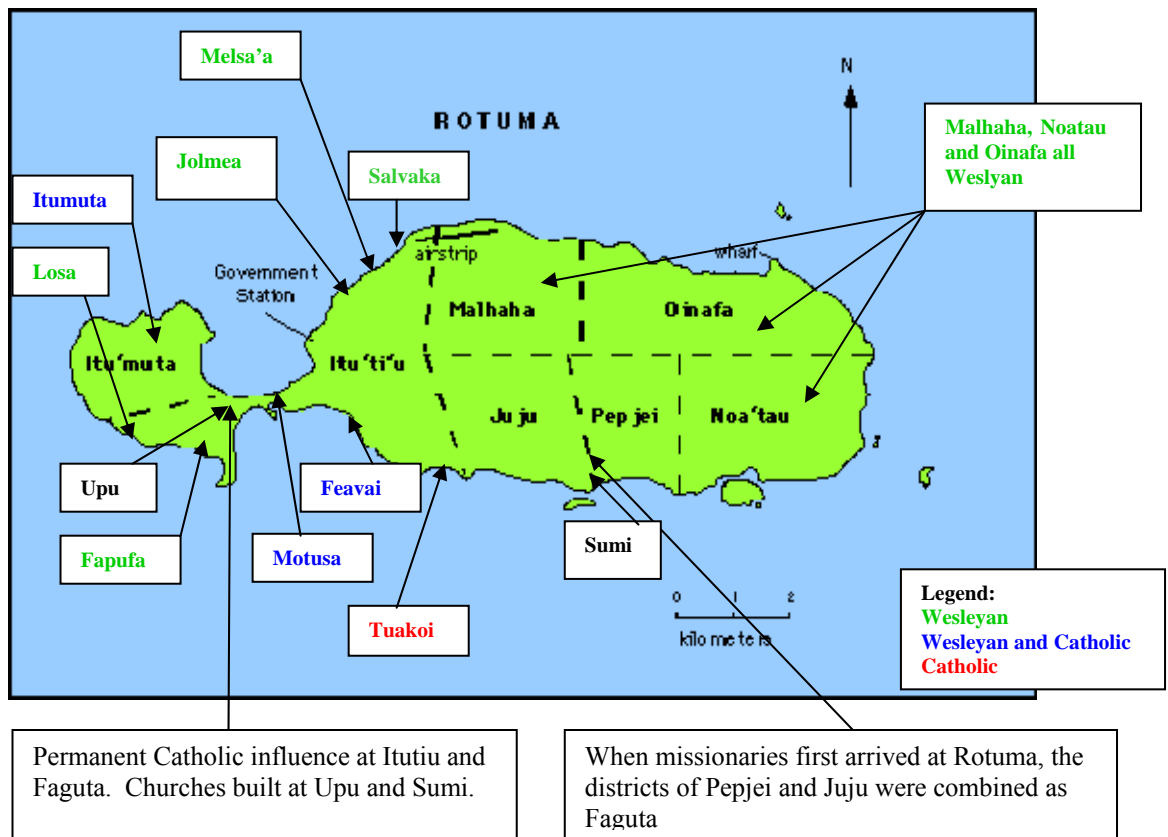
<sup>194</sup> At that time the districts of Juju and Pepjei were combined in one, the district of Faguta on the mid south coast of the island. They were separated after one of the wars to weaken the power of the chief Riamkau. Sumi is now in Juju.

<sup>195</sup> The ramifications for the system of land ownership and usage of the donation of land to the Church by parishioners will be dealt with later in this chapter when it proved of concern to the British administration and caused relationships within *kainaga* to become strained.

<sup>196</sup> Soubeyran, 1949.



Roman Catholic Church of St. Michel at Upu, Motusa, c 1920<sup>197</sup>



Map 4 Religious affiliations and Catholic Churches on Rotuma.<sup>198</sup>

<sup>197</sup> Photograph from Marist Archive in Rome, [http://www.rotuma.net/Images/marist2\\_web/index.html](http://www.rotuma.net/Images/marist2_web/index.html), accessed January 2008.

<sup>198</sup> Map from <http://www.rotuma.net/os/RotumaMap.html>, accessed 28 March 2008.

were completely Wesleyan.<sup>199</sup> In general terms traditional allegiances can be seen in action in these villages, especially given the lack of Catholic influence in the eastern and northern districts.

What was seen as Rotuman ambivalence encouraged early Europeans to comment on the weak nature of Rotuman spiritual belief. The Reverend William Allen, Methodist missionary on Rotuma between 1881 and 1886, said of their beliefs,

*The Rotumans were devil worshippers, and had their priests (apeoiitu) and temples (rimonu). These priests were consulted by the people in times of sickness, war, etc. The people always took presents of food, pigs or mats. After presenting their gifts they remained in the temple and watched the priest, who presently began to shake and tremble. He is then supposed to be under the influence of the devil. The visitors were filled with fear, and waited anxiously to hear what the devil had to say through the mouth of the priest. The priest generally said something to please the visitors, after which the priest and the visitors drank kava together and then separated.*<sup>200</sup>

In attempting to downplay the role of the Rotuman priest Allen reveals the European ethnocentrism of the time as well as his own inability to understand and empathise with the concepts of Rotuman spirituality.

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<sup>199</sup> Soubeyran, 1949.

<sup>200</sup> W. Allen, *Rotuma*, a paper read to the 6<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, held at Brisbane, Queensland in January 1895. This paper is reproduced at <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Allen.html>, accessed March 2007.

Christianity, therefore, added a considerable degree of tension into both the political and social life of the island. The so-called “religious wars” had been going on intermittently since around 1839 when John Williams of the London Missionary Society left Samoan missionaries on the island before sailing on to his death in Erromango in modern day Vanuatu. These wars were comparatively small affairs - Howard describes them perhaps more accurately as skirmishes<sup>201</sup> – but, in a community so tiny, they served to cause considerable disturbance and dislocation. In the first instance they pitted Christians against non-Christians but later tension grew between the two Christian faiths on Rotuma. The last and most unequal in terms of numbers pitted against each other was between the combined Wesleyan districts of Itumuta, Ituti’u, Malhaha, Oinafa and Noatau and Catholic districts of Juju and Pepjei (combined as Faguta). On the surface they appear to be based solely on religious difference and while that is an important ingredient the main reason for the wars rested more properly in the hands of the Rotuman chiefs and the rivalry between Maraf, the Wesleyan chief of Noatau and Riamkau, the Catholic chief of Faguta. This rivalry was a traditional one between the “stranger-chief” who invaded from Tonga (Maraf/Ma’afu) and the indigenous chief (Riamkau). This conception of the origins of the chief holds true for Rotuma – the origin myth has a foreigner (Raho) growing the island from baskets of soil, being challenged by another foreigner (Tokaniu) and in later times a group of Tongans led by Ma’afu invading the island and taking control for a time. The name Maraf is now taken by all the chiefs of Noatau.

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<sup>201</sup> Howard and Kjellgren, 1995, pp. 131-152.

In addition, as Howard has shown in his 1985 paper, there is a traditional opposition between east and west, north and south with the east being the area from which the paramount chief is, in practise, usually drawn. In the 1878 war the divisions were severely exaggerated with the five northern and eastern districts opposing the two southern ones.<sup>202</sup> Riamkau was killed in the battle, not, according to Elisapeti Inia, by the opposing forces but by one of his own people who was extracting retribution for the theft of a pig – that is, behaviour unbecoming a leader of men. Thus the so-called religious wars, between the Roman Catholic and Wesleyan converts were fuelled by disputes between chiefs and within groups about the quality of chiefly leadership.<sup>203</sup> These wars took lives and disrupted life on the island. While some eyewitnesses talk of men coming home when such wars were on, the probability is that many were too far away and communication slow.<sup>204</sup> The last two wars occurred in 1871 and 1878 respectively just prior to the secession of Rotuma to the British crown which lends credence to the belief that there was as much a political element as a religious one in them.

Another background factor that surely exacerbated tensions in the early pre-colonial period was disease. Influenza, measles and other diseases swept Rotuma with the coming of Europeans bringing wholesale suffering to the island and wiping out much of the population. European clothing worn inappropriately

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<sup>202</sup> Alan Howard “History, myth and Polynesian chieftainship: the case of Rotuman kings,” in A. Hooper and J. Huntsman (eds), *Transformations of Polynesian Culture*, Auckland: Polynesian Society, 1985 accessed <http://www.rotuma.net/os/howsel/12kings.html> on 13 January 2006.

<sup>203</sup> Howard and Kjellgren, p. 131-152, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/howsel/22religiouswars.html> accessed 13 January 2006.

<sup>204</sup> Dana, 1935, pp. 147-148.

caused a proliferation of colds and chest infections which neither the Rotumans nor the missionaries could control. Many layers were worn during the day when the temperature and humidity was high and very little at night when the temperature dropped with the sun.<sup>205</sup>

Other events also have had a hand in the tensions that developed on the island over the period of the internecine warfare. The 1860's saw the establishment of several foreign trade firms in Rotuma, among them Henderson and MacFarlane, J.C. Godeffroy and Sons and Bush and Company. These company outposts promulgated an increasing influence from outside the island as foreign staff arrived and foreign goods became available. In some ways, life went on as normal for the Rotuman people – plantations were worked, food harvested, obligations fulfilled and festivals and rites of passage observed. At the same time, as we have seen, there was a good deal of turmoil emerging between the chiefs and their respective districts.

These tensions were caused, in part, by the increased requirement to spend time cutting copra for the overseas trade instead of in food production. They were further increased by the disparity between the numbers of able-bodied men in comparison to dependent women, children and elderly people.<sup>206</sup> The topics that occupied the minds of the chiefs at this time were how to continue to look after their people and culture yet maintain their power while limiting that of the

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<sup>205</sup> Allen, 1895, reproduced at <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Allen.html>, accessed 13 January 2006.

<sup>206</sup> Dana, 1935, pp. 147-148.

outsiders and possible usurpers.<sup>207</sup> It was a vexed and multidimensional question.

Despite this concern, Rotuman knowledge about the world of commerce outside the island continued to grow in this era. Coupled with information brought back by Rotuman sojourners it was a factor in the success of Rotumans overseas, introducing them as it did to new ways of thinking about the world of trade. Once the movement of goods into Rotuma for the consumption of the European missionaries began, the production of coconut oil and later copra for trade from Rotuma to the outside world grew. It brought with it the money economy and employment in the various facets of the trading business. The men of the island cut the copra, produced the coconut oil and then transported it to the ships for sale to the outside world. By 1882 there were five trading firms on the island with 250 tons of copra and 2-5 tons of kava (*Yaqona* or *Piper Methysticum*) exported per annum. Few contemporary accounts from traders exist with information coming piecemeal through other sources.

The story of George Westbrook's sojourn on Rotuma, beginning in 1880, is one of the few available and tells a great deal of the daily life of traders, and consequently of islanders, on the island. At age nineteen, Westbrook left Auckland in 1880 to manage a trading station on Rotuma for the New Zealand firm of Henderson and MacFarlane.

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<sup>207</sup> These ideas are touched on obliquely in Rensel, 1993, pp. 215-240 and Alan Howard, "The Resurgence of Rivalry: Politics in Post-Colonial Rotuma" in *Dialectical Anthropology*, No. 14, 1989, pp. 145-158.

*Rotuma (he said) lifted out of the blue like a dream and the  
“Ryno” put in at Onifa (sic). In an hour I went ashore with my  
horse and stock-in-trade. I felt a new man with that island  
beach under my feet; it was like coming home.*<sup>208</sup>

For Westbrook, who lived most of his adult life in the Pacific Islands, particularly Samoa, Rotuma was a welcoming and friendly place. He wrote that there were several trading stations on the island; one for a German firm in Fiji, another large German firm, Deutsche Handelsund Plantagen Gesellschaft der Sudseeinseln zu Hamburg (DHPG), previously J.C. Godeffroy and Sons, of Samoa, and Bush and Company of Levuka as well as his own.<sup>209</sup> These jockeyed for their share of the copra available. The ability to earn a good income from cutting copra enabled Rotumans to participate in the growing consumer market on the island. That this is so is indicated by the fact that Rotuman copra cutters took their opportunity to make money so seriously that there are known instances where, when copra prices rose, the Chiefs, and later the Rotuma Council, were forced to ban the cutting of copra in favour of work in the plantations to ensure that sufficient food was produced to feed the island population.<sup>210</sup>

While no trade inventories specifically relating to Rotuma were unearthed, A.G. Flude a New Zealand historian, researcher and author, noted that a Brisbane newspaper article of 1887 held that traders were making quite a profit from the

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<sup>208</sup> Dana, 1935, pp. 136-138.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 148-149; Spoehr, 1963, pp. 46-47.

<sup>210</sup> Rensel, 1993, pp. 215-240. Few statistics were available for trade in the years before 1881 when Rotuma seceded to Britain.



goods they sold in the Pacific islands – six foot lengths of cotton prints purchased at six pence were sold for two shillings; white shirts purchased for fifteen shillings a dozen were sold for six shillings each; sewing needles bought for two shilling for 144 items were sold for a penny apiece; sewing cotton bought at a cost of one shilling for a 126 foot reel was sold at the rate of six pence per six feet and tobacco purchased at a cost of two shillings a pound was sold for approximately double that amount.<sup>211</sup> It was in the traders' interest to ensure that the indigenes joined the burgeoning consumer market not only to boost their own profits from copra but also to ensure that the payments given for it returned to the companies via purchase of imported items which in turn brought about changes in the traditional culture and economy. The money economy had arrived at Rotuma.

The advent of the first Europeans into the economy of Rotuma spelled the beginning of the decline of chiefly economic power and ultimately a loss of some of the respect due to the chiefs. Over the following century all Rotumans became well used to operating within a money economy, many were increasingly able to speak English and to gain a western style education. This had the effect of changing some aspects of the Rotuman culture, for example the relationships between the chiefs and the people and the economic and political power base of the chiefs but at the same time it boosted the ability of the Rotumans to operate effectively in western societies.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> A.G. Flude, "William (George) Ellis - A Profile: South Pacific Trader" at <http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~tonyf/ellis/ellis.html> accessed November 2005.

<sup>212</sup> This loss of respect is commented on frequently by older Rotumans today, for example Major General Jioje Konrote (Canberra 2003) remarked, in conversations with the author, on the need for the people to pay more respect to the chiefs as did Sosefo Inoke (Townsville 2002) and Visanti

Material culture scarcely changed until the advent of the traders and missionaries. Over this period however the influx of Europeans in larger numbers than at any one time before as well as the rise of the money economy introduced a process of change that continues to the present day. Housing is an example of the wider process. Rotuman houses at first contact consisted of wooden poles on which sat the roof frame. Roofs were thatched with sago palm fronds and the low walls were of plaited palm leaves. The doorways and walls were very low to minimise damage from wind and hurricanes and the dirt floors were covered in mats.<sup>213</sup>

European values regarding housing gradually began to take hold. Mr Emery, mate of the *Toward Castle* who settled in Rotuma in 1829 “built a wooden house on the offshore island of Uea. He had English furniture, cooking utensils, and pictures on the walls. Emery married a Rotuman woman, and lived on Uea with about sixty other Rotumans who reportedly treated him as their chief.”<sup>214</sup> By the early 1850s another whaler noted “that brightly coloured curtains were used to screen sleeping areas of a large house he and his mates visited.”<sup>215</sup> In 1873 the missionary Reverend Osborne wrote of his predecessor,

*Before Wm. Fletcher's last appointment to the island, there was a comparatively large number of Christians, but they were necessarily*

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Makrava (Rotuma 2003). They felt the main reason for this was the increasing numbers of Rotumans, diasporic and living on the island, who were wealthier and better educated than the chiefs.

<sup>213</sup> Jan Rensel “From Thatch to Cement: Social Implications of Housing Change on Rotuma,” in Jan Rensel and Margaret Rodman (eds), *Home in the Islands: Housing and Social Change in the Pacific*, University of Hawai’I Press, Honolulu, 1997, pp. 32-33.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52, fn.5.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*

*very ignorant ... their houses were the meanest hovels imaginable, and they themselves were unutterably filthy ... Through the instrumentality of Mr. & Mrs. Fletcher, and several really superior Fijian teachers, the most gratifying changes were effected. Hundreds lotu'd [entered the church] ... then they purchased soap ... then they grew dissatisfied with their hovels, and commenced the erection of substantial and neat houses. So rapidly did they advance, that when I was appointed to take Mr. Fletcher's place, nearly four years ago, I found that there was a membership of upwards of 450, & a large attendance at the schools. There were also scores of well-constructed wattle and lime houses neatly whitewashed, having doors and glazed windows.*<sup>216</sup>

It is unclear from the record how soon western style housing became dominant, but between the beachcombers who settled permanently, the “civilising” mission of Christianity, particularly that of the Methodist Mission, the influence of European traders and the incidence of cyclones that left the island bereft of traditional building materials, the mode of building construction changed over the century after Rotuma’s first encounter with Europe. The plaited walls were first limed over, then this construction method made way for local stone and lime plaster and, most recently, brick. Thatch roofs became corrugated iron as did some walls. Many traditional houses remained although when Hurricane Bebe raged through the island in 1972 it destroyed what was left of the traditional

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<sup>216</sup> Reverend Osborne, Methodist Church of Australasia, Letters Received, March 1, 1873

housing<sup>217</sup> and completed the task the missionaries had set themselves some 100 years before.

It was not just the exterior of houses that changed. The interiors which previously contained little more than “mats, carved bare wood pillows, a few clubs, spears and drinking vessels of coconut shells”<sup>218</sup> as well as sinnet nets to hold perishables and other items out of the way of children and foraging wildlife<sup>219</sup> came to sport wooden doors and windows of European construction and cloth curtains.<sup>220</sup>

Jan Rensel refers to the importance of housing and its construction on the way of life in Rotuma,

*For centuries, houses – their construction, maintenance, use and even their location – have been central to the social reproduction of kin groups (kainaga) on the island of Rotuma. .... Rotuman houses stand as tangible reminders and powerful symbols, embodying the responsibilities and relationships of all who participate in their construction, repair and use.*<sup>221</sup>

The change in housing construction from traditional single room dwellings built in the traditional style and of traditional materials to more modern multi-roomed structures made of stone and brick affected Rotuman social and cultural life in a

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<sup>217</sup> Rensel, 1997, p. 40.

<sup>218</sup> J.W. Osborne *Log of the 'Emerald,'* 1834-35, PMB 223, p.151

<sup>219</sup> G.N. Cheever, *Log of the ship 'Emerald'* 1834-35, PMB 223

<sup>220</sup> Rensel, 1997, p. 39.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

number of ways. With commercialisation of the Rotuman economy and the change of housing style, housing construction became skilled labour – work done in exchange for money - consequently losing much of its reciprocal nature. A more ‘European’ way of thinking about domestic life too was apparent, for example in the abandonment of the single men’s quarters where unmarried men and boys had previously lived separately from their sisters. This is not to say that social and cultural mores were abandoned wholesale because that is not the case as will be shown later in this thesis. The housing example is important in pointing up the engagement of Rotumans with change and their interest in using or adapting new ideas and technologies. This in turn allowed an easier transition out of the island to Fiji and thence into the wider world and the diaspora.

As the non-missionary European community on the island grew, relationships were forged with locals that to some extent, may have weakened the conservative nature of some sectors of the Rotuman community and further enabled the islanders to accept the ways of others and to turn them to their own use. The European community on the island at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a relatively open one. Some indigenous women, for example the Fijian “Kadavu Mary” and a few Rotumans, formed semi-permanent relationships with the single traders just as they had with the beachcombers. These women along with some of the less conservative chiefs formed a link between the traditional Rotuman community and the foreigners.

The European community enjoyed a lively social life along with the hardships and hazards of living in a remote outpost like Rotuma. This is alluded to particularly by Westbrook in his portrait of his year there. He relates one story of a party held to celebrate the birthday of one of the traders, Waldemar Deinstmann. The guests included Sir Hugh Hastings Romilly, on the island to negotiate the terms of annexation by Great Britain, W.L. Allardyce, later to be Resident Commissioner on Rotuma and later still Governor of Tasmania – “fourteen white men with wives and housekeepers, a few native girls known to be good dancers, and a select number of the less sedate chiefs.”<sup>222</sup> Alcohol flowed and skits, still a popular pastime on Rotuma, were performed poking fun at the conduct of the late religious wars – in particular the ministers who were played by appropriately clad locals gesturing impolitely at one another. Typically European entertainment – one guest played the accordion accompanied by another on the fiddle – ensued and the party ended with all guests slightly drunk and flour and lamp black being thrown liberally about in an attempt to change Europeans into natives and vice versa.<sup>223</sup>

The more receptive chiefs and members of the Rotuman community, as mediators in the Rotuman/Trader relationship saw both an economic or political advantage in maintaining relationships with the traders as well as a social one. At any rate it can be seen that part of the Rotuman community appeared to mix freely with the European sojourners and this would have contributed to a cross fertilisation of ideas that became increasingly important from then on as Rotumans engaged

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<sup>222</sup> Dana, 1935, p. 153

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

more with the world beyond their shores. Rotuman espousal of the ways of Christianity and the money economy also had significant import for the future. Their engagement with a Christian god and the adoption of European modes of trade and their response to growing markets in food, coconut oil and copra began to engender change and a growing ability to adapt to ways outside the island. However all of this was situated firmly within the context of Rotuman values and mores – the *kainaga* (kin-group), sharing and exchange and the authority of the Chiefs. The past continued to inform the present.

The coming of Europeans to the island prepared the Rotumans for the future. The lessons were at times hard but fortuitous in that they taught Rotumans not to be overwhelmed by westerners and reinforced the need felt by all Indigenous peoples to take advantage of circumstances and situations which allowed them to improve their lives. Most of the beachcombers had little permanent influence beyond, perhaps, the siring of children before they died or were killed by one of their own in the many drunken brawls that erupted between them at regular intervals on the island. Some, like Bill Ring remained into old age, and introduced and reinforced European ideas about trade through his coconut oil enterprise. Coconut oil was the primary cash crop until the 1870's when copra took over as trade with European companies increased. Many beachcombers, including Ring, William John, Emery and others acted as go-betweens for Rotuman chiefs and traders. This role gave them a degree of power in their adopted land and a valuable skill in the eyes of the people whose land sheltered them. Their skills and familiarity with western cultural ways were passed to their

children as well as others on the island thus broadening the ability of Rotumans generally to thrive in diaspora generations before these skills were needed to survive and thrive in western dominated societies.

Rotuman women married both indigenous and European men who arrived on Rotuma and, over the years a large group of part-Rotuman descendants formed. These children were accepted as being full Rotuman – and today Rotumans believe that anyone who can show even a scant trace of Rotuman blood should be regarded as having all the rights of others in similar positions in the family of origin. The cosmopolitan nature of Rotuman society thus allows an easy transition between the island, Fiji proper and the diaspora.

The traders left a marked legacy in terms of the Rotuman economy and material culture. Trade assisted in the move from traditional food consumption towards an increased use of imported foods such as flour, rice, sugar, canned fish and so on. It provided the avenue for the importation of European styles of clothing and implements. They also provided an opportunity and, to a lesser extent, an example of the opportunities available from trade. This encouraged the islanders to trade for themselves, especially when the cost of goods proved expensive and the exploitation of their labour and raw materials became evident. The downside of this was that, at least for a time, it created divisions in Rotuman society as



Rotumans working for the trading companies were pitted against those running cooperatives.<sup>224</sup>

By the time this reference point moved to the rear horizon Rotumans had moved forward into the world of the modern Pacific. They had educational opportunities through the association with Britain and Fiji, work opportunities off the island in Fiji and elsewhere. They had experienced the satisfaction of beating the traders at their own game, although they created some social divisions in doing so, and had absorbed the skills to run a business if not the skills to deny credit to their relatives. Despite the changes to their economy, they still worked their food gardens, still made their fine mats and continued to value the cultural more of reciprocity. In short, they had journeyed forward but were still in touch with their past.

## **PART I**

### **BEING ROTUMAN**

**-4-**

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#### **FOREIGN GOVERNMENT AND DIASPORIC BEGINNINGS**

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*I think it would be an ideal situation if the Rotuma Division had as much autonomy as possible to serve Rotuman communities in Rotuma, Fiji and abroad. I believe this would help to consolidate the now international Rotuman community because the Church is a natural focus of activities; it*

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<sup>224</sup> See Howard, 1966 and 1994 for a discussion on the economic aspects of the period and the effect on Rotuman culture.

*will serve well to keep our identity as a people, the language and customs everywhere there are clusters of Rotuman families. I hope you share this dream with me.*<sup>225</sup>

The European visitors from whom the Rotumans borrowed the most in terms of knowledge and links to the world outside the Pacific were the missionaries and, later, the British colonial administrators. This waypoint on their journey saw Rotumans lose some of their autonomy at home but in return they were introduced to a moral, spiritual and political organisational system which further smoothed the path from the island into the diaspora and the modern world.

As already noted, missionary influence was by no means dominant by the time Rotuma came under British rule. The introduction of Christianity to Rotuma began with political manoeuvring on the part of the Rotuman chiefs and sparked a series of opportunities for the Rotuman people both at home and abroad. Traditional patterns continued to dominate political life. Until the nineteenth century the Rotuman social structure consisted of a tripartite pan-Rotuman polity underwritten by an autonomous layer of local district chieftainships. This structure supported the cultural, political, economic and spiritual life of Rotuma. The district chiefs lived in a state of constant political manoeuvring as power gravitated from one district to another. The chiefs perceived the advent of Europeans into the Pacific, and with them the Christian missionaries, as opportunities for increased power and status<sup>226</sup> through the exotic European

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<sup>225</sup> Reverend Jione Langi, discussing the effect of Rotuma's Methodist history on the present church, at the Fiji Methodist History Conference, Davuilevi, October 1995 in Andrew Thornley and Tauga Vulaono (eds), *Mai Kea Ki Vei? Stories of Methodism in Fiji and Rotuma*, Fiji Methodist Church, Suva, 1996, p. 93

<sup>226</sup> Commissioner Charles Mitchell to Governor of Fiji, Outward Letters, 26 January 1882, Fiji National Archive, Suva.

goods they brought with them and also the outside trade and influence that they attracted.<sup>227</sup> Ultimately the political power of the chiefs would be brought under the British Crown and the old gods would be subordinated to and moderated, but never quite destroyed, by the new all powerful Christian God.

The missionaries, on the other hand, had a strong vocation that required them to bring the message of Christianity to the people of the Pacific Islands. They were also bent on a civilising mission to ensure that the “heathen” natives adopted appropriate behaviour both in dress and in habit. Conversion of the heathen was not their only aim, however, as the age-old battle for supremacy between the Christian churches, in particular the Protestant and Roman Catholic ones, swung into action with both jockeying for position in the stakes for the largest congregation. Missionaries in Rotuma, like others elsewhere, provided a link, however tenuous it might have been at times, to their own political masters and had little hesitation in calling on them when other foreign powers threatened their work.<sup>228</sup> This holds true for both the Roman Catholic and the Wesleyan missionaries on Rotuma in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

When the jockeying became incitement to internecine warfare it brought the long-standing political enmities between the British and the French governments into play. The London Missionary Society (LMS) and Wesleyan missionaries were British while the Roman Catholics were French. They traded insults freely,

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<sup>227</sup> Alan Howard, “The Rotuman District Chief: A Study in Changing Patterns of Authority” in *Journal of Pacific History* 1, 1966, p. 63-78

<sup>228</sup> Roger C. Thompson, *Australian Imperialism in the Pacific: The Expansionist Era 1820-1920*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1980, p. 10.

adding an often less than Christian demeanour to the so-called civilising mission. From time to time the bickering and competition reached a crescendo involving warfare amongst the converts, supported and encouraged by the foreign missionaries who then complained about each other to their respective governments. Consequently at various times each government sent a warship into the area in an endeavour to protect their citizens against their rivals and to enforce fines for a variety of misdemeanours upon the people of Rotuma.

In time the island's chiefs, with the help of the Wesleyan missionaries, would steer it into annexation by Britain through a combination of longstanding internal tensions and power-plays fuelled by Christian factionalism. Annexation brought with it the British Resident Commissioner (now District Officer) who was charged with the administration of the island in conjunction with the Rotuman Council of Chiefs. In this way the British method of government and control provided the Rotuman chiefs and their people with examples of administration that are largely still in operation in Fiji today. This waypoint engendered familiarity with the British style of government and the connection with Fiji through annexation to the British Crown gave Rotumans an understanding of European polity and the ability to move freely between the two entities.

The pre-European geographical division of power noted in an earlier chapter would also appear to be replicated in the distribution of Roman Catholics and Wesleyans in that it could be implied that the Wesleyans were associated with the more powerful chiefs given their preponderance in the northern and eastern

districts while the Catholics prospered mainly in the west and south. Following this line of reasoning it could be argued that the Wesleyans prospered due to their physical location in the east and north of the island while the Roman Catholic group did less well being located as they were in the south and to a lesser extent in the west. The majority of Catholics were also located in the district of Riamkau the chief of Faguta, whose loyalties, because of his rivalry with Maraf of Noatau, were in constant flux. His political and religious alliances shifted depending on where he perceived his best advantage lay.<sup>229</sup> Thus the Catholic position was rarely secure, a fact made obvious by their resort to the threat of French warships and the “Treaty of Hamelin” in which Protestant chiefs were fined for persecuting the Catholics and warned against restricting their freedom of worship in the future.<sup>230</sup>

In their dealings with the missionaries, writes contemporary Rotuman John Tanu referring to the past, Rotumans were particularly interested in status and political power in the first instance. Thus Tokaniaua of Oinafa challenged the Paramount Chief Riamkau of Faguta by ignoring his order not to host the Samoan teachers in 1839 and when Chief Maraf protected the Samoan teachers in 1840 and the Catholic priests in 1847 it was in the interests of raising his status.<sup>231</sup> This accords with the reaction to the initial missionary endeavour elsewhere in western Polynesia where material wealth was strongly linked to the gods’ favour and the

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<sup>229</sup> L. Soubeyran, “Autre details sur le retour des Missionnaires a Rotuma, 1868” in *Historical accounts of Rotuma*, PMB Reel 159.

<sup>230</sup> Fr Joseph Trouillet, SM, “Histoire de Rotuma,” in *Historical Accounts of Rotuma by Various Authors*, p.6, PMB 159.

<sup>231</sup> John Tanu, “Mission Influence on Secular Life,” in Chris Plant (ed) *Rotuma: Hanua Pumue*, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, Suva, 1991, p. 16.

attainment of status. As Wesleyan missionary John Thomas wrote of the Tongan chiefs, for example:

*Most of the chiefs upon this island [Tongatapu] will say, how glad they would be to have missionaries; but the truth is they only want our property, ... neither do they wish to change their religion; but whatever chief first receives a missionary or an Englishman, all the property he has is considered as belonging to that chief.*<sup>232</sup>

Other accounts of the reasons for the Rotuman chiefs asking for missionaries come from the LMS records, which note that LMS missionaries A.W. Murray and G. Turner were told in 1845 that the island chiefs wanted European missionaries and that they were concerned about the “French expansionist schemes that had begun with the annexation of Tahiti.”<sup>233</sup> A good reason, no doubt, to maintain an anti-Catholic stance – the priests of that faith being French!

John Thomas’ understanding that it was chiefly status that drove the acceptance of Christianity also goes some way towards explaining why the Rotuman chiefs voiced a preference for European or white missionaries and the poor success rates for the Samoan teachers left by John Williams in 1839. Other reasons given for lack of progress are the inability of the Samoan or Tongan teachers left by the Protestant missions to learn the Rotuman language<sup>234</sup> and still others credit the lack of early progress in conversion to the antipathy towards missionaries of

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<sup>232</sup> John Thomas, quoted in S. Lātūkefu, “The Wesleyan Mission,” in Noel Rutherford (ed), *The Friendly Islands: A History of Tonga*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1977, p 116.

<sup>233</sup> Wood, 1978, pp. 119-120.

<sup>234</sup> Wood, 1978, p. 118.

European beachcombers living on the island who discouraged the people from taking up Christianity.<sup>235</sup>

The European *'Aitmana* arrived in the Pacific in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century as both the Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches expanded their proselytising efforts in a bid to gather as many converts as possible. Once the missionary movement into the western Pacific began in earnest the Rotuman chiefs consistently asked for missionaries to be left, in particular white ones. They did this even although, as outlined in previous pages of this work, they and their people continued to follow their own cultural/spiritual path for some time after the Christian proselytization began. Other studies of Pacific Islander conversion to Christianity have shown the linkage between material considerations – the desire for literacy, new technology and consumer goods – and the islander belief that the European god was the pathway to their acquisition.<sup>236</sup>



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<sup>235</sup> Wood, 1978: 116.

<sup>236</sup> Donald Denoon (ed), *Cambridge History of Pacific Islanders*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, pp. 141,142, 165, and 203; K.R. Howe, *Where the Waves Fall*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1984, pp. 144, 145, 172, 186-87, 226, 238, 267, 272 and 309.

Sr Marie Pierre and some young women at Faguta c1920<sup>237</sup>

Photographs taken by A.M. Hocart in 1913<sup>238</sup> show some of the effects of missionary efforts at clothing the people, with women dressed almost exclusively in “Mother Hubbard” style dresses and men in an assortment of shirts and trousers and lavalavas. However they continued to dress more or less traditionally when dancing the *tautoga* wearing skirts of *ti* leaves over their lavalavas.

Perhaps the most important outcome of the early missionary period which included the “religious wars” discussed in the last chapter was that the Council of Chiefs met and determined to stop the fighting by requesting annexation by the British Government. This solution has been, historically speaking, commonly used in the Pacific. Previous Pacific rulers had used both Christianity and foreign annexation to unify their nations, gain power or bring peace and prosperity. For example Pomare II of Tahiti reunified his domain in the name of Jehovah in 1815<sup>239</sup> and, even closer in time and space, Fiji had been offered for cession on a number of occasions to both Great Britain and the United States between 1858 and 1874. Cakobau, chief of Bau, offered 200,000 acres of land to the British Crown in 1858 in a bid to gain control of all of the Fiji Islands and settle a large fine he had incurred with America over the death of an American citizen in

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<sup>237</sup> Photograph from Marist Archive, Rome, [http://www.rotuma.net/Images/marist2\\_web/index.html](http://www.rotuma.net/Images/marist2_web/index.html), accessed January 2008.

<sup>238</sup> See <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Photos.html> for examples.

<sup>239</sup> Howe, 1984, pp. 142-44.



Yasawa. Another group preferred the Americans and although those offers were rejected a later unconditional offer to Great Britain in 1874 was accepted.<sup>240</sup>

At the same time it is important to be aware of the British intentions in the Pacific in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century because it was these intentions, along with those of the ruling elite in Rotuma, which ordered the political, economic and spiritual future of the Rotuman people. Britain was originally reluctant to annex Fiji in 1858 because of the substantial and immediate cost that would be required. At the same time it was not regarded as crucial to British safety in the Pacific, nor was it considered capable of supplying sufficient primary goods to offset costs of government or of offering a particularly convenient stopping point on the trade route between Sydney and Panama. Almost twenty years later, however, a sizeable influx of British settlers, mostly from Australia, which had suffered an economic depression in the late 1860's, saw a change in Britain's attitude.<sup>241</sup>

When the Rotuman chiefs decided to offer Rotuma for cession to the British Crown, their use of the missionary influence was strong – the Wesleyan missionaries were British and the majority of Rotumans were now Wesleyan. On previous occasions when the French priests felt threatened they called in a French warship and in one instance had a treaty drawn up, the "Treaty of Hamelin."<sup>242</sup>

Given the competition between the British and the French it is not surprising that

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<sup>240</sup> RA Derrick, *A History of Fiji*, Government Press, Suva, 1950 (reprinted 2001), pp. 139, 140, 152, 222 and 248.

<sup>241</sup> Derrick, 1950, pp. 147, 184.

<sup>242</sup> W.E. Russell, "Rotuma: Its History, Traditions and Customs," *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Vol. 51, No.4, 1942, pp. 229-255, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Russell.htm>, accessed January 2006.

in June 1878 chief Maraf, a Wesleyan, on behalf of the majority of chiefs of Rotuma, would take the advice of his pastor and send a petition for cession of the island to the Acting Governor of the Colony of Fiji, William Des Voeux, for transmission to Queen Victoria.

In 1879, shortly after the signing of the petition for annexation by Britain, Maraf, as paramount chief, attempted to gain some advantage either for himself or for the island as a whole by granting Mr. Weber, a representative of the trading company Messrs. J.C. Godeffroy and Company of Samoa, trading privileges on the island for a sum of money without the consent of the other chiefs. Weber was also the German Consul and according to Eason the other chiefs were concerned about having yet another foreign power involved in the politics of the island. This, combined with a rumoured approach by Rotuman Catholics to ask for annexation by France, no doubt contributed to the eagerness of the majority of the chiefs, two of whom were Maraf's Protestant appointees in Catholic districts, to seek annexation by Britain.<sup>243</sup>

Des Voeux sent the *HMS Conflict* to Rotuma, charging her Commanding Officer, Lieutenant G. Bower, with instructions to report on the conditions on the island and to encourage the Rotuman people to remain peaceful until a reply could be gained from Her Majesty Queen Victoria regarding their petition. While in Rotuma the chiefs informed him of their concern that a visit by the German consul, Mr Weber, in a German man-of-war, to oversee the erection of trading

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<sup>243</sup> Eason, 1951, p. 62.

stations on the island would result in their punishment for offending Godeffroy. Bower immediately called a meeting of all the chiefs and drew up a memorandum stating that all chiefs recognized Maraf as head chief and agreed that Maraf could only make decisions with the consent of all chiefs together. The agreement held that there would be a sustained peace until Queen Victoria's response was obtained or one year elapsed whichever came first. When Bower returned he reported on the island as a whole: he wrote about the richness of the soil, the possible revenue to be gained from annexation of the island and its suitability as a trading hub.<sup>244</sup>

Queen Victoria gave her consent. With the Annexation of Rotuma to Britain in 1881, to be administered as part of the Colony of Fiji, peace was ensured and so was a degree of "progress," in other words an introduction to the industrial capitalist world espoused by the British government. Soon after the initial request by the Rotuman chiefs was received by the British Governor in Fiji an interim Government Resident, Arthur Gordon, nephew of the Governor Sir Arthur Gordon, was dispatched to take control and set up an interim administration.<sup>245</sup>

The way the Rotumans perceived this period of their history and the agency they had in it is explained by Iveni Fatiaki in 1995 in the form of a story, told to the Methodist Church History Conference at Davuilevu Theological College in Suva, about the coming of Christianity to Rotuma:

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<sup>244</sup> Eason, 1951, p.64.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, p.62

*We call the pre-Christian period the period of conception, a time when people began to have a consciousness of some super-power beyond the globe. The name Rotuma was derived from a Fijian word – Votumai – meaning “appearing”. It was given by Buloniwasa in Fiji when the island first appeared to her entreaty. She was in fact pregnant by her brother and she was chased from her own land in Vuda, Fiji. Her brothers took her to somewhere in the world and then to Rotuma. She landed on the west-north-west side of the island and the people there knew she had come from afar. The people of this village looked after her, loved her and treated her in a very Christian way even though Christianity was not known. This village is called Itumutu.*

*Later after the Votumai period a remarkable event happened. This was the murdering in a political way of the two chiefly brothers – Gagaj Kuna’ and Gagaj Garagsau, the two sons of the widow named Firoa, the great-grandmother of Jione Langi and Deaconess Olivia. I’m talking about the time before the coming of Christianity. In her grief and unbearable pain she chanted and I quote “Saga la fuapafaroala surum Aitu manman”, “open up thy thatched blue and be present the Mana God.” The consciousness and awareness of someone greater than the power in the island was there in the mind of the people. This is why this is a period of conception. Looking towards the blue – the horizon – during this period of grief, the woman knew there must be some power beyond. Today we learn about theology and we know about “transcendent’ and ‘immanent’.*

*These people knew at the time that something such as this was with them.*

*And so the widow rested in peace. When missionaries landed on 12 November 1839 on the shores of Oinafa, Rotuma, it was the fulfilment of the widow's dream. To this lady it was nothing less than the Almighty God. So we in Rotuma, standing on the brink of time, we salute the London Missionary Society and the Wesleyan Missionary Society and the Samoan, Tongan, Fijian, Rarotongan, Maori and European missionaries who helped to make Rotuma what it is today.<sup>246</sup>*

What does this story by Iveni Fatiaki tell us? Firstly it is tailored to an already Christian audience and would appear to explain the acceptance of Christianity in Rotuma on the basis that its coming was a foregone conclusion. Secondly it links the past and the prayer by Firoa to the family of two well-known modern Rotuman church officials – the Reverend Jione Langi and Deaconess Olivia. Thirdly it credits ancient Rotuman culture with values and morals of a Christian nature shown by the welcome given to a Fijian woman pregnant by her brother. The latter story itself mirrors another, that of Hanitema'us, except in that Hanitema'us and her brothers are on their way to Fiji not from Fiji and Hanitema'us becomes the first woman on Rotuma and symbolic of the original Rotumans. This then, is a modern explanation couched in terms of an ancient myth legitimising the present through the past.

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<sup>246</sup> Iveni Fatiaki, "Votumai (Rotuma)" in Thornley and Vulaono, 1996, p. 272.

That they were sitting astride an international political “fault line” could hardly have escaped the notice of the Rotuman chiefs. The island’s association with nationals of both Britain and France drew the island into a minor power struggle between the two European powers both intent on securing their place in the Pacific and boosting their economies through colonial dominance in the area. By the late nineteenth century European traders were entrenched in most of the islands of the Pacific, trading for copra and other island produce, supplying the missionaries and islanders with western goods and employing island people either directly or on their own account supplying the raw export materials. As shown in the last chapter, trading companies from Britain, Germany, New Zealand and Australia were all present on Rotuma in the last twenty years of the century.

One factor assisting the choice between Catholic and Protestant variations of Christianity was their relative compatibility with indigenous perspectives and aspirations. A point made by Raeburn Lange regarding Wesleyan lack of class discrimination is pertinent to the understanding of the popularity of the Wesleyan brand of Christianity in Rotuma.<sup>247</sup> As this thesis notes in later chapters, Rotumans are, generally speaking, good and willing leaders; they enjoy responsibility and the chiefly structure is not as strong as in, for example, Samoa or Tonga. In the Wesleyan church both chiefs and their people could, with sufficient training, take an equally active and responsible role in the evangelical

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<sup>247</sup> Raeburn Lange, *Island Ministers: Indigenous Leadership in Nineteenth Century Pacific Islands Christianity*, Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury and Pandanus Books, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, ANU, Canberra, 2005, p. 131.

mission.<sup>248</sup> It is possible that, as Howard has written, “by accepting Christianity, and the religious dominance of the missionaries, the chiefs set the stage for narrowing the scope, if not the degree, of their authority.”<sup>249</sup> The growth of Wesleyanism supported by the majority of the north and east chiefs may indeed have caused the dissolution of the pan-Rotuman political structure beginning with the abolition of the *sau*, the spiritual leader on the island. The missionaries thus gained the intermediary position between the people and the gods. Due to their smallness in number and their position on the island Catholicism was not in a position to share the power wielded by the Wesleyans and indeed may have been seen as the religion of the lesser districts – much as it was in Tonga and in other places around the world.<sup>250</sup>

Thus Christianity provided a link to the greater world, opening up opportunities that may otherwise have been a good deal longer coming. The Christian influence which supported cleanliness, godliness and the clothing of bare limbs was accepted by the Rotuman people in return for what they perceived as a better life.

However, belief in animistic and ancestral spirits continued and the important aspects of their traditional culture remained – the kinship, reciprocity and the ownership and closeness to the land – in what Sahlins called a “structure of

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<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>249</sup> Alan Howard, 1966, pp. 63-78.

<sup>250</sup> Hugh Laracy, “The Catholic Mission,” in Noel Rutherford (ed), *Friendly Islands: A History of Tonga*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1977, p. 148.

conjuncture”<sup>251</sup> where some of the old ways changed through the adoption of new ways which were fitted into an acceptable social whole. Christianity accustomed the Rotumans to the ways of the western world – dress codes, manners, education – and the Rotuman people seized the day and took their destiny to the next waypoint, annexation by Great Britain.

Cession did not please everyone. One informant in the Torres Strait said that his grandfather had left Rotuma because he did not agree with the chiefs on the matter of cession.<sup>252</sup> However, after the cession of the island to Britain in 1881 the opportunity for movement between Fiji and Rotuma was made easier and the urge to travel and live away from the island for a time was offset by the ease of return as increased colonial shipping included Rotuma in the regular services in the area. In the past Rotumans had traded food for desirables such as whale’s teeth and iron tools. Now copra became the principal item of trade that brought cash into the Rotuman economy and satisfied the growing local market for goods such as cloth, foodstuffs and other western items brought in from abroad.

Missionaries were often linked to other European interests. Jean and John Comaroff have called the Protestant evangelists in Africa the “harbingers of industrial capitalism,”<sup>253</sup> and Ralph Mansfield, editor of the *Sydney Gazette* in 1829, posited a link between missionaries and traders, writing:

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<sup>251</sup> Sahllins developed this thesis in *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Islands Kingdom*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1981

<sup>252</sup> K. Kiwat, interviewed Erub Island, January 2004.

<sup>253</sup> Jean and John Comaroff, *Of revolution and revelation: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa, Volume One*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991, pp. 8-9,



*The Pacific's 'unnumbered islands, teeming with population, ... fertile soil and rich in useful productions,' were being prepared for the day when they 'will become the West Indies of Australia' by the missionaries who were civilising their inhabitants. ... the Missionary [he noted] is the merchant's Pioneer.*<sup>254</sup>

It could be said that the missionary was not only the merchant's pioneer but also that of the colonial empire builders since it was through missionaries that influence was placed on Rotumans to cede their island to Great Britain.

Arthur Gordon took over the administration of Rotuma in 1879 in preparation for cession, and by February the following year he had negotiated with the chiefs a body of laws relating to murder, assault, theft, slander and liquor use. Laws relating to adultery and fornication were left as they had been under the influence of the missionaries; however innocent amusements such as singing, dancing and wearing flowers were again allowed, a measure that upset the Wesleyan missionaries but was accepted by the Roman Catholic fathers.<sup>255</sup> A police force was organised to ensure that the laws were adhered to, with one man to be stationed in Itu'ti'u and one in Noatau.<sup>256</sup>

The initial Offer of Cession was couched in terms of Queen Victoria "taking" Rotuma. This was an offer that, according to Gordon was "insufficient." The

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also Vanessa Smith, *Literary Culture and the Pacific: Nineteenth Century Textual Encounter*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 53.

<sup>254</sup> Quoted in Roger C. Thompson, *Australian Imperialism in the Pacific: The Expansionist Era 1820-1920*, Melbourne University Press Melbourne, 1980, p. 10.

<sup>255</sup> Arthur Gordon to High Commissioner for the Western Pacific, Resident Commissioner Letterbook 1879-1881, Report No. 9, 1880, p. 39, National Archive of Fiji, Suva.

<sup>256</sup> H.H. Romilly to High Commissioner for the Western Pacific, Resident Commissioner Letterbook 1879-1881, Enclosure to Report No. 21, 1880, p. 58, National Archive of Fiji, Suva.

Chiefs were advised to reword the offer in terms of “giving” themselves and the island to the British monarch. The Queen would then make a decision on whether she would “grant their prayer.”<sup>257</sup> The final Offer of Cession signed by the seven district chiefs therefore stated:

*We the Chiefs of Rotumah with the knowledge and assent of our respective tribes and in accordance with their desire, do on our own behalf and that of our respective tribes hereby cede and surrender absolutely, unreservedly and unconditionally to Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Empress of India, the possession of and full sovereignty over the whole island of Rotumah and over the inhabitants thereof and of and over all ports, harbours, roadsteads, streams and waters, and all foreshores and all islets and reefs adjacent thereto: praying that Her majesty will be pleased to extend to us such laws as now govern her native subjects in the Colony of Fiji or such other laws as in Her Majesty's wisdom she may see fit to make and appoint for our government and for the maintenance of peace and good order.*<sup>258</sup>

While the British appeared to be very much in charge, the Rotuman chiefs were consulted on a regular basis in the lead-up to the actual date of cession.<sup>259</sup> If the Deputy Commissioner is to be believed, and there is limited Rotuman evidence available to contradict the written record, the British simply applied a level of government above that

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<sup>257</sup> Arthur Gordon in an address to the Rotuman Chiefs at Noatau, Letterbook 1879-1881, National Archive of Fiji, Suva.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>259</sup> Gordon, Letterbook 1879-1881, National Archive of Fiji, Suva.

of the local chiefs and life went on much as usual. Indirect rule of this nature was common throughout the British Empire.

One of the first problems encountered by the Rotuman chiefs after Cession was the attitudes of the various Resident Commissioners sent by the British from Fiji to live in a community with a culture quite different to their own. Some of these men caused a degree of disruption to local politics because they were not fully cognisant of the ranking order of the chiefs and tended to favour one over another more senior because of the ease of communication they enjoyed.<sup>260</sup>

The chiefs were also expected to collect taxes to pay for the administration costs incurred by the British Government in Rotuma. This came as something of a surprise – it was assumed that the new government would pick up these costs. Consequently the chiefs were loathe to exact taxes from their people due to the extra work in cutting copra to pay the tax would cause them.<sup>261</sup> Rotuman chiefs, elected as they were from a pool of suitable contenders rather than through patrilineal descent, could be ousted if the people believed they were ineffective or unfair. None the less taxes were duly collected as the colonial economy added yet another layer, administration, to the political structure already in place.

The main concerns of the Resident Commissioner were

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<sup>260</sup> Eason, 1951, p. 79

<sup>261</sup> Arthur Gordon to High Commissioner for the Western Pacific, Resident Commissioner Letterbook 1879-1881, Report No.3, 1879, p. 5, National Archive of Fiji, Suva.

*(1) careful guidance of the District Councils and the Council of Chiefs;  
(2) guarding against political and religious jealousies and ambitions;  
(3) the decrease of population; (4) guiding the Regulation Board; (5)  
inquiring into land claims and preventing the alienation of land to  
Missions or others; (6) reconciliation between people of the two  
religions; (7) difficulties of assessing the land tax.*<sup>262</sup>

Much to the despair of the Resident Commissioners some of the missionaries of both persuasions were not adverse to “advising” the chiefs in ways that suited the needs of their particular denomination and which, at times, tended to run counter to the objectives of the government. For example, in matters of land the Roman Catholic Church was involved in a long running battle with the Resident Commissioners into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century over endeavours to alienate land for the sole use of the Church despite land alienation by non-Rotumans being forbidden by law.<sup>263</sup> The Wesleyans also tried to subvert the land laws by seeking to stop Catholic landowners from taking up their rightful plots in predominantly Wesleyan areas.<sup>264</sup>

The concern over the decrease in population was, as has been discussed previously, directed at a real and growing problem. Just as white men came and settled on Rotuma, young Rotuman men were finding irresistible the adventure of sailing away on the ships that visited the island. Control of emigration of young men was taken over by the Resident Commissioner in 1887 after efforts by the

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<sup>262</sup> Eason, 1951, p. 83.

<sup>263</sup> H. Macdonald, Rotuma Resident Commissioner Letter book 1906-1908, National Archive of Fiji, Suva. Few reports in this document run do not mention the concern of the Resident Commissioner regarding the appropriation of land by the Roman Catholic church.

<sup>264</sup> Eason, 1951, p. 83.

district chiefs failed to halt the flow. With the approval and encouragement of the chiefs restrictions were imposed on married men leaving the island and all Rotumans wishing to leave the island for any reason were required to seek approval from the Resident Commissioner. This requirement is still written into the Rotuma Act, an act passed by the colonial government which, with some amendments, is still in use in the legislation for the administration of the island.<sup>265</sup>

Some Rotumans left temporarily to seek adventure and improve their knowledge of the world. Others did not return. Today the families of these men, especially those who went pearling in the Torres Strait and remained abroad, are searching out their Rotuman relatives and renewing the links severed long ago and discovering the source of some of the cultural traits passed down to them from their forefathers.<sup>266</sup>

One of the first Rotumans to comment on leaving the island is Epeli who left Rotuma in 1878 at the age of fifteen to get away from the religious strife brewing on the island at the time. According to David Chappel:,

*He travelled for thirteen years, visiting New Zealand, New York, London, South Africa, India and half a dozen Pacific Islands from New Guinea to Samoa. He once disembarked in Sydney and “played around.” After presumably spending all his money in typical sailor*

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<sup>265</sup> Laws of Fiji, Chapter 122, Rotuma Act, Part III, Section 16., Rotuma (Emigration) Regulations, 1-4, [http://www.itc.gov.fj/lawnet/fiji\\_act/cap122.html](http://www.itc.gov.fj/lawnet/fiji_act/cap122.html) accessed July 2004.

<sup>266</sup> Krasna interviews, Fingal/Tweed Heads 2003; G. Mye interview, Erub Island, 2004; N. Sailor interview, Thursday Island 2004.

*fashion, he went to work in the Torres Strait as a pearl diver, as many Rotumans did in the nineteenth century. Years later, he bought passage for Fiji, whose British rulers had annexed Rotuma. Epeli was broke, having spent his wages on women and rum. He finally came home because "white man's lands are good but if no money no food. Here a man has no money, but there's plenty to eat."<sup>267</sup>*

Epeli's story testifies to the desire of Rotuman men to leave the island as part of the rite of passage into manhood but it also shows the continuation of strong links to the island and the nurture it provided.

Ellen Churchill Semple, writing in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, espoused a theory that island people often emigrated due to overcrowding and because it was the only way their homeland and people could survive.<sup>268</sup> This may be true of islands in other oceans but it is not tenable in post-contact Rotuma until possibly the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>269</sup> Underpopulation rather than overpopulation was the main concern in this period, due to introduced diseases and other ailments directly associated with the advent of Europeans on the island.<sup>270</sup> From the time of European contact, crewing on foreign ships became an accepted way of life for Rotuman men and youths with a consequent loss of workers for the plantations.

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<sup>267</sup> Taitano, letter to AM Hocart, quoted in Chappell, 1997, p.169.

<sup>268</sup> Ellen Churchill Semple, *Influences of the Geographic Environment*, Constable, London, 1911, quoted in Connell and King, *Ibid.*, 1999, p.2-3.

<sup>269</sup> Howard and Rensel make reference to palpable population pressure in their 1994 paper "Rotuma in the 1990's." <http://www.rotuma.net/os/howsel/21rotuma1990s.html> accessed February 2007.

<sup>270</sup> See. Soubeyran, 1949; also J.J. Bryant, "Rotuman Migration and Fiji," in John Connell (ed), *Migration and Development in the South Pacific*, National Centre for Development Studies, Research School for Pacific Studies, Canberra, 1990, p.138.

Most of the young men who went adventuring returned home at some point to settle down and were replaced by others in the seafaring “rite of passage” into which the urge to travel and see the world had developed. In 1830 when George Bennett visited Rotuma he commented:

*An innate love of roaming seems to exist among these people; they set sail without any fixed purpose in one of their large canoes: few ever return, some probably perish, others drift on islands either uninhabited or if inhabited, they mingle with the natives, and tend to produce those varieties of the human race which are so observable in the Polynesian Archipelago. I frequently asked those of Rotuma what object they had in leaving their fertile island to risk the perils of the deep? The reply was ‘Rotuma man want to see new land’: they thus run before the wind until they fall in with some island, or perish in a storm.<sup>271</sup>*

He also remarked that:

*As an evidence of the great desire of the natives of both sexes to leave their native land, I may mention the offers which were made to the commander of the ship, of baskets of potatoes and hogs, as an inducement to be carried to the island of Erromanga, where our vessel was next bound to.<sup>272</sup>*

The problem was emphasised when, in 1886, the Resident Commissioner said in his Annual report:

*...there are not more than 30 adult male Natives on the island that have not been abroad. Large numbers have stayed away many years*

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<sup>271</sup> George Bennett, “A Recent Visit to Several of the Polynesian Islands,” in *United Services Journal*, Vol. 33, 1831, pp. 198-202.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*

*and wandered to the furthest corners of both hemispheres. It is a cutting reproach to cast at a man that he has not been away from the island; hence, partly, the anxiety of the young men to accomplish their long cherished dream (of going abroad)*<sup>273</sup>

This outflow became a considerable social and economic problem for the island in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as emigration and disease threatened the very existence of the Rotuman people. The loss of men from Rotuma crewing on ships and departing for the pearling grounds of the Torres Strait meant that many women were left to fend for themselves and their children and this placed pressure on the rest of the community to provide for them.<sup>274</sup> The Chiefs, as well as the British Resident Commissioner, were perturbed by the situation and the latter, at that time Hugh Romilly, reported to the High Commissioner in Fiji in December 1880 that some nine-tenths of the men had left and having been away for many months, came back with a great deal of worldly wisdom and knowledge only to find their own people “in precisely the same condition as when they left and despise[d] them.”<sup>275</sup> Romilly blamed the missionaries for driving the young men away due to their banning of harmless amusements like dancing and singing. Minutes of the Rotuma Council for February 1883 show a continued concern over the terms of engagement of 30 Rotuman men who had signed on as crew on the *Stormbird* for a passage to the Sandwich Islands some three years prior and had not yet returned. Because of the need for men to work the island’s food gardens the Resident Commissioner expressed his disquiet that the terms of engagement may not have

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<sup>273</sup> W.L. Allardyce, Annual Report of the Resident Commissioner, 1886, Outward Letters file, Rotuma District Office, National Archive of Fiji, Suva.

<sup>274</sup> Minutes of the Rotuma Council 9 April 1885, National Archive of Fiji, Suva.

<sup>275</sup> Hugh Hastings Romilly, Resident Commissioner Rotuma to High Commissioner Fiji, 7 December 1880 – NAF Deputy Commissioner for Rotumah [sic] Letterbook 25 October 1879 – 11 April 1880, National Archive of Fiji, Suva.



included a return passage.<sup>276</sup> This led to the colonial government endeavouring to ensure, through legislation, that all contracts contained clauses ensuring payment of return passage at the finalisation of employment.<sup>277</sup>

Other Europeans travelling through Rotuma, including Litton Forbes, W.L. Allardyce, the Reverend William Allen and J. Stanley Gardiner, commented on this propensity for the Rotumans, the men in particular, to leave for periods of time. On return their stories of adventure and the world ensured a steady stream of young men signing on to spend two or three years away from home. Prior to 1881 labour recruiters were also able to access the island directly and as a consequence Rotuman contract labour was utilised in the Pacific from Hawaii to Australia.

The first Rotuman migrants to arrive in Australia came to take up work in the pearling industry in the Northern Territory and the Torres Strait Islands in the late nineteenth century. The pearling companies recruited them as boat crew and occasionally as divers. Rotumans were valued for their strong work ethic. This was noted as early as 1832 by John Eagleston, Captain of the whaling ship *Emerald*, who wrote;

*They make good ship men ... [and] ... for a trading vessel are preferable to any other natives ... they being more true and faithful and more to be depended on.*<sup>278</sup>

Forty years later Litton Forbes made a similar observation: “The men of Rotuma make good sailors; and after a few years service in sea-going vessels are worth

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<sup>276</sup> Minutes of the Rotuma Council, February 1883, National Archive of Fiji, Suva.

<sup>277</sup> Fiji Colonial Government files F24/16 and F24/44, National Archive of Fiji, Suva.

<sup>278</sup> Eagleston, Log of the *Emerald*, 1832, PMB 223.

the same wages as white men.”<sup>279</sup> Rotumans already in the pearling industry were highly valued and were asked to recommend their friends and male kin. The National Archive of Fiji (NAF) holds a number of requests on file from the Wanetta Pearling Company of the Torres Strait in the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, requesting that the Governor of Fiji allow Rotuman workers to take up work in the pearling industry in Australia.<sup>280</sup>

Although the statistics for Rotuman labour in Australia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries may not be completely accurate they give some indication of the numbers employed during that period. Between 1863 and 1869 approximately 35 Rotumans had been recruited to work and by 1901 there were at least 61 Rotumans engaged in the pearling industry in Darwin in the Northern Territory and Thursday Island off the tip of Cape York, Queensland.<sup>281</sup>

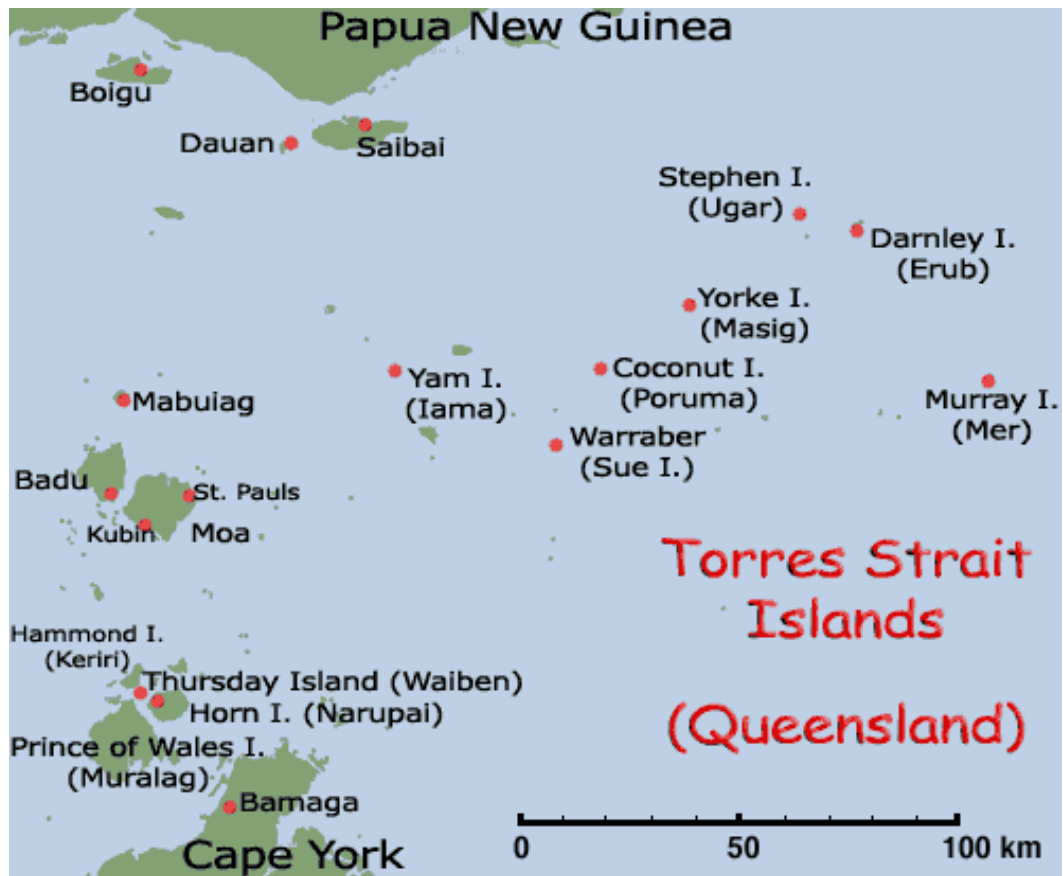
Pacific Islanders formed an important part of the bêche-de-mer industry as well as the development of the pearl shelling industry in the Torres Strait from its commercial beginnings in 1869. They came from a wide spectrum of the Pacific islands including Tanna, Erromanga and Aneityum in the New Hebrides (Vanuatu), New Caledonia, Ouvea, Mare and Lifou in the Loyalty Islands, the Solomon Islands and Fiji and Rotuma. While some of these men

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<sup>279</sup> Litton Forbes, 1875, p. 226.

<sup>280</sup> Colonial Government of Fiji, F24/44, National Archive of Fiji, Suva.

<sup>281</sup> Royal Commission re pearling (Commonwealth) Report by Judge Dashwood on Darwin and Thursday Island, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers*, 1901-2 (2), A43, pp. 987-8, quoted in Charles Price, “Origins of Pacific Labourers in Queensland, 1863-1904: A research note,” *The Journal of Pacific History* Vol. XI, No.2, p.107 and Table 2, p.116.



Map 5 Islands of the Torres Strait<sup>282</sup>

were recruited in their home islands many were also engaged in mainland Australian ports such as Sydney where, as Mullins notes in his history of the Torres Strait, “a pool of these willing and competent workers had gathered” since the early 1870s after disengaging from visiting trading, whaling or sandalwood ships.<sup>283</sup> Thus from at least the early 1870s there were large numbers of Pacific Islanders living in most of the islands of the Torres Strait.<sup>284</sup>

<sup>282</sup> Map located at <http://www.ozoutback.com.au/postcards/tsi.htm> , accessed January 2008.

<sup>283</sup> Steve Mullins, *Torres Strait: A History of Colonial Occupation and Culture Contact 1864-1897*, Central Queensland University Press, Rockhampton, 1995, p. 70.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.* p.73.

The majority of Rotuman men working in the beche-de-mer and pearling industries returned, like Epeli who was mentioned earlier in this chapter, to the island of Rotuma or Fiji at the end of their contracts; however, a small number stayed on. Their reasons, whether they had married and had families in the Torres Strait or had simply lost the desire to go back to island life or indeed were too impoverished to do so, we may never fully know. However some information can be gleaned from the descendants of these men and from ethnographic and historical writing about the region which sheds some light on the lives of these first Rotuman migrants to Australia.

Unlike the western and central Torres Strait islands, the eastern islands are volcanic with fertile soils as well as good fishing. Two islands in particular – Erub and Mer – were extremely fertile and supported large populations who maintained villages along the beaches and flourishing gardens in the interior.<sup>285</sup> They appear to have been more favoured by Rotumans as places to settle perhaps due to their resemblance in character to home. Descendants of these men still live in the Torres Strait with the greatest concentration coming from Erub.

A local Erub man, Kemual Kiwat, believes his ancestor on his mother's side, Joe Kerepo (also known as Joe Rotumah), was the first Rotuman to arrive on Erub. Joe Kerepo arrived in the Torres Strait with his wife Annie, an Aboriginal woman from the Fraser Island or Maryborough area. They had five children. Annie the eldest returned to Rotuma, married and had children there. The four sons Pau,

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<sup>285</sup> Mullins 1995, p. 11

Tom (Tom Mani), Daniel and Mupang remained in the Torres Strait. Kivat's mother was born to Pau. It is of note here that tracing some Rotuman family linkages proved a little difficult. Rotumans do not traditionally have more than one name and the Rotuman families in the Torres Strait did not always conform to the European idea of taking a paternal surname. Consequently Joe Kerepo's sons Pau and Tom took their own surnames – Pau was simply Pau and Tom became Tom Mani.<sup>286</sup> In April 1915 the Anglican Bishop of Carpentaria baptised one month old Daniel Pau.<sup>287</sup>

Kivat's grandfather on his father's side also originated in Rotuma. Grandfather Kivat worked for a period of time out of Newcastle in Australia until he saw the money to be made in the Torres Strait. After working his way north he spent one season diving for pearl shell then he went back to Rotuma before returning to the Torres Strait and working for both the Hockings and Bowden master boats and diving the Darnley Deeps. He married a local girl and they had five children – one of whom was Kemual Kivat's father – and never returned to his homeland.

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The original Kivat was fortunate to marry into a Torres Strait family whose only daughter inherited her father's land and this passed in time to her children.<sup>289</sup>

Other Pacific Islanders including Joe Kerepo (Rotumah) settled in the Straits and

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<sup>286</sup> Kemual Kivat interview 15 January 2004 with Agnes Hannan Erub; naming convention also indicated by Ata Susau, interview 22 March 2003 with Agnes Hannan, Melbourne.

<sup>287</sup> Anna Shnukal, 2002, “ ‘All cross blood’: demography and Darnley islanders 1870s-1928,” in Gordon Briscoe and Len Smith (eds), *The Aboriginal Population Revisited: 70000 years to the present*, Aboriginal History Monograph 10, Canberra, p. 65.

<sup>288</sup> Kivat, interview 2004

<sup>289</sup> Kivat interview 2004

were given pockets of land through fictive kinship relations with Torres Strait Island men from Erub (Darnley Island) or one of the other islands close to the pearl fisheries.<sup>290</sup>

Another informant, Nancy Sailor is descended from a Rotuman named Aptinko from the village of Noatau who arrived as a very young man close to the beginning of the 20th century. Sailor believed that names were changed because of language difficulties and her grandfather subsequently became known as Abednego. Biblical names, she said, were popular in the Torres Strait and it sounded similar to his proper name. Her grandfather arrived in the Strait as part of a boat crew and married a woman from the western islands. They lived in the community of St Paul on Moa Island and also on Erub. Sailor's father, the couple's fifth child, was born on Erub and was given to the Kiwat family to raise. As Sailor said, "He was adopted by that same Kiwat family, the woman who delivered him was a Kiwat so my grandmother gave him to her to raise because her husband was a Rotuman."<sup>291</sup> This style of traditional adoption is also common in Rotuma and while the child is raised by others they are not in any doubt about the identity of their natural parents.

Sixteen Rotumans, Joe Kerepo amongst them, and other Pacific Islands men settled on Erub (Darnley) with their families in 1885, being moved there from Mer (Murray) by the Government Resident after disputes with Meriam over land

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<sup>290</sup>Shnukal, 1992, p. 22, Nonie Sharp, *The Stars of Tagai: The Torres Strait Islanders*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1993, p. 7.

<sup>291</sup> Nancy Sailor, interview 12 January 2004 by Agnes Hannan on Thursday Island.

issues. They were given parcels of land for houses and gardens at Mogor in the Samsep ged clan territory.<sup>292</sup> According to Haddon they had become the majority on Erub within three years.<sup>293</sup> The reasons for this had to do with the introduction of exotic diseases which raised the mortality rate amongst indigenous islanders and the preference for foreign sons-in-law who could offer higher bride prices.<sup>294</sup> The brides themselves were keen to engage with Rotumans because of the status attached to their lighter skin and soft straight hair.<sup>295</sup> There were also several instances of traditional adoption of the children of Rotuman men and local women into local families which not only ensured the continuation of local clan rights in property but also incorporated children of Rotuman descent (and to some extent their natural parents) into the Torres Strait clan system, gave them property rights and also influenced the way they identified themselves.

According to Charles Price, “there was appreciable movement from pearling to tropical agriculture and vice versa.”<sup>296</sup> Thus the Rotuman workforce continued, when possible, to maintain their horticultural skills both for their own nutrition as well as for sale or exchange. This skill facilitated inclusion in the social fabric and connected them through their labour as well as marriage to local women to their new home. Interviews conducted by the author on Erub in 2004 confirmed

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<sup>292</sup> Colin Scott and Monica Mulrennan, “Land and Sea Tenure at Erub, Torres Strait: Property, Sovereignty and the Adjudication of Cultural Continuity,” in *Oceania*, December 1999, Vol. 70, p.146.

<sup>293</sup> A.C. Haddon, 1901 -35 *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1935, p. 193.

<sup>294</sup> Jeremy Beckett, *Torres Strait Islanders: Custom and Colonialism*, Cambridge University press, Cambridge, 1987, p. 38.

<sup>295</sup> Nancy Sailor interview 2004, Shnukal, 1992, p. 24.

<sup>296</sup> Price, “Origins of Pacific Labourers ...”, p. 107.

the continuing strong influence of the descendants of these migrants on the island.

As Shnukal says,

*... by the turn of the century the newcomers were no longer the marginal men of before. Some even went so far as to discharge their family obligations as caretakers of traditional totemic ceremonies, such as the 'alag' 'wongai ceremony' (after its incorporation into Christian ritual as an annual celebration of the first fruits of the land and sea).<sup>297</sup>*

The descendants of these men continue to live in the Torres Strait Islands, particularly on Yam, Erub and Thursday Islands. Their names – Abednego, Sebasio, Pedro, Oui, Kiwat, Kerepo, Morseu and Mani as well as Rotumah<sup>298</sup> – are well known in Torres Strait communities today, even though the original settlers are long gone and much of their history faded.

In 2004 a Rotuman family by the name of Marseu, led by a female member who had migrated to New Zealand, began a project to trace their family in the Torres Strait. Their ancestor, a man named Raki and his brother Uasile were recruited to work in the pearling industry and settled on Erub. Raki married a local woman and had three children, the eldest of whom, Aisea, returned to Rotuma aged eight with his uncle. The Marseu family is descended from him. Olivia Pickering is his great granddaughter and launched the project ultimately tracing her Erub family which now numbers several dozens, amongst them the Mosby family.<sup>299</sup>

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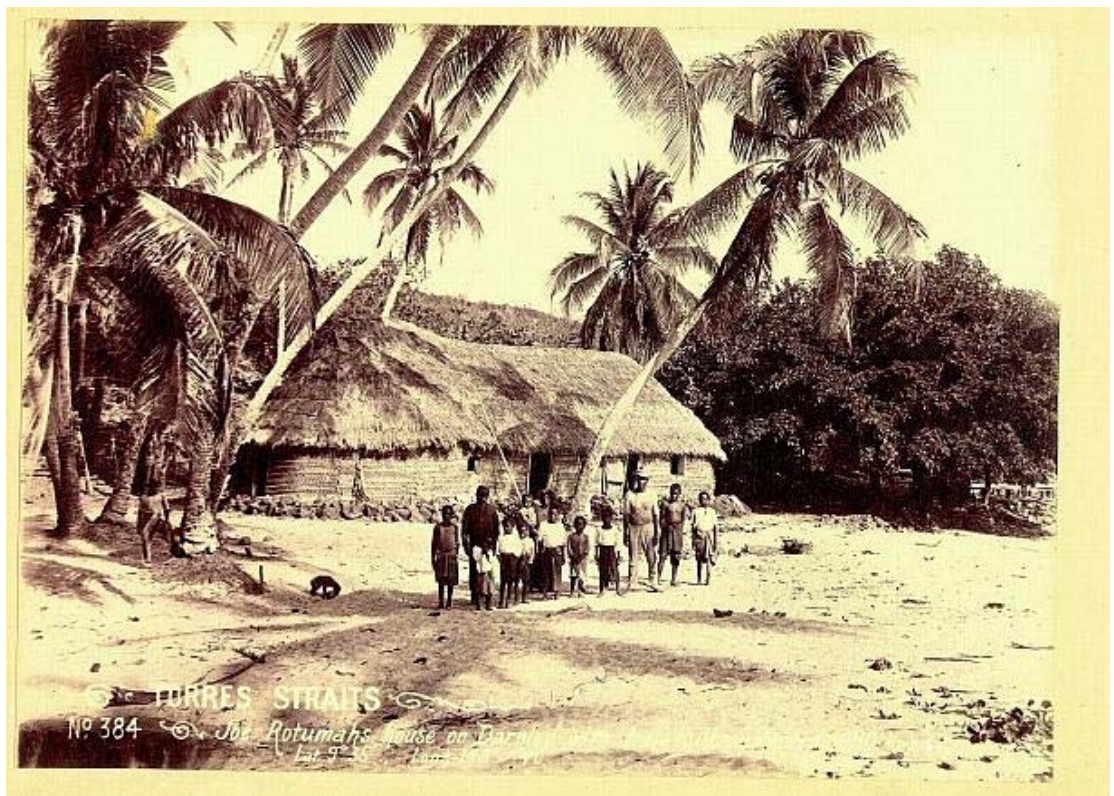
<sup>297</sup> Shnukal, 1992, p. 23. Also confirmed by Agnes Hannan, field notes from research visit to Waiben (Thursday) and Erub (Darnley) Islands 2004.

<sup>298</sup> Shnukal, 1992; Interview with Kapua Gutchen, CEO, Erub (Darnley) Island, January 2004.

<sup>299</sup> Olive Pickering "Our Erub Family," at <http://marseu.com> accessed 14 July 2007.



George Mye the inaugural ATSIC Commissioner for the Torres Strait in 1990 and himself of Lifouan descent – his father was adopted into the Mye family – recounted his memories of the Rotumans on Erub. Born in 1926 he heard about them from his parents and grandparents all of whom were able to bear testimony to that period of Torres Strait history. Mye recalled that, at the coming of the light to Erub in 1872,



Joe Rotumah's house on Darnley Island (Hume Family Collection, University of Queensland Collection)

it was a Rotuman man, possibly of Catholic background, who protested against the arrival of the London Missionary Society teachers, suggesting that they were

“vermin”.<sup>300</sup> This seems plausible given the bitterness of the warfare between the two religions on Rotuma prior to 1881. Another informant had previously stated that their ancestor left Rotuma to get away from the constant bitter fighting during this period.

The Pacific Islanders (including Rotumans) had a privileged position in the society of the Torres Strait at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They were usually Christian and could read and write and, as a result, were regarded by Europeans as superior to the indigenous Torres Strait people.<sup>301</sup> This caused some divisions between Torres Strait Islanders and Pacific Islanders.<sup>302</sup> These arose more commonly after the annexation of the Torres Strait by Queensland and, in 1904, the application of the Protection Act to the indigenous Torres Strait islanders. At this time all indigenous islanders came under the control of the Chief Protector. During the period between 1897 when the Act was first applied to mainland Aborigines and 1904 the Honourable John Douglas, Government Resident in the Torres Strait, had

*insisted that the Islanders should be exempt from its provisions on account of “their marked mental superiority over the mainland native.” He asserted that they were “capable of exercising all the rights of British citizens, and ought to be regarded as such.”*<sup>303</sup>

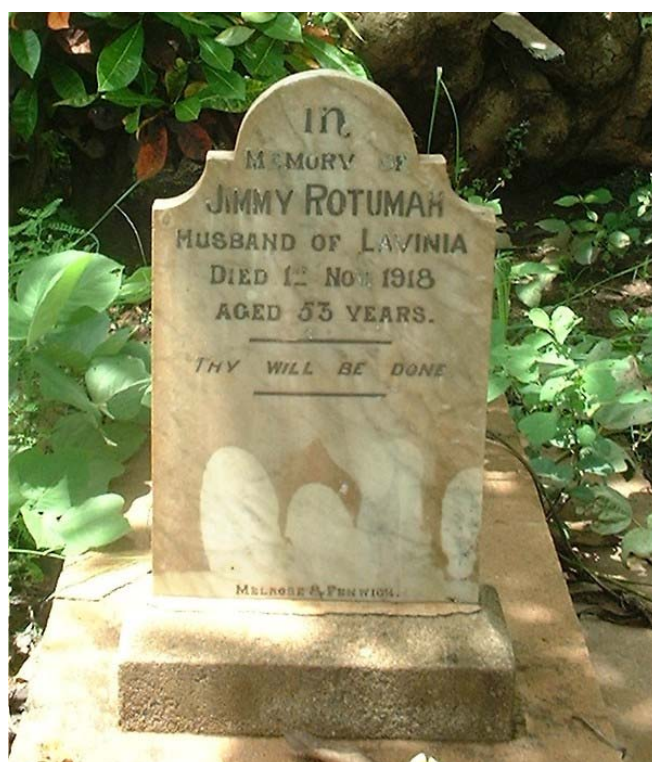
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<sup>300</sup> George Mye interview 15 January 2004, Erub Island

<sup>301</sup> Mullins, 1995, p. 70

<sup>302</sup> Kivat interview 2004; Mye interview 2004.

<sup>303</sup> Quoted in Beckett, 1987, p. 43.



Above: Gravestones of Rotumans and descendants at Darnley Island <sup>304</sup>

<sup>304</sup> Agnes Hannan, Erub Island 2004

These rights were withdrawn under the Act from 1904 and the Protectors assumed control over all aspects of the indigenous Islanders lives from work, pay, living arrangements, even movement out of and between the islands of the Strait.<sup>305</sup> This was not the case for the Pacific Islanders who were technically “free men” and who could move freely around, drink alcohol, work for whichever firm they chose and additionally maintain control over their wages.

The repatriation of Pacific Islanders from 1901 had little effect on those living in the Torres Strait. Most had been in residence for many years and had grown families. They were also an important part of what was a very lucrative industry to which the loss of good workers would have been crippling.

### **Cession of Rotuma to Britain**

With cession and the establishment of the British Resident Commissioner on Rotuma the people of both faiths reconciled over time and with the changing attitudes of the hierarchies of the Churches. Ultimately there was no more talk of war between them, simply the level of animosity that could be found anywhere, including in Australia and Europe in the early twentieth century.

The main effect of the annexation of Rotuma by Great Britain was a subtle erosion of the traditional political organisation on the island. The work begun by the missionaries in calling for the eradication of the spiritual heads - the *sau* and

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<sup>305</sup> Beckett, 1987, pp. 45-48.

the *mua* – initiated a movement towards a more western style of government continued in a secular manner by the District Officer and colonial authorities.<sup>306</sup> Where once the lines of authority and the roles of the chiefs and sub-chiefs in directing and nurturing the people were strongly drawn, now the borders between chiefly authority and that of the Colonial government shifted and blurred. While Rotuma was part of the Colony of Fiji the Resident Commissioner, later known as the District Officer, was the ultimate authority on the island. Although initially members of the Rotuma Regulation Board the district chiefs did not hold the power to make policy or legislate.<sup>307</sup> Duties which were nominally those of the chief – settling disputes between people and land disputes – were assumed by the District Officer.<sup>308</sup>

In 1939 the Council of Rotuma was legally recognised. Along with the chiefs of the seven districts, members consisted of a nominated representative from each of the districts and the Medical Officer.<sup>309</sup> In 1958, in a continuing policy of democratisation, the representatives ceased to be nominated by the District Officer and were elected by the people. The District Officer presided over meetings and held a casting vote. The colonial authorities, through the Council, took over many aspects relating to the welfare of the people as well – assuming control of

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<sup>306</sup> See Aubrey L. Parke, *Rotuma Custom, Practice and Change: An Exploration of Customary Authorities, the Kinship System, Customary Land Tenure and Other Rights*, Coombs Academic Publishing, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University, Canberra, 2003: 11-49; and Howard, 1966, pp. 63-78.

<sup>307</sup> Alan Howard, "Reflections of Change in Rotuma, 1959 – 1989," in Chris Plant (ed), *Rotuma: Hanua Pumue*, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, Suva, 1991, p. 228.

<sup>308</sup> Parke, 2003, p. 18.

<sup>309</sup> Representative to be nominated by the District Officer.

*schools, a hospital, technical advice and assistance for communications, especially roads, and economic development, particularly agriculture and veterinary officers, and financial assistance through subsidies for clearing and maintaining coconut plantations.*<sup>310</sup>

The Council also administered the Rotuma Development Fund which was instituted to promote “the development, welfare and advancement of Rotumans”<sup>311</sup> both inside and outside Rotuma. The Council, on behalf of the fund, exacted a tax on all copra produced to finance the objectives of the fund. Another, smaller, development fund available to Rotumans is the Rotuma Agricultural and Industrial Loans Fund, with capital of up to \$FJ20,000 which is also administered by the Council which can, under the regulations of this Fund, approve loans to any Rotuman for agricultural or industrial purposes.<sup>312</sup>

Under this regime the Rotuman chiefs were involved in the Rotuma Council, along with other local district and Statutory representatives such as the District Officer and the Medical Officer. They also continued to maintain traditional roles which revolved around ceremonial: births, deaths, marriages and chiefly appointments.

Education remained outside the British administration’s focus. The missionaries had brought with them rudimentary education for Rotuman children. The Catholic priests and nuns built dormitories and children were housed there away

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<sup>310</sup> Parke, 2003, p. 18

<sup>311</sup> Rotuma Act [Cap 122], Laws of Fiji, Part IV, Section 24, <http://faolex.fao.org/docs/texts/fij50792.doc>, accessed 26 March 2008

<sup>312</sup> Rotuma Act [Cap 122], Laws of Fiji, Part V, Section 25, <http://faolex.fao.org/docs/texts/fij50792.doc>, accessed 26 March 2008.

from their families while they were schooled in the catechism and basic learning.<sup>313</sup> Once cession took place the opportunity was available to Rotumans to opt for a higher education in Fiji. This was taken up by many Rotumans and they have gained a reputation for cleverness amongst their peer group in the Pacific.

*The Rotuman, one District Commissioner said, was a 'steady and much valued worker in regular employment, more particularly away from his own island.' The higher status and earnings of Rotumans in the mines' occupational and wage structure reinforced their 'naturally law-abiding and docile' disposition.*<sup>314</sup>

Their reputation as a reliable and responsible group of workers goes back as far as the late eighteenth century and is still claimed by employers, researchers and Rotumans alike today.<sup>315</sup>

Other influences also affected pan-Rotuman affairs.<sup>316</sup> The introduction of civil servants such as doctors, nursing staff, policemen, postmasters, agricultural officers, meteorologists, and Church officials served to add another level of power relationships into the political mix. Parke also considers the Rotuman Cooperative Association a significant influence across Rotuma because of its success, under the leadership of Wilson Inia, in removing the dominant non-Rotuman trading firms of Morris Hedstrom Ltd. and Burns Philp (South Seas)

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<sup>313</sup> Soubeyran, 1949.

<sup>314</sup> 'Atu Emberson-Bain, *Labour and Gold in Fiji*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 52.

<sup>315</sup> Makarita Wong, interviewed Sydney, 2003; Alan Howard, "Rotuma as a Hinterland Community," in *Journal of the Polynesian Society* Vol. 70 1961, pp. 272-299, also at <http://www.hawaii.edu/oceanic/rotuma/os/howsel/2hinterland.html>, accessed 13 January 2006; Emberson-Bain, 1994, p. 51.

<sup>316</sup> Parke, 2003, p. 45.

Company Ltd. from the island and placing the island trade firmly in the hands of islanders. While this (and other Rotuman led and owned firms) ultimately did not prosper, for a time its power was significant. So too was the power and drive of Wilson Inia, one of the first individual Rotumans to gain substantial influence across the island although, as Parke notes, it was probably not without “accusations of being a slave driver and a dictator.”<sup>317</sup>

Conditions on the island improved with the provision of a doctor and a hospital and other service infrastructure. The situation that prevailed when George Westbrook had to amputate Jonas Bratberg’s hand assisted by W.L. Allardyce, later a Resident Commissioner, after he blew it off while fishing with dynamite on the reef at Rotuma had long passed.<sup>318</sup>

These health benefits and others in part justified the surrendering of power by Rotuman chiefs. In handing over much of their power and independence to the British Government in 1881, the Rotuman chiefs also set their island on a course towards the future – a future that would see them governed, after Fiji’s independence from Britain, not by themselves alone but as part of a larger nation whose cultural outlook was not quite the same as their own.

The period of some fifty years between the cession of Rotuma to Britain in 1881 and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century proved to be a relatively stable one as the District Officers carried on the work of supervising the administration of the tiny outpost

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<sup>317</sup> Parke, 2003, p. 46.

<sup>318</sup> Dana, 1935, pp. 149-51.



and the churches went about their work educating the people. Schools were built by both the Methodist and Roman Catholic denominations and in 1936 the Methodist mission was fully manned for the first time by Rotuman preachers.<sup>319</sup> It was a period of relative calm except for the impact of World War I on the European colonies of the Pacific. This had the effect of removing the German trading bases and colonies to the control of allied countries Australia, New Zealand, Japan and the USA.

As a consequence the numbers of trading companies was consolidated into those of the new colonial administrators. By the mid-twentieth century most of the non-British firms on Rotuma had been closed down or taken over and the two main companies remaining in operation in Rotuma were Fiji's Morris Hedstrom and the Australian trader Burns Philp South Seas. The companies effectively divided the island between them and operated exclusively in their own area. As Howard wrote in 1994:

*The firms imposed a rigid set of rules to raise their profits and stifle competition. No-one was allowed to sell copra outside his or her area. Each household was limited to three or four baskets of copra on a given day, and the weight of each basket was limited to 60 pounds. A charge of a penny a basket was levied if the owner was absent and unable to assist in the weighing. The firms also exploited Rotuman labour for building copra sheds and other local facilities, without paying reasonable compensation. Rotumans who aspired to go into business for themselves were prohibited from*

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<sup>319</sup> Langi, 1992, pp. 45-64.

*buying goods, even from the firm which had no control over the area in which they resided. To make matters worse the firms blatantly disregarded the rules for certain favoured individuals, particularly the friends and relatives of the shopkeepers. The favoured ones were given first choice in everything; otherwise unavailable goods were sold to them 'under the counter.'*<sup>320</sup>

This period was an informative one for Rotumans whose cultural mindset was cued more to ideas of communalism rather than the individualistic opportunism of the foreign trade companies. Economic times were changing, however, as more Rotumans became disenchanted with the situation. The position of Registrar of Co-operative Societies came into being through the Fiji Colonial Government Ordinance No. 11 of 1947 and encouraged the formation of co-operatives or “canteens” throughout the colony. Five were set up on the island – in Oinafa, Lopta, Malhaha, Itu'muta and Noa'tau – and despite opposition from the firms and their local shops run by local people, these small businesses struggled on with inadequate capital investment and little basic business experience.<sup>321</sup> For a period of time the establishment of the cooperatives set Rotumans in opposition to each other and it was a salient lesson in commercial relations. Nevertheless the establishment of these small cooperatives were an expression of the strengthening of the Rotuman desire to regain some control over their economic destiny. They were supported by people not related to those running the firms' shops and their own *kainaga* and the expertise and mentoring

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<sup>320</sup> Alan Howard, 1994, p. 118.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

of one Wilson Inia who had left the island to obtain an education in Fiji some years before, returning to take up a teaching post.<sup>322</sup>

The unequal relationship between Rotumans and the trading firms had always been obvious but now there was a more educated population and the possible means to do something about it. Wilson Inia was one such champion of local Rotuman enterprise. He is still regarded by most Rotmans as something of a hero and certainly a father figure. A teacher and lay preacher, he was educated in Rotuma and Suva in both Methodist and Roman Catholic missionary schools. He gained his teaching qualifications in 1924 and taught throughout Fiji before returning to Rotuma in 1953 and taking up the position of Headmaster of the Malhaha School. He worked untiringly for his people from 1953, ultimately becoming headmaster of the new Rotuma High School in 1957. After his retirement he was appointed as the Rotuma representative at the Fiji Independence Conference in London and in 1970 was chosen to represent Rotuma as a Senator in the new Fijian Parliament.<sup>323</sup> His was a life of service to the community through his work in education, the Methodist Church and in the community. He assisted the Rotumans running the cooperatives across the island and to improve their business skills by conducting accounting classes in conjunction with the Registrar of Cooperatives.<sup>324</sup> Perhaps more than any single person Wilson Inia was responsible for the early commercial education of

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<sup>322</sup> Alan Howard, *Hef Ran Ta: The Morning Star*, Institute of Pacific Studies, Suva, 1994.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-9.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 119-120.

Rotumans in business on the island. He brought not just education in terms of reading and writing but also in terms of accounting and commercial skills.

In 1953 the Rotuma Cooperative Association (RCA), an amalgamation of all the small local cooperatives, was established. The RCA held a proportion of each of the smaller cooperatives shares. These were managed by the central committee consisting of a chairman, a manager, two representatives from each cooperative and an internal auditor. Inia acted as advisor. The advantages of the RCA were mainly in cost savings – one set of books and coordination of the import of goods and export of copra and local products.<sup>325</sup> Despite all of Inia's initiatives in teaching commercial skills and the successful operation of the RCA while he was alive, the ability of Rotumans to run businesses profitably is hindered by the system of sharing and reciprocity, where *kainaga* are able to call in favours. Being a shopkeeper in such a society means also being a favourite relative. As a consequence neither the RCA nor a later local competitor, Raho Enterprises, still exists today.

The attitude of the trading companies to the advent of the RCA was predictable. They continued to have a monopoly on transport both on the island, between the island and the cargo ships and in the cargo ships themselves. They used their monopoly to try to force the RCA out of business. However, despite the hardships involved the Rotumans were determined to wait out the situation and

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<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*

survive.<sup>326</sup> By the 1960s the RCA had gained the upper hand and both Morris Hedstrom and Burns Philp ceased operations. This had some less fortunate repercussions as some 16 Rotumans were left out of work at a time when employment on the island was scarce. The only other employers on the island at that time were the government and the RCA.<sup>327</sup>

In their move beyond Rotuma and Fiji, Christianity provided an additional support mechanism. Diasporic communities are often arranged around a church community, for example the Drummoyne Uniting Church in Sydney, the Richmond Uniting Church in Melbourne and the Uniting Church in Nudgee in Brisbane have all provided the nuclei for their Rotuman communities, regardless of denomination, to grow on.

Exposure to the ways of Europeans through trade, Christianity and British administration altered the Rotumans' interaction with the outside world and changed the ways they interacted politically on the island as well as subtly changing their spiritual world view. The power of the chiefs was limited through the introduction of Christianity and the consequent removal of the spiritual leaders, the *sau* and *mua*. It was then further limited by the British administration placing, as it did, a series of British officials on the island to advise the chiefs and to ensure that laws were upheld, taxes collected and acceptable standards of behaviour were maintained by all the factions on the island. Out-migration increased with the coming of Europeans as the power of the chiefs waned, the

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<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*

voyaging spirit was renewed and Rotumans established themselves as an urban community in the major towns of the British Colony of Fiji. Despite the real or imagined distance from the chiefly purview, Rotumans, guided by more senior members, continued to observe the reciprocal responsibilities of their culture in important life stages such as births, weddings and deaths both on the island and in their communities in Fiji. All of these revolved around the *koua* and feasting, talking, remembering, passing along news of friends and relatives, in short in the operation of collective memory and the constant restatement of identity within a discrete group.

Perhaps the second most important influence of this era after Christianity was the link to Fiji created by British rule. After 90 years of foreign rule it was perceived by the people of Rotuma that it was more sensible to maintain close links with Fiji because of the advantages it brought than to seek to try to bear the expense of nationhood on their own. For example just a few of the advantages were enumerated by a Rotuma resident on the Rotuma Website in August 2000:

- 1. The cost of a number of Rotuma residents and equipment to maintain the roads.*
- 2. The cost of a number of Rotuma residents and the generators and pumps and fuel for them to provide and maintain the water system for the island.*
- 3. The cost of maintaining the hospital and its doctor, dentist, nurses and other staff, mostly residents of Rotuma, and for medical treatment and medicine for the residents. And if a resident becomes ill or injured*

*and needs more extensive care/treatment at Suva the government pays for the airfare or an emergency flight to transport them.*

*4. The cost of a generator and maintaining it to provide power for the hospital and the entire Ahau complex and Council offices and garage.*

*5. The cost of all the teachers, mostly highly qualified Rotumans trained by the Fiji government, to provide a good education for the children and maintaining the various school facilities, except for the Catholic school.*

*6. In addition the Rotuma Council is provided (sic) school buses to get the children to/from school as well as fuel and maintenance of them.*

*7. And they also provide funds for/pay (sic) the seven district chiefs and other Council staff/expenses so the Rotumans don't have to.*

*8. Also costs for maintaining the Post Office and telephone services as well as some smaller services such as an agriculture and fishing specialist to assist Rotumans with such.*<sup>328</sup>

Other benefits of Fijian citizenship in addition to these include the provision and maintenance of the airport and airstrip on the island and subsidy of the air and boat services. There were, of course, disadvantages in taking this course, one of these was the possibility of loss of rights in land. This issue concerns not only the residents of Rotuma but also their *kainaga* abroad.<sup>329</sup> The concern that the Fijian land ownership *Vola Ni Kawa Bula* (VKB) where land rights are vested in a patriarchal system could be forced on Rotuma is anathema to most Rotumans wherever they live due to their traditional system where “a Rotuman has

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<sup>328</sup> Lavenie Coy, Forum 20, Rotuma website, at <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Forum/Forum20.html> accessed May 2001.

<sup>329</sup> Rotuma Lands Act [Cap 138], Laws of Fiji, <http://faolex.fao.org/docs/texts/fij50835.doc>, accessed March 2008.

ownership rights in respect of both paternal and maternal lands.”<sup>330</sup> The Council of Rotuma, in March 2004, registered “the land ownership rights of every Rotuman on both paternal and maternal sides”<sup>331</sup> thus perhaps ensuring that records of rights for future claims are extant.

The knowledge that they have rights in land in Rotuma is of great importance to diasporic Rotumans in Australia and elsewhere as well as for those on the island. For them “blood” is everything and it matters not where they were born – Australia, New Zealand or the USA – as long as they have a drop of Rotuman blood and can trace their family connections their entitlement remains.<sup>332</sup> This engenders an immense sense of ownership and pride in themselves as Rotumans and ensures that they maintain a Rotuman identity in diaspora.

Most Rotumans today tend to agree that inclusion as part of Fiji is the only way for the island and its culture to survive. Rotumans could move to Fiji to earn a living and still have access to their island home. Gradually a large Rotuman community grew in Suva, Lautoka and other Fijian towns to work in the sugar mills and gold mines.<sup>333</sup> From there it was a small jump, aided by twentieth century growth in air and sea transport, to the rest of the world. The establishment of Fiji as a Pacific transport and tourist hub mid-century and the slow death of the White Australia Policy at around the same time opened up

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<sup>330</sup> Submission by the Council of Rotuma to the Constitution Review Commission, Ahau, Rotuma, 18 May 2001, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Forum/Forum22.html>, accessed March 2008.

<sup>331</sup> Henry Enasio, Forum 25, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Forum/Forum25.html>, accessed May 2001.

<sup>332</sup> Sosefo Inoke, interview Townsville, 2002; Krasna interviews, Fingal/TweedHeads 2003.

<sup>333</sup> Emberson-Bain, 1994, p. 51.



greater opportunities for movement from Fiji to Australia. Because of a strong collective memory through which the cultural mores of the people are sustained this movement out of the Fiji Islands into the Pacific Rim countries and beyond has not disrupted the ties of identity and culture that continue to flourish in diaspora through a strong connection back to the community, the *kainaga* and the island itself.

Rotumans have, in comparison to the Indo-Fijians, a relatively privileged position within the Republic. They are considered amongst the indigenous people of Fiji and, as well as having rights in land, have one reserved Senate seat and one seat in the House of Representatives, they have a strong representation in the Fiji Parliament in relation to their numbers. The majority of Rotumans live in the larger urban centres in the main islands of Fiji and so benefit from urban development and reform. In general Rotumans living in urban Fiji are well educated and have relatively well-paying jobs. Their movement from the island to Fiji was effected to gain a better life and education for themselves and their children as well as to enable them to assist those remaining on the island through remittances in both cash and kind.

The colonial period also brought an array of enduring changes – education, the acceptance of western clothing styles, the increasing use of English – and these coupled with the initial establishment of an off-island urban community in Fiji encouraged further movement into the Pacific rim and beyond. The period allowed a gradual and supported movement to occur that combined a subtle shift

in the Rotuman world view, allowing them to accommodate the significant aspects of their culture while using the skills and knowledge acquired during the period to move easily into the world community and maintain their identity as Rotumans.

**PART II**

**BEING ROTUMAN  
IN AUSTRALIA**

**PART II**  
**BEING ROTUMAN IN AUSTRALIA**

- 5 -

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**MIGRATION**

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*Oceanic peoples were familiar migrants, migration being built into social and cultural systems. Historically, this enabled these people to populate the world's largest geographical feature. The "Vikings of the Sunrise" have become the "transnational corporation of kin" of the modern day.<sup>334</sup>*

Migration is a process that starts well before any actual move takes place and continues long after the migrant has settled in a new place. Beginning in the spirit of adventure or in the need to make an economic decision, it has continuing effects on social structures and networks over a long period of time. The migration of Rotumans away from their island to Fiji and beyond has had an effect on the social structures of the Rotuman community both on and off the island. This chapter seeks to explore Rotuman migration through the process of relocation and its effect on the migrant community in Australia. While Australia is a waypoint itself, the waypoints of the past can be seen here to influence the ways in which Rotumans have managed their latest migration. Consequently this chapter deals with the mechanics – the when, why, where and how – of the Rotuman migration to Australia.

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<sup>334</sup> Grant McCall and John Connell, "The Future of Migration in the Pacific and Asia," *International Migration review*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 1991, p. 621.

Previous chapters have charted the migration of Rotumans to their island and their reaction to the later arrival of Europeans. They have shown the influence of migration to the island from the earliest movement of pre- Rotuman peoples into Rotuma to the present movement which has seen Rotumans radiating out from the island to the wider world. This chapter will thus contend that the island itself is a hub as well as a waypoint and that what we are seeing in Rotuman migration is a continuation of the process, influenced in modern times by globalisation, which has been occurring over the preceding centuries in Polynesian societies. Later chapters in this section will look at the mechanisms employed by Rotumans to maintain their cultural identity in diaspora.

Much of the current literature on Pacific migration deals with change – the change wrought on migrants and migrant communities by the act of moving into a country whose dominant culture is dissimilar to their own. Change of this nature is inevitable as newcomers endeavour to function within the new social and political structure. At the same time the current literature does point up some continuity. For example, Leulu Felise Va'a,<sup>335</sup> Helen Morton Lee,<sup>336</sup> and Morgan Tuimaleali'ifano<sup>337</sup> all discuss the ways that migrants change when they move outside their homeland and yet retain important elements of their original cultural identity. For example, the majority of Samoans in Australia are shown to

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<sup>335</sup> Leulu Felise Va'a, *Saili Matagi: Samoan Migrants in Australia*, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific and National University of Samoa, Suva, 2001.

<sup>336</sup> Helen Morton Lee, *Tongans Overseas: Between Two Shores*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 2003.

<sup>337</sup> Morgan Tuimaleali'ifano, *Samoans in Fiji: Migration, Identity and Communication*, Institute of Pacific Studies Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa Extension Centres of the University of the South Pacific, Suva, 1990.

participate in the *fa'alavelave*<sup>338</sup> and some other aspects of the *fa'a Samoa* or “Samoan way” while at the same time the distance between the *matai* or chiefs and the *taulele'a* or untitled people in terms of role and status has narrowed and, in some cases, been reversed because of the increased prosperity some migrants have been able to achieve in diaspora.<sup>339</sup> Thus while the political structures inherent in, in this case, Samoan society may have changed in diaspora, the basic cultural mores have not. This is akin to what has occurred in the Rotuman diaspora so that migrants from the Pacific can be seen to look back to their last waypoint to inform the next in their journey into the future.

Since 1984 theoretical models of Pacific migration have been advanced that are useful in explaining the meta-science of migration. In 1983 John Connell, now of the University of Sydney, School of Geosciences, developed the “Dependency/World System” (DE/WS) approach which portrays Polynesian migrants as victims of global capitalism which has destroyed cultural traditions through monetisation, consumerism and individualism. This model has considerable attraction for those social scientists and historians who espouse a passive victim stance regarding colonised peoples. A year later I.G. Bertram and R.F. Watters, published their work on the “Migration, Remittances, Aid and Bureaucracy” (MIRAB) model which presented the losing small islands of the Pacific as economically unworkable without the injection of aid from international governments and remittances from migrants and thus presented the

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<sup>338</sup> *Fa'alavelave* consist of life cycle events (births, deaths, marriages) or occasions which needs urgent attention and support which can be in the form of money or gifts of food, clothing, or other necessities. See for example, Va'a, 2001, pp. 11 and 233.

<sup>339</sup> Va'a, 2001, pp. 229-230, 232-237.

idea of agency in migrants choosing to move and migrant communities encouraging people to migrate in order to support an economically non-viable homeland. In 1992 Geoffrey Hayes, a geographer and demographer of the University of Papua New Guinea, added support for another model, that of “multi-phasic demographic response,” or demographic transition, derived from American sociologist and demographer Kingsley Davis’ work at Berkley, California.<sup>340</sup> This model takes into account mortality and fertility variables – the idea that

*in modernising societies ‘faced with a persistent high rate of natural increase resulting from past success in controlling mortality, families tended to use every demographic means possible to maximise their new opportunities and to avoid loss of status.’*<sup>341</sup>

While all of these models work to a greater or lesser extent in particular circumstances I would contend that they are insufficient in the case of modern Rotuman migration from both the island of Rotuma and from the Rotuman community in Fiji proper. In the instance of the DE/WS model Rotumans have been shown to manipulate the colonial system and the reception of the Christian religion for their own purposes and thus cannot be seen as passive victims. Hayes’ demographic transition model fits to some extent in the sense that Rotuman demographics, once the island population recovered from the influx of foreign diseases and began to rise in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, have played a role in the movement out of Rotuma to Fiji and thence to the world of the Pacific rim

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<sup>340</sup> Geoffrey Hayes, “Polynesian Migration and the Demographic Transition: A Missing Dimension of recent Theoretical Models” in *Pacific Viewpoint*, 1992, Vol. 33, No. 1, p. 2.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

and beyond. However it does not fully explain the character of the relationships within the phenomenon of Rotuman migration and diaspora.

Of the three models above, MIRAB comes closest to describing the Rotuman situation given the remittance rate, the Fiji government development funds<sup>342</sup> and subsidies for transport and communications<sup>343</sup> and the small amount of international aid from such countries as Australia, New Zealand and Japan,<sup>344</sup> that flows into the island of Rotuma. In the early days of migration MIRAB may well have been a satisfactory model for Rotuman migration but today it falls short of a full explanation of the relationships, aims and aspirations of Rotumans in the diaspora, Fiji community and the home island.

The MIRAB model has been strongly criticised by academics, and by Epeli Hau'ofa in particular. Hau'ofa argued that Pacific islands became dependent on remittances through the actions of colonial governments which created artificial boundaries between islands which had not existed before.<sup>345</sup> This argument is a true one, however some Australian academics see the role of remittance in a

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<sup>342</sup> Rotuma received \$924,000 worth of aid between 2001 and 2005 from the ministry responsible for regional development in Fiji according to Fiji Times Online, 30 June 2005, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/NewsArchive/Archive2005/archive0506.htm> accessed February 2007.

<sup>343</sup> Fiji Times online, 30 June 2005, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/NewsArchive/Archive2005/archive0506.htm> accessed February 2007

<sup>344</sup> Fiji Times online, 11 February 2006, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/NewsArchive/Archive2006/archive0602.htm>, accessed February 2007.

See also <http://www.rotuma.net/os/NewsArchive/Archive2006/archive0602.htm>,

[http://www.rotuma.net/os/biographies/josaiausa/josaia\\_usa.htm](http://www.rotuma.net/os/biographies/josaiausa/josaia_usa.htm),

<http://www.rotuma.net/os/lajereports/0603.htm>, and

<http://www.rotuma.net/os/howsel/21rotuma1990s.html>

<sup>345</sup> Epeli Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," in *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1994, pp. 148-61, 153-54.



slightly new light, for example Dave Peebles sees a necessity for Australia to commit to a new phase in policies regarding Pacific immigration and assistance,

*where the flow of ideas and people is two-way: where we welcome Pacific citizens to Australia, so they can earn the remittances they need to help their home communities.*<sup>346</sup>

In this he adds to the argument presented by the authors of *At Home and Away*, a report commissioned by The World Bank in 2006, which notes that “migration can contribute to social stability as well as economic development ... [in that] ... migration and remittances have had a positive impact on migrant-sending countries.”<sup>347</sup> NZ has toyed with such policies off and on for the last two decades. This can be seen clearly in the migration of Rotumans out of their island where the opportunities for education, at least at tertiary level, are non-existent except through travel to Fiji and beyond. Migration has thus added to the skills available to Rotumans and encouraged them to seek work outside the island in positions that allow them to send money and goods home to help others to achieve similar goals.

Anthropologist Roger Rouse, of the University of California, in his paper on Aguilillan migration patterns from Mexico to the United States of America, notes that past “ways of construing migration have faced qualified challenges from accounts that treat it principally as a circular process in which people remain

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<sup>346</sup> Dave Peebles, “Rudd’s chance to rebuild ties with the Pacific,” in *The Canberra Times*, 6 March 2008, <http://canberra.yourguide.com.au/news/opinion/opinion/rudds-chance-to-rebuild-ties-with-the-pacific/1197018.html>, accessed April 2008.

<sup>347</sup> Manjula Luthria, “Executive Summary,” in *At Home and Away*, The World Bank, 2006, p.viii, [http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/PACIFICISLANDSEXTN/0..contentMDK:21020027~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:441883\\_00.html](http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/PACIFICISLANDSEXTN/0..contentMDK:21020027~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:441883_00.html), accessed April 2008.

oriented to the places from which they have come.”<sup>348</sup> He, like other modern social scientists, uses a trans-national or social network approach in dealing with the subject.<sup>349</sup> Transnationalism is

*the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement. ... Transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organisational, religious and political that span borders. Transmigrants take decisions, and feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously.*<sup>350</sup>

This thesis, similarly to Rouse, seeks to look at the mechanisms people employ to uphold continuity – to maintain their ties to their land, their ethnicity, their culture. Just as the Aguilillans, from their new homes in America, maintained a constant contact, both personal and business, with their relatives in Mexico so Australian Rotumans maintain their links with kin in Rotuma, Fiji, New Zealand, America and the rest of the world.

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<sup>348</sup> Roger Rouse, “Mexican Migration and the Social Space of Postmodernism,” in Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (eds), *Migration, Diaspora and Transnationalism*, Elgar Reference Collection, Cheltenham, 1999, p. 11.

<sup>349</sup> See for example, Steven Vertovec, *Trends and Impacts of Migrant Transnationalism*, WP-04-03, Centre on Migration, Policy and Society Working Paper No. 3, University of Oxford, Oxford, 2004 and Monica Boyd, “Family and personal Networks in International Migration: Recent developments and New Agendas,” in *International Migration Review*, Vol. 23, No.3, Autumn 1989, pp.638-670.

<sup>350</sup> Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Blanc-Szanton, “Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration,” in Steven Vertovic and Robin Cohen (eds), *Migration, Diaspora and Transnationalism*, Elgar Reference Collection, Cheltenham, 1999, pp. 1-2.

Theoretical discussion is important to social scientists and historians because it allows us to understand phenomena such as migration, through recognising patterns in the complexity of historical process. However it pays to remember that migration theory and theoretical models of migration deal adequately only with the meta-situation. Not all Rotumans are frantic to leave their land. Many are quite comfortable honing and extending their agricultural skills and proud of their ability to maintain their families in this way. Others see opportunities in the outside world and pursue them but continue to share any wealth in true Rotuman fashion with others of their kin group including those on the island through support and remittances in times of need or ceremonial. Rotumans, like all migrants, move for their own particular reasons. Amongst Rotumans, however, the linkage between migration, trans-nationalism and social networks is especially pertinent because Pacific Islanders' social structure and culture revolve closely around webs of kinfolk and reciprocal relationships. Of the people interviewed for this thesis several left Fiji because they met Australians, married them, and relocated. Others missed family members who had moved to Australia and moved in turn to be close to them. Yet others left Rotuma because of disputes over land<sup>351</sup> or, especially amongst the younger people, to take advantage of a more modern lifestyle and higher education.

Emigration has allowed Rotuman numbers to swell to approximately 10,000 world-wide, well beyond the capacity of the island itself. After Cession in 1881 Rotuma was closed as a port of entry and all trade and movement of persons went

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<sup>351</sup> Alan Howard and Jan Rensel, "Rotuma in the 1990's: From Hinterland to Neighbourhood" at <http://www.rotuma.net/os/howsel/21rotuma1990s.html> accessed 2 February 2007.

through Fiji. Fiji then became an “expansion joint” preventing the severe overcrowding that may have threatened Rotuma in the 20<sup>th</sup> century had Cession not occurred. The population in Rotuma stabilised in around 1921 and the rate of increase has been steady at a little over 2% per annum.<sup>352</sup> The Fiji census figures for the years between 1921 and 1996 support this, with the number of Rotumans on the island in any year varying between a low of 2112 and a high of 3235, while the numbers in Fiji grew from 123 in 1921 to 9727 in 1996.<sup>353</sup> Thus while the number of Rotumans increased over the 60 years, the number on the island remained stable although with a skewed demographic – by 1996 the population of the island tended to be in the older age bracket as young men and women and young families left to live and work in Fiji and elsewhere. Howard and Rensel noted that:

*During 1960 it was clear that the flow of people from Rotuma to Fiji was accelerating and would have a major impact on the future of the island. At the time there were approximately 3000 persons on the island and about half that many Rotumans in Fiji. On Rotuma one could sense the pressure on land, manifest in an increasing frequency of disputes and much talk about land issues<sup>354</sup>.*

The net outcome was for migration to drain any population increase, a situation mirrored in Bertram and Watters’ discussion of the MIRAB economy in the small

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<sup>352</sup> J.J. Bryant, “Rotuman migration to Fiji,” in John Connell (ed), *Migration and Development in the South Pacific*, National Centre for Development Studies, Research School of Pacific Studies, Canberra, 1990, p. 138.

<sup>353</sup> Jan Rensel, “The Fiji Connection: Migrant Involvement in the Economy of Rotuma” in *Pacific Viewpoint*, Vol. 34, No. 2, October 1993, p.225; Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics, [www.statsfiji.gov.fj/cens&surveys/Popu\\_census.htm](http://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/cens&surveys/Popu_census.htm), accessed March 2007.

<sup>354</sup> Alan Howard and Jan Rensel, “Rotuma in the 1990’s: From Hinterland to Neighborhood,” in *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Vol. 103, 1994, pp. 227-254.

island states of the South Pacific.<sup>355</sup> MIRAB describes the economic system of a number of Pacific Islands in that they display a

*heavy reliance on transfer payments, including repatriated factor incomes, to finance current expenditure; a migration process that disperses the members of ethnic groups across geographical space while retaining the organic unity of families and communities; and a consequent transnationalization of the society's economic activity whenever external niches of economic opportunity become accessible.*<sup>356</sup>

Fiji is a crucial hub in Rotuman transnationalism. The first stage in the migration out of Rotuma was and still is to Fiji with few migrants arriving in Australia directly from the island. Today there are more Rotumans in Fiji than anywhere else in the world including their own island. As shown in the table below, by 1976 the numbers of Rotumans in Fiji had well outstripped those in Rotuma itself and a decade later was well on the way to being three times larger than the natal community. By 1996 the total number of Rotumans in Fiji, including on the island of Rotuma was 9727 and in 2005 their numbers had risen to 10,999.<sup>357</sup>

	1956	1966	1976	1986	1996	2005
Rotuma	2993	3235	2707	2588	~2810 <sup>358</sup>	n/a
Fiji	1429	2562	4584	6064	~6917 <sup>359</sup>	n/a

<sup>355</sup> I.G. Bertram and R.F. Watters, "The MIRAB Economy in South Pacific Microstates," in *Pacific Viewpoint*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 1985, p. 497.

<sup>356</sup> Geoff Bertram, "The MIRAB Model Twelve Years On," in *The Contemporary Pacific*, vol. 11, no. 1 (Spring 1999), pp 105-138

<sup>357</sup> <http://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/Fiji%20Facts%20%20Figures%20As%20At%20Jul%2006.pdf> accessed February 2007.

<sup>358</sup> [http://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/cens&surveys/Popu\\_census.htm](http://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/cens&surveys/Popu_census.htm), accessed July 2007.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*

Total	4422	5797	7291	8652	9727 <sup>360</sup>	10,999

Rotumans on Rotuma and in Fiji, 1956-2005 <sup>361</sup>

If asked why they left their natal land the majority of migrants from anywhere in the world, other than refugees escaping persecution, would say they emigrated for economic reasons – more work opportunities, better pay, better education – in short to obtain a better life for themselves and their children. Connell and King note that many studies show that it is the “real and perceived inequalities in socio-economic opportunities and standards of living” that drives migration.<sup>362</sup> The Rotuman migrants of the last two or three decades are no different; unlike their ancestors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century many of whom left for the sake of adventure and proving their manhood.

As previously noted, with the annexation of Rotuma by Britain and its administration as part of the Colony of Fiji all trade and commerce as well as movement of people was forced through the main Fijian ports. Thus Rotumans who wanted to work on foreign shipping or seek employment outside of Rotuma or Fiji were obliged to travel first to Suva. From the 1880’s then, the movement of Rotumans from their island to the larger islands of Fiji became evident. Since annexation the population outside the island in Fiji and the outside world has grown exponentially. The combined Rotuman population in Rotuma and Fiji

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<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>361</sup> Alan Howard and Jan Rensel, “Rotuma in the 1990’s: From Hinterland to Neighbourhood” at <http://www.rotuma.net/os/howsel/21rotuma1990s.html> accessed 2 February 2007; Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics, [www.statsfiji.gov.fj/cens&surveys/Popu\\_census.htm](http://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/cens&surveys/Popu_census.htm) accessed July 2007.

<sup>362</sup> John Connell and Russell King (eds), *Small Worlds and Global Lives: Islands and Migration*, Pinter, London, 1999, p.9.

figures note a fall in Rotumans living in Rotuma from 94% of the total Rotuman population in 1921 to 30% in 1986 and 28% in 1996.<sup>363</sup> The figure for those leaving for foreign countries is more difficult to assess for the years quoted but between 1986 and 2003 a total of at least 531 Rotumans emigrated from Fiji to other countries.<sup>364</sup>

Migration patterns to Australia and within have altered over time. The original nineteenth century Rotuman migration to the Torres Strait islands still remains, but its links with Rotuma have weakened. Others have moved onto the Australian mainland for a number of reasons usually related to employment and education. Interviews with ten descendants of Rotumans from the Torres Strait were conducted in Darwin in the Northern Territory, Tweed Heads on the border of Queensland and New South Wales and Melbourne in Victoria. While the majority knew of their Rotuman ancestors and were anxious to maintain them, this was not always the case. Two families, one in Tweed Heads and one in Darwin, had members who had visited Rotuma to trace their forbears and were proud to show the family tree.<sup>365</sup> Another informant, a great grandson of one of the original immigrants to the Torres Strait, said his father had moved to the Northern Territory as a young man and had been adopted into one of the Arnhem Land tribes. He married an Arnhem Land girl. As a result, this man said, his Rotuman-ness was part of his songline but only as a minor musical thread. He

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<sup>363</sup> Jan Rensel, *Ibid.*, pp. 224-225; [www.statsfiji.gov.fj/cens&surveys/Popu\\_census.htm](http://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/cens&surveys/Popu_census.htm) accessed July 2007.

<sup>364</sup> Fiji Government Statistician, 14 May 2004.

<sup>365</sup> Franz Krazna interview, Tweed Heads 2003; Peter Rotumah telephone interview, Darwin 2003

regarded his Aboriginal background as his magnum opus because it was those traditions with which he had grown up.<sup>366</sup>

From 1901 to 1973 Australia had a racially restrictive immigration policy and while the table on the following page shows that few Pacific Islanders were refused entry, the flow into the country was minimal. The final abandonment of the vestiges of the White Australia Policy in 1973 thus appears to have had little influence on the numbers of Rotumans migrating into Australia; although the numbers of those identified by the Australian Department of Immigration as Fijian has increased possibly because of the large numbers of Indo-Fijians entering the country after the Fijian Coups of 1987, 2000 and 2006.

Between 1901 and 1973 the White Australia Policy caused a slowing in the arrivals of Pacific Islanders to this country. However, it did not stop Pacific Islander immigration completely. Immigration statistics rarely show Pacific Islanders being refused entry to Australia. Pearlring companies continued to request permission to recruit from amongst the Rotuman population both in Rotuma and in Fiji and it was not the Australian government that tended to refuse permission, but rather the Governor of Fiji and the Rotuman chiefs.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total SSI's</b>	<b>Inc SSI's not tested</b>	<b>Total excluded</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Total SSI's</b>	<b>Inc SSI's not tested</b>	<b>Total excluded</b>
1901	240	185		1925	36		
1902	1176	1150	22 (a)	1926	69	40	3 (a)
1903	1098	1094	5(3a, 2b)	1927	55	32	

<sup>366</sup> Peter Rotumah (relative of Darwin Rotumah) interview, Melbourne 2003



1904	193	153	14 (a)	1928	64	55	
1905	98	89		1929	32	24	
1906	156	156		1930	52	8	
1907	121	95	3 (a)	1931	23	23	
1908	89	72	1 (a)	1932	58	43	
1909	94	85		1933	16	6	
1910	54	43		1934	18	9	
1911	69	52		1935	27		
1912	92	58		1936	45		
1913	105	57		1937	19	1	
1914	101	39		1938	52	20	
1915	37	22		1939	19	9	
1916	59	36	3 (a)	1940	24	23	
1917	40	19		1941	24	6	
1918	43	38	1 (stowaway)	1942	34	13 (Fiji)	
1919	24	18		1943	189		
1920	47	28	1 (stowaway)	1944	48		
1921	46	32	2 (a(3))	1945	25		
1922	47	27	2 (a(3))	1946	51	36	
1923	43	26					
1924	50	25	2 1x(a) 1(stow)				

**Table 1 Total South Sea Islanders admitted to Australia 1901 – 1946<sup>367</sup>**

It is not possible to say exactly how many Rotumans emigrated to Australia after the disbandment of the White Australia Policy because Fijian immigrants

<sup>367</sup> Compiled from Barry York, *Admitted 1901-1946: Immigrants and Others allowed into Australia between 1901 and 1946: data by year on persons not asked to pass the dictation test, their nationalities or race, the countries whence they came and the sections of the Immigration Act under which they were allowed in.*, Studies in Australian Ethnic History No. 2, Centre for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Research School of Social Science, ANU, 1993.

to this country are not delineated by ethnic identity – so Fijians of Indian, Chinese, Rotuman and other non-Fijian ethnicities are simply identified as Fijian. It may be possible to separate them out by name but this is not fool-proof.

The majority of Rotumans arrived in Australia from the 1970s in a step/chain migration mostly from Fiji or in a few cases from Fiji via New Zealand. In the twentieth century the development of fast and economical international travel has increased the ability of Rotumans and others to migrate permanently and still maintain a relatively close physical connection to their kinsfolk in the main Fiji islands.

As with all Pacific Island migration to Australia, the early numbers arriving on the mainland were small and larger numbers began coming only between twenty and thirty years ago. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) notes the arrivals into Australia from Fiji from 1991 to 2006 as shown in the table below:

Before 1991	1991-1995	1996-2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006 (b)	Year of arrival not stated	Total
22,397	6,915	7,935	1,952	1,327	1,475	1,493	1,501	1,010	2,140	48,145

Table 2 ABS census information for Fijian arrivals into Australia<sup>368</sup>

In the 1980s there was also an estimated 27,000 people of Maori ancestry living in Australia,<sup>369</sup> the 2001 census showed 7,720 Tongan-born persons in Australia<sup>370</sup> and in 2004 the Samoan community was estimated to number 17,223.<sup>371</sup> In comparison to these Pacific island groups the number of Rotumans in Australia is small. Howard estimated a population of 378 in 1989<sup>372</sup> and my research in the Rotuman community since then shows an increase in numbers to approximately 550. A further rough calculation using published population figures for Maori,<sup>373</sup> Tongans,<sup>374</sup> Samoans<sup>375</sup> and Rotumans<sup>376</sup> in their native countries places their population in Australia at 10.8%, 6.6%, 8% and 5% of their total numbers respectively.

<sup>368</sup> ABS 2006 census statistics, [www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/d3310114.nsf/Home/census](http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/d3310114.nsf/Home/census), accessed April 2008.

<sup>369</sup> Statistics retrieved from <http://www.stats.govt.nz/analytical-reports/maori/maori-in-aus.htm> accessed April 2008.

<sup>370</sup> [http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/tonga/tonga\\_brief.html](http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/tonga/tonga_brief.html), accessed April 2008.

<sup>371</sup> Statistics retrieved from [http://www.dfat.gov.au/GEO/samoa/samoa\\_brief.html](http://www.dfat.gov.au/GEO/samoa/samoa_brief.html), accessed April 2008.

<sup>372</sup> Howard, "Pacific-based Virtual Communities: Rotuma on the World Wide Web," in *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1999, pp. 160-75.

<sup>373</sup> <http://www.stats.govt.nz/people/communities/maori.htm>, accessed April 2008.

<sup>374</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/tn.html>, accessed April 2008.

<sup>375</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ws.html>, accessed April 2008.

<sup>376</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/fj.html> accessed April 2008 and percentage of Rotumans in Fiji population taken as 1.2%.

Some of the arrivals prior to the 1970s were students. In 1953 the “Rotuman University Scholarship Fund” was instituted by the Council of Rotuma with funding from an initial seeding of £2882/3/4 coming from the Rotuma Provincial Fund, the Rotuma Copra Sales Deductions Accounts and the Deposit Account Rotuma Natives, the latter having been untouched since 1949. It was expected that the fund would provide £400 each for four students each year at an approved overseas University over a period of ten years. During the period in which these scholarships were offered the students were sent to either Australia or New Zealand.

The first students were enrolled at Ardmore Teachers’ College in Papakura in New Zealand in 1956 and another was supported in Sydney Australia from 1958 while completing a veterinary science degree.<sup>377</sup> The students were expected to use their education to contribute in some way to Rotuma either through a role in education or similar and for the most part these expectations were fulfilled.<sup>378</sup> While the correspondence shows that this was difficult at times for the students<sup>379</sup> – some being married with children and forced either to separate for a time or struggle to feed and clothe their dependants on their small stipend – it allowed them to develop relationships with students from the host countries and to find support mechanisms to help them to acclimatise to both the change of climate and surroundings. Initiatives such as this gave these and, through them, other members of the Rotuman community the opportunity to live in societies whose

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<sup>377</sup> District Officer Rotuma, E/1-2, National Archives of Fiji, Suva.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*

culture was quite removed from their own. It also gave them a taste of the world outside the fairly narrow confines of the Fiji Archipelago. Seeing the opportunities available encouraged discussion and raised interest amongst other Rotumans at home.

One of the earliest migrants in Sydney noted that the first arrivals tended to be women married to Australian men or men on their own, being single or having left their families behind<sup>380</sup> Leaving home and extended family ties was very difficult because money was scarce and there were few other Rotuman, Fijian or even other Pacific Island women to talk to and no-one to lend the support normally found in the family networks of Pacific Islanders. The customs were strange, the cities larger and the food customarily enjoyed by people from the Pacific – taro, yams, breadfruit, cassava – were not freely available even in the fruit and vegetable markets. One young man in Brisbane<sup>381</sup> said he worked out his homesickness by working in his garden, planting vegetables from home that would grow in the climate of south-east Queensland. Small patches of taro were also cultivated in Sydney as Rotumans tried their hand at recreating a fragment of home in their backyard. The rewards in terms of employment, the ability to help those back home financially and education were sufficient to ensure that migrants stayed and their example drew more of their kin to migrate.

As time went on more Rotumans arrived and were welcomed into the tiny but growing community. Old furniture, white goods, household appliances and

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<sup>380</sup> Martoa Dickinson, interview Sydney, 2003.

<sup>381</sup> Tivaklelei Kamea, interview Brisbane, 2003.

clothes were donated or loaned to the newcomers as they needed them to help set up their homes. Rooms were made available for those without the capital to afford a place of their own. Young people were sent over from Fiji to live with relatives while they attended school, college or university. While some of these people returned to Fiji at the end of their schooling there were some who stayed on. Work was found, marriages were contracted and children born. Once settled they, in turn, supported others thus continuing and reinforcing the inclusive nature of their culture. This type of support continues today.<sup>382</sup> The stability of the Rotuman communities in Australia is illustrated by the permanency of their domicile. Those who arrived in the 1970s are now experiencing the joys of grandparenthood as the second generation of Australian-born Rotumans arrives.

The Rotuman community in Australia has contributed strongly to Australian society. Amongst their numbers are ministers of religion, accountants, lawyers, teachers, administrators, nurses, travel agents and other occupations from blue-collar to millionaire property owners.<sup>383</sup> Rotumans are known for their ambition and their desire to do well at whatever they turn their hand to. Their reputation was cemented early in the written record with their willingness to work hard being noted by the District Officers on the island and Vatokoula (Fiji) mines administrators alike.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> Martoa Dickinson, interview Sydney, 2003.

<sup>383</sup> For example Semesi David, who is a property developer in Sydney Australia.

<sup>384</sup> Emberson-Bain, 1994, pp. 136-137.

Following the coup of 1987 many Rotumans, feeling some sympathy for the plight of the Indo-Fijians and fearing for the safety of their families in the atmosphere of violence and unrest in Suva and other parts of Fiji, decided to leave and join their relatives in countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America.<sup>385</sup> Consequently, by the 1990's the number of Rotumans arriving in Australia had begun to grow. In the last thirty or so years the population of Rotumans in Australia has increased rapidly, with some families already producing a second and third generation. Many of these young families stem from unions between Rotuman immigrants and members of Australia's multicultural population and well as marriages and partnerships with other Rotumans.<sup>386</sup>

Most of the Rotumans who migrated to Australia have taken up residence in the eastern states and in the capital cities of Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra and Brisbane although there are smaller communities in Perth and Adelaide. Other pockets of people of Torres Strait and Rotuman ancestry are scattered throughout the country from Waiben (Thursday) and Erub (Darnley) Islands to Darwin in the north, Fingal and Kingscliff in the east and country Victoria in the south. The largest of the communities is in Sydney followed by Brisbane and Melbourne but all are linked with one another through knowledge of their family connections, the social expression of Rotuman-ness through community functions and religion, fund raising get-togethers, trips back to Fiji and Rotuma and plenty of gossip sessions.

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<sup>385</sup> Gabriel Manueli, personal communication, 2003.

<sup>386</sup> Author observations and Interviews in Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra and Brisbane.

With the introduction of new generations of Australian-born Rotumans has come the concern that Rotuman identity and culture could slip away as pressure from peer groups at school and intermarriage encouraged younger people to deviate from the Rotuman norms practised at home. This concern has led to a concerted effort on the part of the community to maintain their Rotuman-ness and these efforts are discussed in the pages that follow.



**PART II**  
**BEING ROTUMAN IN AUSTRALIA**

-6-

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**COMMUNITY FORMATION AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY**

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*... Starting at 4.00pm this Saturday 13th August 2005 at the Nudgee Uniting Church hall, Earnshaw Road, Banyo. The community will be gathering to learn rotuman (sic) songs and dancing. The cultural meet will be followed by a KOUA dinner provided by the MORRIS family of the Gold Coast in honour of his (sic) late father. Posted 09.08.05<sup>387</sup>*

Two types of community characterise the Rotuman diaspora in Australia. One, the ancestors of the men who worked the Torres Strait pearl industry and the other, those who had migrated to Australia in the period after the demise of the White Australia Policy in search of a better life for themselves and their children, form the dual cores of the Rotuman diaspora in Australia. Collective memory worked in different ways for each of these communities in their endeavour to ensure the survival of their natal culture. This situation arose because the communities that each of the groups found themselves in were different in their dominant constituents. The early Rotuman immigrants into the Torres Strait found themselves in a situation where the basic mores of the Indigenous society were similar to their own and their place in the wider society which included a white, European governing strata, was often couched in terms of the “go-between” or facilitator between the two groups. They were a generally sought after and respected component of Torres Strait colonial society. Later

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<sup>387</sup> Brisbane Rotuman Community webpage  
<http://www.connectqld.org.au/asp/index.asp?pgid=24668>, accessed August 2005.

immigrants arrived in the southern states of mainland Australia in the post-colonial period. They arrived into a society that, unlike the Torres Straits of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, was less overtly hierarchical. They were thus not placed in any privileged position in the hierarchy of trade or governance despite their strong work ethic and reputation as educated, responsible and ambitious people.

The original immigrants who arrived in the Torres Strait in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have become much more a part of the local landscape than the later arrivals to mainland Australia in the mid-twentieth century. There are a number of reasons for this difference. The Rotumans arriving in the first wave came mostly as single men who took wives from amongst the local Torres Strait women or mainland Aboriginal women. Although accurate population statistics are not available it would be fair to say that their numbers, in relation to the size of the then extant Torres Strait population was high and their burgeoning families quickly made up a large part of the community. In 1893 the Pacific Islander population of Darnley (Erub) Island was 96 compared to that of the indigenous Darnley Islanders who numbered 85.<sup>388</sup> They were much sought after both for their labour and for their status as husbands. The society, of which they became part, was at first a colonial one in which Europeans occupied the top rung of the social ladder, the pearling crews from Asia and the Pacific the central rungs and the local Torres Strait Islanders the lowest rung. As a result Pacific Islanders tended to mediate

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<sup>388</sup> Shnukal, in Briscoe and Smith, 2002, pp. 59-61. Uili Nokise 1983 quoted fn 39, p. 60.

between the Europeans at the top end and the local Indigenous people at the bottom. As a consequence aspects of culture from Asia and the Pacific have become accepted as part of the traditional Torres Strait culture. The Rotuman inclusions are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter but include music, dance, feasting and mortuary rites. They have also been in Australia now for more than a century.

The later wave of Rotuman immigrants generally came as part of a couple or a family group in the post-White Australia era where a multicultural policy<sup>389</sup> was the order of the day. Multiculturalism and a more liberal immigration policy after the 1960's has impacted on the more recent Rotuman migrants in two ways – first of all it has enabled them to live their culture in this country without restriction but at the same time the broad range of cultural inclusions in mainstream Australian society since World War II as well as a much greater population overall has meant that they have had a limited cultural impact on the greater Australian society unlike their earlier fellows in the Torres Strait. As a result the later stream face a harder task in maintaining cultural norms. The compulsory education system in Australia today also exerts a greater influence on their descendants than formal schooling in the Torres Strait did in the early years of the twentieth century. Other influences have been brought to bear on the Rotuman community, not least the sheer size of the urban sprawl in Australian cities which makes it difficult to maintain contact across widely separated suburbs in an increasingly busy world.

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<sup>389</sup> Australia's multicultural policy was implemented from 1973 and encourages Australians from all ethnic backgrounds to maintain, express and share their cultural values.

Rotumans in the later Australian diaspora continue to maintain their cultural identity through various forms of community interaction while at the same time functioning as members of Australian society. This chapter contends that, in activating collective or cultural memory through strong family and inter-family networks, through cultural activities and through the vehicle of the church, the Rotuman community currently maintains a level of Rotuman-ness that is sufficiently authentic to allow a comfortable movement between the Australian community and society, their own local community in this country and their home communities in Fiji and Rotuma. Even those from the Torres Strait have sufficient in common for them to recognise, and be recognised as having, Rotuman social characteristics. The mechanisms through which the communities of recent Rotuman immigrants and their families as well as the descendants of Rotuman seamen in the Torres Strait maintain their links to Rotuma and its culture are song, dance, language, and other ceremonial traditions that include mortuary rites and feasting. This Rotuman identity in turn allows them to more confidently negotiate the large, diverse and at times alien mores of wider Australian society.

### **Rotumans in the Torres Strait**

As this thesis noted in the previous chapter Rotuman men who arrived and stayed on in the Torres Strait in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries married into the local islander families or took a wife from amongst the indigenous mainland population. In doing so they made a niche for themselves and their

children in relation to their new home. The relationships between Rotumans and the local indigenous people was often, but not always as the removal of Pacific Islanders from Mer in 1885 attests,<sup>390</sup> a mutually beneficial one. Where they did settle, in places such as Erub and elsewhere in the Torres Strait, the Rotuman immigrants maintained many of their cultural mores and the remnants are still visible there over 100 years on. Indeed, a number of Torres Strait cultural traditions – dances, songs and feasting – have their origins in Rotuma.

According to George Mye, a local Erub elder, the people who have maintained the greatest Rotuman character in their song and dance are the Meriam (Murray Islanders) despite the fact that there are more Rotuman descendants on Erub than on Mer.<sup>391</sup> Kemual Kiwat, a Rotuman descendant, also talked about the inclusion of Rotuman dance, in particular the *taibobo* style.<sup>392</sup> *Taibobo* comes from the Rotuman *tautoga* and consists of rhythmic chanting and movement. In Rotuma the *tautoga* is traditionally accompanied by beating on a large pile of mats. According to Mabo, in the Torres Strait “the usual instruments used in support of these chants are rolled mats, drums and bamboo clapsticks. The rolled mat is unusual but the sound is effective when beaten with clapsticks.”<sup>393</sup> While Mabo

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<sup>390</sup> The Murray Islanders saw the South Sea Islanders living on their island as thieves and free-loaders as shown by the letter of February 1885 from Boogie, one of the Mamooses on Mer, to Police Magistrate Henry Chester arguing for the removal of the South Sea islanders because they paid nothing for living on his land, stole coconuts and bananas and burned the coconut trees, see Mullins 1995, p. 158.

<sup>391</sup> Mye, interview Erub Island, 2004.

<sup>392</sup> Kiwat interview Erub Island, 2004; see also Karl Neuenfeldt and Lyn Costigan, “Negotiating and enacting musical innovation and continuity: How some torres strait islander songwriters incorporate traditional dance chants within contemporary songs,” in *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, Vol.5, No. 4 2004, p. 116.

<sup>393</sup> Eddie Koiki Mabo, “Music of the Torres Strait,” in Fiona Macgowan and Karl Neuenfeldt (eds) *Landscapes of Indigenous Performance: Music, song and dance of the Torres Strait and*

writes that the incorporation of the Rotuman dance was a missionary intervention to “erase all memories of the past,”<sup>394</sup> it also acted as a cultural bookmark for Rotumans in the eastern islands. Today the origins of the chants and dance are well known and those of Rotuman descent point to it as a special part of their own heritage.

Nancy Sailor, another Rotuman descendant, commented on another, very particular, tradition that came to the Torres Strait with the Rotumans – the spraying of perfume or throwing of talcum powder on dancers during a performance.<sup>395</sup> This is a tradition that lives on wherever Rotumans dance – in Rotuma, Fiji, or in diaspora. Women mix with the dancers at celebrations liberally sprinkling and spraying the participants.<sup>396</sup>

Other Pacific Islander, and possibly specifically Rotuman, introductions into the Torres Strait are, according to Sailor, Kiwat and Mye, the *kup mari* and feasting. The Torres Strait *kup mari* is essentially the same as the Rotuman *koua* or earth oven. This method of cooking meat and vegetables particularly for feasting and ceremonial occasions is common across the Polynesian islands of the Pacific but it is the contention of those interviewed that it was introduced by Rotumans.

*They have a part in that, a very big part in the feasting. They initiated what is now become a Torres Strait custom and the*

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*Arnhem Land*, Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005, p. 47. See also photograph of the 2003 Rotuma Day celebrations in Brisbane.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47.

<sup>395</sup> Sailor, interview Thursday Island, 2004.

<sup>396</sup> Dickinson, interview Sydney, 2003; also noted by the author at the Rotuma Day Celebrations in Brisbane 2003.

*cooking, it's all by Rotumans and that spread from Darnley into the Torres Strait. Darnley was the base of the Rotumans.*<sup>397</sup>

Both also mentioned a cassava and coconut dish called *fakalolo*<sup>398</sup> which they associated with Rotuma. The cooking style, which according to Jeremy Beckett comes from the Pacific Islands,<sup>399</sup> using coconut milk is very evident across the Torres Strait and would have contributed to a strong feeling of “*déjà vu*” and a welcome familiarity for the Pacific islanders working in the pearl fisheries if it was already a traditional method.

Yet another strikingly similar tradition is the one year anniversary “tomb-raising” held in the Torres Strait and the *hot'ak hafu* ceremony of Rotuma. These ceremonies occur when headstones are placed in position on graves and are celebrated in both Rotuma and Fiji and in the Torres Strait. It marks the end of the mourning period and involves an elaborate ritual of decoration of the grave, the erection of the headstone and much feasting. Jeremy Beckett notes that introduced mortuary rites underlie the modern tombstone opening in the Torres Strait, “the feasting, the singing and the dancing are all local adaptations of forms brought in by Polynesians and Melanesians who came to work in the Torres Strait during the second half of the nineteenth century.”<sup>400</sup> Sailor, Mye and Kiwat all believed that the ceremony had been influenced by Rotumans.<sup>401</sup> Josephine

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<sup>397</sup> Mye, interview Erub Island, 2004.

<sup>398</sup> While the name sounds Samoan or Tongan the ingredients are reminiscent of the Rotuman *fekei*.

<sup>399</sup> Beckett, 1987, p. 5

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>401</sup> Mye interview Erub Island, 2004, Kiwat interview Erub Island, 2004, this hypothesis needs further investigation the similarities between the two traditions are uncanny.

Petero, a Rotuman-born woman living on Hammond Island in the Torres Strait agreed.<sup>402</sup>

Two separate accounts of the ceremonies follow, one from Rotuma and the other from the Torres Strait. These show the similarities of the funerary rites in the two locations. Elisapeti Inia, a Rotuman elder who lives in the village of Savlei on the island, notes the following about the Rotuman ceremony of *Hot'ak Hafu* (Mounting the Headstone):

*The erecting of a headstone is delayed for approximately a year to allow time for the family to plant crops and plait mats, to prepare for the ceremony, and to give relatives abroad sufficient time to plan their trips. ... The 'hot'ak hafu marked the end of the mourning period. Until this event, the immediate family of the deceased visited the grave regularly bringing flowers and 'tefui' and fresh sand from the beach. 'Hot'ak hafu' were essentially family functions. The family fixed the date, informed close relatives and friends, and bore most of the expenses involved. The villagers helped by donating root-crops, pigs, mats and money.*<sup>403</sup>

Similarly Leah Lui, a Torres Strait islander, noted in her thesis on the Torres Strait custom that:

*One of the main ceremonies which brings us together to celebrate our culture is the tombstone unveiling ceremony. For my people, the death of a member of our society initiates the performance of certain*

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<sup>402</sup> Josephine Petero, telephone interview Thursday Island, 2004.

<sup>403</sup> Elizabeth K. Inia, *Kato 'aga: Rotuman Ceremonies*, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, Suva, 2001, p. 87-101.



*rites. No less than 12 months after the primary rite in interring the body, a secondary mortuary rite is performed. This is known as the tombstone opening ceremony. The ceremony involves the public unveiling of the engraved tombstone which is blessed by a priest. The unveiling is followed by feasting and traditional dancing to celebrate the occasion. Its observance is symbolic of many things; the acknowledgement of a final resting place for the spirit of the deceased; the end of the period of mourning; the fulfilment of obligation and the reinforcement of island custom through the reunion of kin. The performance of the ceremony continues today on the Islands and the mainland.*<sup>404</sup>

Lui's description of the full ceremony<sup>405</sup> is so similar to that which takes place in the Rotuman community today that a link between the two must be posited in support of Beckett's aforementioned analysis. Lui notes that it is not a tradition of long standing and is thought to have been brought by the Christian missionaries.<sup>406</sup> However, Rotuman men were arriving and settling in the

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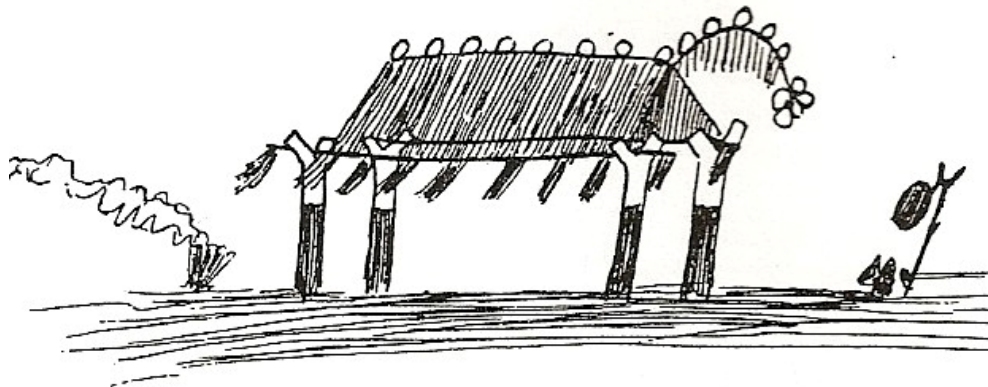
<sup>404</sup> Addie Leah Lui, "Cultural Identity and Development in the Torres Strait Islands," p. 2, [http://ignca.nic.in/ls\\_03009.htm](http://ignca.nic.in/ls_03009.htm) accessed 4 August 2005.

<sup>405</sup> Addie Leah Lui, "The Last Farewell: Maintaining Customary Practise in Torres Strait Islander Society," Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Graduate Diploma of Material Anthropology in the Material Culture Unit at James Cook University of North Queensland, 1988.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.



Gravesite in Rotuma<sup>407</sup>



1898 drawing of Torres Strait funeral platform<sup>408</sup>

<sup>407</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/pictalbum/GraveDeco.html>, accessed 18 March 2008.



Decorations around grave in Rotuma<sup>409</sup>



Modern gravesite in Torres Strait with decorations<sup>410</sup>

<sup>408</sup> J. Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann, "Tombstone Openings: Cultural Change and Death Ceremonies in Torres Strait, Australia," in *Kabar Seberang Sulating Maphilindo*, Vol.8-9 1981, p. 8.

<sup>409</sup> Photograph Agnes Hannan Rotuma 2003

<sup>410</sup> Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann, 1981, p. 8.

Torres Strait Islands at approximately the same time as the missionary arrivals.

The similarities in these two accounts are the delay of a year or more to allow relatives to finance and arrange the various aspects of the ceremony, for example, ordering the headstone, leaving enough time for relatives to make their way from far away to attend, as well as accumulating the food and offerings required. It is also seen by both groups to be strongly connected to the immediate family and they bear the greater part of the cost of the function. Both see it as the final act of appreciation for the deceased person and the final fulfilment of responsibility of the living for the dead and that this allows the spirit of the dead person to rest peacefully. Both ceremonies involve the erection of an enclosure around the grave which is decorated in some way – usually with *tefui* and streamers in Rotuma and with palm leaves, paper flowers or bright cloth in Torres Strait. Feasting on food traditionally cooked in earth ovens (as well as in modern appliances), dancing and singing into the small hours are part of the ceremonial for both groups. Both process to the graveside – the Rotumans carrying the headstone while in Torres Strait the tombstone is already in place and veiled in metres of bright cloths. The church is included in both ceremonies but the Rotuman ceremony includes symbolically cleansing the stone (through rubbing it with coconut oil and decorating it and its bearer with *tefui* in the same way as a newcomer or returnee to the island is cleansed of the salt of travelling across the sea), presenting the stone to the family and friends and then of saying a final goodbye to the deceased by placing the stone in place and decorating the enclosure. The feasting, dancing and singing that follow in both cultures provide

the venue for a renewal of kinship links, strengthening of cultural ties and the celebration of a life. It is collective memory in operation.

Rotumans in mainland Australia today conduct *hot'ak hafu* ceremonies for their deceased relatives on the first anniversary of their death. These are perhaps not such a large affair as they are in the Torres Strait and in Fiji but the rites are conducted in just the same way by family members. In recent weeks members of the Brisbane community buried their mother in Fiji and will return there in twelve months to conduct the *hot'ak hafu*.<sup>411</sup>

Blood ties were important to the Pacific Islanders who settled in the Torres Strait. As much as they accepted Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal brides, Shnukal describes the degree of importance placed by the Pacific Islander settlers on ties back to their own lands. In the Torres Strait Rotumans often sent their mixed-descent daughters to relatives on other islands to obtain suitable marriage partners who had links back to the home island in the Pacific. Despite the distance, it is probable that Joe Kerepo's daughter Annie was one of these and was sent back to Rotuma to marry.

Physical beauty was also a consideration – “light skin and straight hair” was considered preferable to the frizzy hair of the Torres Strait. This is illustrated in a comment by Olive Cowley Morseu, herself descended from a Samoan, made to Shnukal in 1992 that she, Olive, married a man descended from a Rotuman

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<sup>411</sup> Ron Mathewsell, personal communication.

because he was not a “native.”<sup>412</sup> Nancy Sailor commented on the fair skin, the handsome features and soft straight hair valued by her islander ancestors.<sup>413</sup>

A fairer skin and straight hair may be found in some members of the Rotuman descent group in the Torres Strait but no definitive sign of the Rotuman language is present in the Torres Strait in the two languages indigenous to the Torres Strait – *kala lagaw ya* in the west and *Meriam Mer* in the east. However “Torres Strait Broken,” the krio English of Thursday Island was brought there by the Pacific Islanders who spoke “Pacific Island pidgin,” a creole developed to enable the many language groups engaged in work in the Strait and the Pacific to communicate with one another.<sup>414</sup> While the indigenous languages continue to exist, “Broken” is now the common form of language communication for all Torres Strait Islanders between the language groups, can be heard across the top end of the Northern Territory in Torres Strait Islander groups and has similar forms in New Guinea and in the Pacific Islands today.

Anna Shnukal in her paper “Pacific Islanders and Torres Strait 1860-1940” argues that it was the Pacific Islanders, Rotumans among them, “who, as cultural mediators between the Europeans and [Torres Strait] Islanders, effectively brought about changes in almost all aspects of Islander society [including] culture and magico-religious practice.”<sup>415</sup> It was the Pacific Islanders who undertook Christian teaching and preaching on a daily basis and after 1879 on some islands

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<sup>412</sup> Shnukal, 1992, p. 24.

<sup>413</sup> Sailor interview Thursday Island, 2004.

<sup>414</sup> Shnukal, 1992, p. 5.

<sup>415</sup> Shnukal, 1992, p. 19.

they gained political power “by virtue of the spiritual and temporal authority vested in them by the Europeans.”<sup>416</sup>

With the passage of time and several generations born in the Torres Strait the Rotuman connection remains strong although the descendants of Rotuman pearlers consider themselves first and foremost Torres Strait Islanders today. The customs brought with the Rotuman migrants in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are now regarded by Torres Strait islanders as part of their own culture, showing the ways in which collective memory can pass from one group to another if the memory has value and meaning for the receiving party. As well, with the advances in communication and the ability to travel, Rotumans, as well as their relatives in the diaspora, are beginning to search each other out. During the research for this thesis many Torres Strait informants were in the throes of tracing family members, visiting and getting to know them and discovering, much to their delight, the similarities that continue to exist between them.<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>417</sup> Krasna, interview Kingscliff, 2004, Sailor, interview Thursday island, 2004, Mye interview Erub island, 2004, Marseu website <http://marseu.com> accessed July 2007.

### **Rotuman diaspora in Australia since mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.**

Rotumans living in Australia today compete favourably with Europeans for employment and their standard of living is relatively high, similar to that of other Australians. The Rotuman ability to integrate successfully into other cultures has been documented in work by Howard and, as Linnekin says of Oceania generally:

*certain higher level pre-suppositions are shared ... : that people can voluntarily shift their social identities, that a person can maintain more than one identity simultaneously, and that behavioural attributes – such as residence, language, dress, participation in exchanges – are not only significant markers but are also effective determinants of identity.*<sup>418</sup>

This *appears to be* a universal phenomenon amongst migrants. For example, personal experience indicates that British migrants to Australia seem to fit in while still maintaining the accent and attitudes of the homeland but these are folk with similar cultural backgrounds to the mainstream Australian population. The shift that occurs when Rotuman people change from business suit and tie to t-shirt and lavalava is more than a casual change of pace – it is a return to cultural mores that extend beyond the niceties of assimilation. Around their family and extended ethnic group Rotuman Australians go back to being Rotumans in another land. The English-speaking business executive slides with amazing ease into the persona, speech and bearing of the Rotuman islander with many of the memories, stories and traditions inherent in that culture.

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<sup>418</sup> Jocelyn Linnekin and Lin Poyer (eds), *Cultural Identity and Ethnicity in the Pacific*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1990, p.9.



The major concern in Rotuman families and communities in Australia is the maintenance of language, values and morality – the understanding of cultural right and wrong – all of which underpin Rotuman-ness. This is not an unusual feature of migrant life no matter from which culture a migrant might hail. All migrants feel the weight of cultural loss or diminution. However, for most Anglo-European migrants the loss is one of minor magnitude – an acknowledgement of essential sameness within the differences. Pacific cultures are sufficiently different to the basic Anglo-European model that informs Australian culture to find the transition into the Australian community more confronting.

The idea of Rotuman-ness and the Rotuman ability to maintain their cultural identity concerns the Australian Rotuman elders. Their unease lies mainly with the acculturation of the younger members of the Rotuman community. They believe that peer pressure at school, intermarriage into Australia's increasingly multicultural society and the death of the Rotuman-born older generation may reduce the ability of the second and later generation Australian-born Rotumans to maintain the customs of a culture grown in a different land. Already language loss is apparent in Australian-born Rotumans and efforts are being made by older Rotumans to address it by making lessons in the Rotuman language available. These have not always been successful or long lasting as parents are increasingly

busy at work. As well, members of the community do not always live close to one another and this occasions time-consuming travel to language lessons.<sup>419</sup>

As New Zealand academic Cluny Macpherson has found in his studies of the Samoan community in New Zealand, loss of cultural identity is of concern to other Pacific Islanders as well. He notes that the power of the elders waned in light of the culture of individualism and youth espoused by the government:

*Parents could neither isolate their children from these influences nor demand an allegiance to their world-view and lifestyle. The more or less absolute control which parents enjoyed over their children in Island societies and which was instrumental in the transmission of certain key elements of world-view and lifestyle, was constrained by New Zealand law.*<sup>420</sup>

He also writes of the influence of intermarriage between Samoans and other Pacific Islanders, Maori and *pakeha*<sup>421</sup> which has caused a degree of ambiguity to creep into the espoused identity of the younger generation of Pacific Islanders and pushed them towards a “New Zealand born” or even a pan-Pacific identity.<sup>422</sup>

The major influences for change, for example the influence of formal education, wider social networks, loss of language, the declining power and influence of the

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<sup>419</sup> Interviews with Kapieni Patresio and Torike Sanerive, Melbourne, 2001, Kapieni and Agnes Manueli, Brisbane, 2001 and John and Akata Muaror, Sydney, 2001.

<sup>420</sup> Cluny Macpherson, “One Trunk Sends Out Many Branches: Pacific Cultures and Cultural Identities,” in Cluny Macpherson, Paul Spoonley and Melani Anae (eds), *Tangata O Te Moana Nui: The Evolving Identities of Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, Dunmore Press, Palmerston North, 2001, p. 74.

<sup>421</sup> The European population of Aotearoa/New Zealand are termed *pakeha* and in other parts of the Pacific *palangi*.

<sup>422</sup> Macpherson, 2001, p. 75.

older generation and geographical dispersal,<sup>423</sup> are also likely to impact on Rotumans in diaspora with similar effects.

Significant concern has been voiced by academics about the high incidence of youth suicide in Pacific Island groups in New Zealand and elsewhere in the Pacific, possibly related to cultural change. Donald Rubenstein of the Micronesian Area Research Centre at the University of Guam argues that Pacific Islander youth suicide is exacerbated by an increasing prevalence of “changes in family structure from lineage to nuclear household and the loss of cultural supports for adolescent socialisation ...”<sup>424</sup> Dr Jemaima Tiatia, a New Zealand-born Samoan and professional researcher, in discussing the high rate of Pacific Islander<sup>425</sup> youth suicide in New Zealand places the onerous financial and social requirements of the *aiga* (family) and the *fa’a samoa* (the Samoan way) squarely in the causal frame.<sup>426</sup>

Insufficient specific statistics are available to make any meaningful comment regarding rates of suicide or attempted suicide regarding the Pacific Islander community in Australia. The statistically smaller community of Pacific Islanders,

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<sup>423</sup> Richard Bedford, Cluny Macpherson and Paul Spoonley, “Pacific Communities in the Information Age,” [http://www.minpac.govt.nz/resources\\_pvc\\_migrationandsettlement\\_presentersnotes.htm](http://www.minpac.govt.nz/resources_pvc_migrationandsettlement_presentersnotes.htm), accessed February 2007.

<sup>424</sup> Donald H Rubenstein, “Suicide in Micronesia and Samoa: A Critique of Explanations,” in *Pacific Studies*, Vol. 15, No.1, 1992, p. 71.

<sup>425</sup> The youth under discussion were Samoan, Tongan, Cook Island Maori, Niuean, Tuvaluan and of mixed race. Jemaima Tiatia, “Rethinking Culture: A Youth Perspective” delivered at the Pacific Prosperity Conference, New Zealand, 2005, [http://www.minpac.govt.nz/resources\\_ppc\\_rethinkculture.htm](http://www.minpac.govt.nz/resources_ppc_rethinkculture.htm), accessed February 2007.

<sup>426</sup> Tiatia, 2005, [http://www.minpac.govt.nz/resources\\_ppc\\_rethinkculture.htm](http://www.minpac.govt.nz/resources_ppc_rethinkculture.htm), accessed February 2007.

including Rotumans, in Australia does not appear to have the same incidence of suicide as elsewhere in Oceania. No incidences of youth suicide amongst Rotumans in Australia were found, however this is possibly due to the way the statistics are collected and recorded. Dr. Riaz Hassan of Flinders University of South Australia noted in 1996 that Australian-born members of immigrant communities tended to suicide significantly less than those born overseas. This is due to the greater incidence of anomie resulting from the disruption caused to social ties amongst those arriving in a new country.<sup>427</sup> Factors which might influence a low suicide rate amongst Rotuman migrants would be the increased likelihood of family or community cohesion and support, the sponsorship of newcomers and the ability of migrants to speak English.

When Rotumans get together there are often long discussions about relationships and children are always included. One way to create a cohesive community in a new land is through common links. Rotuman Australians' linkages of family and place were easily found as, like most societies without a written language, Rotumans kept in their heads a family tree several generations long and often up to six cousins removed wide. They often had a good idea of the make-up of other people's families as well. Rotumans often joke that they are all blood relations because the island is so small! For centuries, knowledge of one person's relationship to another has been important in ordering society and calculating obligation. For example relationships are involved in decisions about who you consult to have certain ailments cured, who loans you a pig when you need one

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<sup>427</sup> Riaz Hassan, "Social Factors in Suicide in Australia," in *Australian Institute of Criminology; Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, No.52, February 1996, p. 4.

for a ceremony and whether you stop and bow your head when someone passes. Knowing who people are and how they fit into society saves one from the acute shame and embarrassment of doing the wrong thing and being teased about it for years. One story that reinforces this idea is that of the family in Oinafa in Rotuma, at the time of the first missionaries, who obtained a box of biscuits. They liked the biscuits so much they saved a few and planted them hoping to get more. A hundred years later and that family are still called the “biscuit planters.”<sup>428</sup>

The elders in the Rotuman community are valued for their wisdom and memory of the past. They are the link to the Rotuman ancestry of the present community. As this generation age and die the Rotuman community in Australia will lose a valuable cultural repository. Community leaders have deliberately set out to maintain as high a level of Rotuman identity within their communities as possible by working to encourage youth participation in Rotuman celebrations through dance troupes to learn and provide traditional dancing entertainment. They are supportive of island music for example the work of the Lalavi Band in Sydney. Through this they hope to engender pride and a desire to maintain the customs of their elders.

While a few of the original Rotuman migrants to Australia were unaccompanied Rotuman men or women married to Australian men, many of those who followed migrated with Rotuman spouses or as part of a Rotuman family group. Among

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<sup>428</sup> Martoa Dickinson, interview Sydney, 2003; Kapieni Manueli, interview Brisbane, 2003.

the eighteen Rotuman individuals interviewed eight had met their Australian spouse in Fiji and travelled to Australia with them. Four came out to visit or stay with family members already in Australia and the remainder were both Rotuman and came as a family group. As those left behind in Rotuma and Fiji saw the benefits – education, employment, good health facilities and greater wealth – being enjoyed by their friends and relatives in Australia, they too began to think about moving. Help with accommodation, food, furniture and integration into the community was offered in true Rotuman fashion.<sup>429</sup> Young people arriving on their own to pursue their education were billeted with relatives or friends of relatives. In Australia, unlike in the main islands of Fiji, the district boundaries of Rotuma blurred, binding the community closer together.

Yet others came with partners from other Pacific islands. The latter, while not Rotuman, were also brought up in the Pacific island social milieu so their inclusion into the growing Rotuman community was relatively easy. Partners not of Pacific island origins were welcomed at all of the gatherings and encouraged to participate in the cultural events held on a regular basis. There were many examples of the latter throughout all of the Australian Rotuman communities, but perhaps the most interesting were one Brisbane family – the wife, a blond Australian lass from outback Queensland, dances alongside the Rotuman women and her own children at all the major gatherings.<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> Marie Dickinson, interview Sydney, 2003.

<sup>430</sup> Cheryl Matthewsell, interview Brisbane, 2004.

Taking part in singing and dancing at these festivities is not just a small diversion for the community and its youth. The boys and girls in the community are taught the traditional songs and dances from an early age and are encouraged to take part in all the community events including Rotuma Day celebrations. Depending on the audience each song and dance has a meaning as well as a story attached to it, the performance of which reinforces the messages they contain. Dr Karl Neuenfeldt of the Central Queensland University illustrated a good example of this when, in 2004, he and Nigel Pegrum, musician and producer, recorded a CD of Rotuman Chants and Hymns. Released in 2006, the chants and hymns were sung by the Churchward Chapel Choir and recorded at the University of the South Pacific in Suva as part of a collaborative project between the Churchward Chapel Rotuman Choir, the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture and the Media Centre at the University of the South Pacific, Rotuman researcher Makareta Mua and Central Queensland University. The first selection on the CD consists of a *tautoga*, a traditional musical arrangement that usually accompanies dancing at large festivals and gatherings, and which,

*consistent with traditional Rotuman musical practice, .... [was] ... written specifically for the occasion [the project]. They are notable for their eclectic and current topics but are mainly connected to issues arising from the Rotuman diaspora to Fiji and elsewhere such as Australia.*<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> Karl Neuenfeldt, “‘Bring the Past to the Present’: Recording and Reviving Rotuman Music via a Collaborative Rotuman/Fijian/Australian CD Project,” in *World of Music* 2007 forthcoming.

Song and dance is part of all important get-togethers in Rotuma, for example Rotuma or Cession Day celebrations, Church conferences, weddings, headstone raisings, visits by dignitaries and the like. The performances usually take place in front of Chiefs, dignitaries and invited guests after the feasting is concluded.<sup>432</sup> The repetitive nature of the chants ensures that the message being relayed gets across in a culture without a written language. The *tautonga* consists of a number of parts – the *sua*, the *tiap hi* and the *tiap forau*. The *purotu* or composer of the song, if he or she is a good one, will include information about the history of the occasion, the people concerned, the village if such is involved. The *tiap hi* “may make reference to old myths and legends and might even end up with a moral.”<sup>433</sup>

Neuenfeldt shows how the collaborative recording noted previously relates to the Australian/Torres Strait connection :

*What follows are some examples and summaries of the traditional chants and mak ka pelu songs, which acknowledge and thus link members of the historical and contemporary Rotuman diaspora. Of the two sua, Kapa Roa'iq Se Laloga and Tātāve Ta Forau, the latter has an explicit connection to the diasporic Rotumans and is couched in the maritime and mobile metaphor of seagulls.*

*Tukuga fāua tātāve ta forau/ Tu'unoa se ufaga 'ona Hāuāt/ āsia  
mafa katoa' noho 'e vasa/ Kapa roa poa ne Rotuam se māoan/ Hi'ia  
– e/ Hi'ie hie hie*

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<sup>432</sup> Alan Howard, “Culture - Music and Dance”, <http://hawaii.edu/oceanic/rotuma/os/Music.html>, accessed August 2005.

<sup>433</sup> Hereniko, 1991, p. 132.



*In the dying year seagulls migrated/ Find themselves in a new environment [Australia]/ Visiting friends living abroad/ Reviving identity, not to be forgotten.*

*The Tiap Hi is even more explicit: naming some of the places Rotumans live in Australia, including Torres Strait. Although there has been no direct migration to the Torres Strait since the late 1800s, the migrants' descendants are still considered part of the diaspora.*

*Mafakatoa' ne Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide/Mafakatoa' ne Brisbane, Darwin, Perth Ma Torres Strait/aqlum ne Kesmas te'/Ma fau fo'ou 'I la pupe'*

*Beloved friends in Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide/Beloved friends in Brisbane, Darwin, Perth and Torres Strait/The blessing of Christmas and the happiness of the New Year be with us all*

*The Tiap Forau, identified here by its first line "Jenega ava 'eake kot kamata", alludes to Rotumans leaving home to work in maritime industries. They brought back with them material goods such as marble tombstones, wood for houses and bicycles. They also brought back with them Bible translations from Tasmania.<sup>434</sup>*

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<sup>434</sup> Karl Neuenfeldt, " 'Bring the Past to the Present': Recording and Reviving Rotuman Music via a Collaborative Rotuman/Fijian/Australian CD Project," in *World of Music* 2007 forthcoming.



Torres Strait Dancers, Torres Strait Cultural Festival 2006<sup>435</sup>

Reverend Iven Fatiaki, interviewed by Neuenfeldt, said that music was used in church and social gatherings to unite people and

*bring the past to the present, remembering what had been done.*

*The happenings of the past can be related through music to perhaps*

*revive what had happened and to maintain the culture<sup>436</sup>*

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<sup>435</sup> [http://www.torresnews.com.au/index.php?option=com\\_zoom&Itemid=33&catid=19](http://www.torresnews.com.au/index.php?option=com_zoom&Itemid=33&catid=19)

<sup>436</sup> Neuenfeldt, 2007 forthcoming.



An Australian spouse dances with other Rotuman women and girls



Her small daughter dances with the group at the Rotuma Day Celebration,  
Brisbane, 2003



Tautonga<sup>437</sup>, photographed on Rotuma in the 1920s by Resident Commissioner Dr H. S. Evans

The composition by the Rotuman choir in Fiji shows the strength of the links between the Rotuman community in Fiji and those in the diaspora as well as the support tendered by one to the other. These musical traditions are carried on in Rotuman community ceremonies in Australia and elsewhere outside Rotuma and Fiji. Thus the past is remembered and passed on.

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<sup>437</sup> The tautonga is an action song consisting of three different types of song and dance in a complete performance conducted in time to a group of elders beating a pile of folded mats.



Reverend Marseu drumming in *ha'heta* – Rotuma Day, Brisbane, 2003

The dancing is accompanied by the *ha'heta* a group of the older members of the community who beat time on a folded mat with sticks. They are the ones who know the language, the songs and poetry and the intonation required to produce the correct backing for the dancing.<sup>438</sup>

The dress for the *tautoga* is also indicative of the past – the *ha'fali* or lavalava appears to have been introduced by the missionaries for the sake of the Christian sense of decency however the skirt of leaves worn over it is similar to the leaf skirts worn at these occasions in pre-missionary times. They also wear the

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<sup>438</sup> Hereniko, 1991, p.132-33.

traditional *fui* or star-shaped decoration made from the young palm leaf – women wear one during the *tautoga* while men have several tied in a garland and intermingled with fragrant flowers.



Reverend Marseu (left) and author wearing *tefui*, Rotuma Day, Brisbane, 2003.

The Rotuma Day celebration tells us a great deal about the Rotuman ideas of history and identity. Rotuma Day is important to the Rotuman people because it was voluntary – it involved Rotuman agency – and signalled the end of sectarian violence brought about by the animosity between the Catholic and Protestant factions on the island in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Rotumans are now an essentially peace-loving people to whom God is important. Cession ensured a lasting peace on the island and assistance from the British Government. Thus Rotuma Day, celebrating as it does all things Rotuman, celebrates the continuation of a Rotuman culture.

The Rotuma Day celebrations or *kato'aga* are usually conducted by both the Sydney and Brisbane communities in May each year. The Melbourne community is too small to do so and their members often travel to Sydney for the occasion. From time to time, members of other communities visit each other at that time. For example in 1998 sixty-six members of the Brisbane community travelled to Sydney for the weekend to celebrate Rotuma Day with relatives in the Sydney community. Several visitors from Fiji and California were also present.

On that occasion 300 guests saw the Drummoyne Rotuman Congregation, the Wesley Mission Rotuman Congregation and the Brisbane Rotuman community groups dance the *tautoga* and listen to the then newly formed Lalavi band composed of seven Rotuman musicians play Rotuman and Pacific songs and melodies. Traditional food from the *koua* (underground oven) – pork, chicken and taro – as well as tinned beef formed part of the feast and the customary Rotuman card game *pasa* took up some time after the cultural performances. The evening was spent enjoying a *mak fifisi* or European style dance until midnight. The next day the celebration ended with a combined church service at the Drummoyne Uniting Church with the visiting minister Voi Taukave giving a sermon on “The Stories We Tell Our Children.” The day ended in a traditional feast of Rotuman food including pork, chicken, *fekai* (pudding), *vai tahroro moa* (dish of meat and coconut), *ikou* (cooked taro leaves) and *tipari* (banana ‘tea’

thickened with arrowroot) and other dishes.<sup>439</sup> The program and food was as traditional as it could be away from Rotuma itself. Rotuma Day celebrations are essentially the same whether they are held in Sydney, Brisbane, Suva or Rotuma.

The author was present at the Brisbane celebration in 2003 as a guest and was privileged to see the way the event was organised as well as the preparation that went into the dancing as well as the *koua* or underground oven and the *fekei* or sweet pudding. The occasion was conducted to all intents and purposes as if it were in Rotuma with the food for the special guest served first on *umefe*, small individual tables, in front of the crowd.

Rotuma Day in Brisbane 2003 was a collective memory fest. Official sanction was given to it by the presence of Fiji's High Commissioner to Australia, Major General George Konrote, one of Rotuma's favourite sons. Major General Konrote was Force Commander to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon until 1999 and later Minister for Home Affairs in Suva, Fiji. He has strongly supported the Rotuman community in Australia.<sup>440</sup> The Brisbane Rotuman community took great care to ensure that the ceremonial aspect of the day was correct. The day was also an opportunity to teach young Rotumans how ceremonial is conducted at "home." The festivity began with a traditional feast at which the important guests, sitting on Rotuman mats, were

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<sup>439</sup> Organising Committee of Rotuma Day 1998, News Page, Rotuma Website, <http://www.hawaii.edu/oceanic/rotuma/os/NewsArchive/Archive1998/archive9805.htm> accessed August 2005.

<sup>440</sup> Major General George Konroti, interview Canberra, 2003





Getting ready for the *tautoga* Rotuma Day, Brisbane, 2003



Food for special guests served on *umefe*, Rotuma Day, Brisbane 2003.



Pork straight from the *koua*



*Fekai* being prepared, Rotuma Day, Brisbane, 2003

ceremonially decorated with *tefui* or flower garlands then presented with *kava* followed by specially cooked food.

The men of the community had been busy since the early hours preparing the *koua* and had cooked a pig, chickens, fish, kumara and much taro. This was divided in the traditional way and placed in baskets then served on banana leaves to the guests by women. They also served fruit and a special pudding called a *fekei*. They remained on their knees throughout as a mark of respect for the special guests. Once the main guest, usually a Chief but in this instance Major General Konrote, had finished his meal he spoke at length in both Rotuman and English on the reason for the celebration and the Rotuman community in Australia. He reminded them of the history behind the celebration and also about the importance of the special relationship Rotumans enjoyed with indigenous Fijians in Fijian society. He urged the community to “work honestly and diligently” and went on to mention those Rotumans who had made outstanding contributions in the fields of religion, business, medicine, sport and government.

Dancing followed the meal and speeches. Women from the community sprayed powder and perfume on the dancers and the special guests and this functioned as an air freshener as well as a symbol of goodwill. Paper money was also placed in the bodices and waistbands of the dancers<sup>441</sup> to show appreciation for a good performance and also to contribute to the cost of the entertainment. The dances

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<sup>441</sup> Note the similarity to the Torres Strait custom of perfuming dancers, a tradition not mentioned by Haddon, so this custom may have been brought to Australia with the early Rotuman pearlers.

themselves spoke of the history of Rotuma and her cession to Britain and were danced by older people as well as girls and boys as young as five years. Reconstructing the ceremonies held in Rotuma over 120 years ago gave the Rotuman community in Australia a concrete link to their past through performance in the present.



Guests join in – Major General Jioje Konrote then Fiji High Commissioner to Australia



Kapieni Manueli, then leader of the Queensland Rotuman Community, and a lady guest, Rotuma Day Brisbane, 2003

Christianity in all its forms, from the original missionary led Wesleyan Methodists and Roman Catholics to the modern day Assembly of God and the Church of the Latter Day Saints, is a very important component of the lives of Rotumans both in Rotuma and overseas. The basic Christian message is, it would be fair to say, more important to most Rotumans than the type of Church that they attend. The Rotuman sense of morality has always been in accord with the tenets of Christianity, probably explaining why the latter has been so successful. For example the moral of fairness and “doing the right thing by others” is also apparent in the Raho legend when Raho discovers Tokaniua’s dried marker placed on a tree near the newer one belonging to Raho to trick him into believing that Tokaniua arrived on the island first. Raho’s first response was anger, which was appeased by *Hanit e ma’us*, the so-called woman of the bush or perhaps more

rightly understood as representing the original inhabitants, by appealing to his better nature to save the island from destruction.<sup>442</sup>

As already noted, Christianity has played an important part in the lives of Rotumans on the island since the first missionaries arrived there in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Faith in God and the ability to attend Sunday services strongly influenced the earliest arrivals decision to stay in Australia. The Sunday service in Drummoyne provided the tiny Rotuman community of Sydney with their only opportunity to speak their own language. Once a week they could relax in the company of fellow islanders and enjoy interacting with much joking and banter and that particularly lewd sense of humour commonly heard when even the most quiet and conservative of Rotuman men and women get together.<sup>443</sup> Joking discourse, as Jeanette Mageo of Washington State University notes, is used in both special formal and everyday informal occasions. In the latter sense she contends that it is normative, that is, it is used as a counterweight to mediate the tensions caused in the male/female relationship.<sup>444</sup> In migration the joking discourse is maintained, providing strong evidence that Rotuman cultural norms continue to flourish, providing the release for the tensions traditionally encountered in male/female relations especially outside the intimate sphere.

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<sup>442</sup> Aubrey Parke, *Seksek 'E Hatana: Strolling on Hatana: Traditions of Rotuma and its Dependencies*, Institute of Pacific studies, University of the South Pacific, Suva, 2001, p40; Mesulama Titifanua and C. Maxwell Churchward, *Tales of a Lonely Island*, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, Suva, 1995, p. 10 and p. 13.

<sup>443</sup> Kapi Patresio, interview Melbourne, 2003; See also Visoni Hereniko "Clowning as Political Commentary: Polynesia, Then and now," in *The Contemporary Pacific: A Journal of Island Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 1, Spring 1994, p. 4 and Alan Howard and Jan Rensel, "Where has Rotuman culture gone and what is it doing there?" in *Pacific Studies*, 24 (1/2) 2001, pp. 63-88.

<sup>444</sup> Jeanette Marie Mageo, 1999, "Toward Historicizing Gender in Polynesia: On Vilsoni Hereniko's *Woven Gods* and Regional Patterns," in *Pacific Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1, March 1999, p. 93.

Along with reminiscences after the familiar service, joking discourse engaged the collective memory and introduced the children to their Rotuman culture. This is borne out by informants in the Australian diaspora as well as Rotuman-born academic Vilsoni Hereniko, who noted when discussing the humorous clan descriptor stories or *te samuga* that it was one way of passing on family history and “a cultural way of deflating pomposity and ensuring humility among (the people).”<sup>445</sup> Similar gatherings took place in Brisbane at the Nudgee Uniting Church, and in Melbourne at the Richmond Uniting Church where a member of the Rotuman community is caretaker.

The majority of the members of the Australian Rotuman communities attend church every Sunday. Both the Brisbane and Sydney communities are able to hold a service in Rotuman and this is a particular draw-card. The Brisbane community also makes a point of getting together afterwards for a meal and to generally catch up on all the latest news and gossip in the community and in Fiji and Rotuma. On Saturdays cultural awareness meetings are held and in 2005 these included discussions on the ceremonies held to celebrate first birthdays, learning basic Rotuman and learning songs and dances. In 2005 the Brisbane Rotuman Community Committee organised a Youth Camp to bring the young people of the community together for a weekend to spend some time finding out about being Rotuman, enjoying one another’s company and having fun.<sup>446</sup> These

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<sup>445</sup> John Muaror, interview Sydney 2003; Vilsoni Hereniko, “Indigenous Knowledge and Academic Imperialism,” in Robert Borofsky(ed), *Remembrance of Pacific Pasts: An Invitation to Remake History*, University of Hawai’i Press, Honolulu, 2000. p. 81.

<sup>446</sup> Brisbane Rotuman Community Webpage, <http://www.connectqld.org.au/asp/index.asp?pgid=24668>, accessed August 2005.

types of activities are based around the church and the community and are conducted in a spirit of inclusiveness and enjoyment as well as learning.

Diasporic communities by their nature are situated within a wider society in the places where they settle. This entails a degree of risk to traditional culture through a wearing away of the sense of community caused by pressures from the mainstream society. These influences come, in the main, through the day to day transactions diaspora members have with those of the wider society – at school and work, in nightclubs, anywhere that non-diaspora members form the majority. When diaspora members marry into the dominant culture or live in widely separate suburbs in large cities the opportunities for coming together with other community members can be difficult and rare. In modern Australian society, as with other western societies, the impetus to attend gatherings can be interrupted by the need to attend to all the other demands of daily life, for example work and children's sporting activities. Consequently the reinforcement of cultural mores can be difficult to achieve.

The Rotuman elders in Australia are very concerned about the diminution of their culture particularly in their young people. Few amongst the Rotuman youth in Australia speak Rotuman and, as they grow older, some are less inclined to maintain their links with the church where much of the acculturation outside the immediate family takes place. Language is a key element in the bonding of a community. As Kapieni Patresio, one of the Melbourne Rotumans said, "When



you lose your lingo you lose everything.”<sup>447</sup> This is akin to the Sapir/Whorf hypothesis that the relationship between language and culture is crucial in shaping thoughts and defining experience.<sup>448</sup> According to UNESCO:

*The world’s languages represent an extraordinary wealth of human creativity. They contain and express the total “pool of ideas”, nurtured over time through heritage, local traditions and customs communicated through local languages. The diversity of ideas carried by different languages and sustained by different cultures is as necessary as the diversity of species and ecosystems for the survival of humanity and of life on our planet. In many cases the knowledge of natural cures and remedies for illnesses transmitted by languages through generations and linked to local plant life have been lost due to the abandonment of languages and cultures, and the destruction of natural habitat.*<sup>449</sup>

In other words losing the ability to communicate in the language of one’s native group means the loss of the nuance encapsulated within one’s culture. It is for this reason that stories which communicate common cultural understandings of morality, social values and norms are less effective when told in a language other than that of the culture being transmitted.<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>447</sup> Kapieni Patresio, interview Melbourne, 2003.

<sup>448</sup> Raymond Scupin, *Cultural Anthropology: A Global Perspective*, Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 2000, pp. 106 and 116

<sup>449</sup> [http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=18391&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=18391&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html), accessed August 2005.

<sup>450</sup> See for example Mark Le, “Miscommunication: from intracultural to intercultural socialization,” in *Language, Society and Culture*, Issue 4, 1999, p. 1, <http://www.educ.utas.edu.au/users/tle/JOURNAL/Articles/Le/Le.html>, accessed April 2008.

As already noted the Brisbane community has begun a series of meetings involving learning the Rotuman language and these have so far been popular. As Ron Mathewsell, the President of the Rotuman Community, said:

*the language, song and dance classes held last Saturday 13/08/05 was [sic] well attended by members and friends. We all had fun and a laugh learning basic rotuman. [sic] I applaud not only those making the effort to learn the language but also to Tivaka and the others helping to teach us our mother tongue.*<sup>451</sup>

Classes in Rotuman language were held over a five to six year period in Sydney with up to 40 people attending<sup>452</sup> but similar classes failed to prosper in Melbourne. The Melbourne community, unlike Sydney, is smaller and widely scattered largely due to the vast sprawl of the city. If both parents worked they could find no time to travel the distances to classes.<sup>453</sup> One father of three thought that knowledge of the Rotuman language was so important it was all he spoke to his children at home.<sup>454</sup> In Canberra, a young boy thought similarly and was teaching himself with the aid of a Rotuman/English dictionary and his mother so that he could write to his grandmother in Rotuma.<sup>455</sup>

Loss of faith is also a very central concern because of the role religion plays in the cohesiveness of the community, particularly in diaspora. Young people not

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<sup>451</sup> Brisbane Rotuman Community Webpage, <http://www.connectqld.org.au/asp/index.asp?pgid=24668>, message posted 15 August 2005, accessed August 2005.

<sup>452</sup> Martoa Dickinson, News Page, Rotuma Website, <http://www.hawaii.edu/oceanic/rotuma/os/NewsArchive/Archive1998/archive9805.htm>, and <http://www.hawaii.edu/oceanic/rotuma/os/NewsArchive/Archive1998/archive9811.htm>, accessed March 2006.

<sup>453</sup> Torike Sanerive, interview Melbourne, 2003; Marie Dickinson, interview Sydney, 2003.

<sup>454</sup> Ata Susau, interview Melbourne, 2003.

<sup>455</sup> Violet Bray, interview Canberra, 2003.

attending church not only miss out on the important Christian message but also on the community get-together afterwards. That poses the problem of how knowledge of history and right behaviour is passed on. The loss of young people from the active community is also enervating for the older people and sets a bad example for those who do attend.<sup>456</sup>

Not all members of the community are willing or able to attend. Indeed the desire of some members of the Rotuman community to keep their associations secular has caused severe tensions to develop from time to time. Other tensions have included the long standing Catholic/Protestant tensions and the appointment of non-Rotuman ministers for the Rotuman community.<sup>457</sup> At the time the research for this thesis was conducted these situations were in the past but occasional factionalism amongst the Rotuman communities in diaspora has had a tendency to fracture and divide and, in that way, exacerbate any erosion of culture taking place.

Inter-marriage into the wider community brings its own concerns. Not all Australians are comfortable with the tight community life enjoyed by Pacific Islanders. Out-marriage can have its strains, however most Rotumans interviewed did not automatically see marriage into other cultural groups as a great problem for the continuity of their culture. Many of those who do marry out do so to people who have similar attitudes and tolerances to family and ethnic community. In the course of the interviews conducted with the Rotuman

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<sup>456</sup> Various interviews, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, 2003.

<sup>457</sup> Sef Fatiaki, interview Canberra, 2003.

community I came across a number of Rotumans married to Australians, Tuvaluans and Indo-Fijians, amongst others, and all happily mixed in together at barbeques, fundraisers and at church. This is not to say that there are not other Rotumans in Australia who do not attend the community get-togethers, simply that it would appear that the majority do regardless of who they marry.<sup>458</sup>

To make sure that children have an understanding of their identity parents tell them stories about Rotuma and what it was like there in “the olden days.” They tell them the myths and legends that are associated with the island – how it was made with baskets of soil from Samoa, about Raho, the founding chief, making the small islets that surround the big island when he hit his digging stick on the ground in a temper, about why people visiting Lhosa, at the sunset end of the island, should not wear red at dusk and why women relieving themselves outside in certain areas might be entered by the eel spirit and bear his children. Because identity in Oceanic peoples is situated in social groups as well as in physical place, the impact of these stories on Australian Rotuman children is not as strong as on those in Rotuma. They do not carry the same set of understandings. Those who can hear the stories in the Rotuman language as well as physically visit the places mentioned and at the same time experience the “atmosphere” and Rotuman spirits, come away with a profound sense of their identity and place within the Rotuman culture. To achieve this understanding many Rotuman migrants take their children back to the island as often as they can. Indeed, several informants

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<sup>458</sup> Agnes Hannan, Field notes, Research trip to Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra and Brisbane 2003.

spoke of sending their children back to live with grandparents or other relatives for extended periods for that reason.<sup>459</sup>

In situating their children on the island migrant parents ensure that they absorb the nuances of their culture including the spirituality bound up with the notion of place. These spiritual concepts – the presence of *atua* and the cultural significance, positive and negative, of certain creatures, for example eels, sharks and owls to mention only a few, continue to be remembered today in the diaspora as even devout Christians relate stories of their power and exploits in reminiscing about “home.”<sup>460</sup> For example one informant spoke of the need for women to be very careful not to relieve themselves outside in an open space but to do so near trees in case they were entered by an *atua* and impregnated. If this happened it was possible that the woman would give birth to an eel. Another spoke of hearing strange sounds whenever he went to a particular part of his family plantation to work and knew that they were *atua*. Yet another told the author that he did not believe in the old ways but not to go to places such as Sisilo, where the *sau* are buried because it was “eerie,” intimating that it may not be safe.

According to two of MacGregor’s informants, Nataniela and Niua, Tagroa “prophesied that a real god was coming later and all the lesser gods would be under him. The gates of heaven would open and he would come through.”<sup>461</sup> This story accords with explanations given by modern day Rotuman migrants in

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<sup>459</sup> John Fatiaki, interview Suva, 2003; Sosefo Inoke, interview Townsville, 2002.

<sup>460</sup> Kapieni and Agnes Manueli, interview Brisbane, 2003; Kapieni Patresio, interview Melbourne, 2003.

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*

Sydney who said that they considered the old gods simply as forerunners of the one true God.<sup>462</sup> In that way the old gods were never rejected outright, they simply gave way to a more powerful one. This sensitivity in not rejecting them shows that there was a continuing belief and MacGregor's note that Tagroa was associated with the Christian god because he was referred to as '*aitmana* or all powerful, all mighty, emphasises this conclusion. In Rotuman Christian practice God is also referred to as '*Aitmana* or the Almighty.<sup>463</sup> Research into the prophecy made by Tagaroa uncovered no further information but bearing in mind that religion and spirituality are always culturally mediated<sup>464</sup> it would not be surprising for Rotumans to maintain some form of belief in their past spiritual affiliations. Informants in the Melbourne and Sydney diaspora, when asked if they believed in the old ways, noted that it was easier to believe when on the island thus linking the belief directly back to place and identity as Rotumans. Thus collective memory is exercised by migrant Rotumans in Australia to teach their children about their background, to instil and reinforce traditional Rotuman cultural mores and to enliven the Australian Rotuman community.

Comparing the two waves of Rotuman migration is instructive in seeing the ways in which collective memory works. The descendants of the men who arrived in the Torres Strait over a hundred years ago still demonstrate a consciousness of being part-Rotuman. Rotuman influences in tomb raising ceremonies, the custom of perfuming dancers and the *taibobo* dance style have all become part of the

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<sup>462</sup> Martoa Dickinson – Agnes Hannan conversation Sydney 2003.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>464</sup> Garry Trompf, "Missions, Christianity and modernity," in Tony Swain and Garry Trompf, *The Religions of Oceania*, Routledge, London, 1995, p. 205.

general Torres Strait Island custom to the extent that the people no longer consciously associate the two. It is probable that the limited retention of Rotuman customs and cultural practices can be attributed to the fact that the original migrants formed such a small group and were all men. For them, without Rotuman women and the reinforcement of Rotuman culture, it was appropriate to assume the Torres Strait Islands way of life. Some things carry great emotional and spiritual meaning and it is these that have survived. It is testament to the strength and meaning of the Rotuman cultural mores to the early migrants – the tomb raising and dance in particular – that it continued to be practised; further that it was adopted by the indigenous Torres Strait Islanders who, along with those of Rotuman descent, have ensured that persisted in the cultural memory of the people.

Understanding Rotuman community life is the key to understanding the Rotumans in Australia because Oceanic peoples see their value and identity in terms of their relationship to their community rather than as individuals. The Torres Strait held similar values allowing the Rotumans who stayed on there before the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to feel more at home than they may have done on the mainland. The more recent arrivals in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne have their own Rotuman associations in each city, as has Adelaide,<sup>465</sup> through which they get together to socialize and raise money for the “folks back home.” Rotuman dances are performed, the language spoken and stories of the island are told, reinforcing the shared memories and planting the first seeds of collective

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<sup>465</sup> See Adelaide Rotuman group website at <http://www.rotumasouthaustraliaonline.com/index.htm>, accessed June 2007.

memory in the listening children. Church meetings ensure a weekly opportunity to express their faith in God and to get together socially. The associations as a whole meet less frequently, usually between quarterly and yearly, depending on the enthusiasm of the leadership. However the core organisers are often the leaders of the most prominent local group. It is the associations who organise the big events like Rotuma Day or fundraising dinner dances in aid of charity for the island of Rotuma and who thus play the greatest role in keeping the Rotuman collective memory alive in mainland Australia.

In conclusion, collective memory functions in all communities to situate culture and identity. It is usually an unconscious act on the part of community members who get together to perform the “festivals, ceremonies and rites” of their forebears.<sup>466</sup> This chapter contends that the Rotuman community in mainland Australia uses collective memory in a more conscious manner than the Rotuman migrants in the Torres Strait did. The latter were men on their own who maintained only those parts of their culture that were of greatest value to them. These were in turn adopted by the indigenous people among whom they lived and Torres Strait collective memory came into play to maintain them. In addition, it was more difficult for the Rotumans in the Torres Strait to return home; the cost of the passage alone was prohibitive. Rather they adapted to the most relevant of the Torres Strait cultural traits and continued to maintain whatever cultural tenets

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<sup>466</sup> Johannes Feichtinger, “Aspects on Collective Memory: Maurice Halbwachs,” Lecture, Inter-University Centre, Dubrovnik, 2002, p.1, <http://gewi.kfunigraz.ac.at/~johannes/Halbwachs.pdf>, accessed August 2005.



of their own were important to them. This may not necessarily be a harbinger of how Rotumans arriving on the mainland will react over time.

The later wave of Rotumans had developed a strong sense of their identity vis-à-vis others because of their longer association with Fiji and Fijians.<sup>467</sup> The lifestyle and worldview of mainstream Australian society is very different to that of Rotuma and Fiji. As well the later migrants included women and families, a microcosm of the life at home, and this would have heightened the feeling of need to protect and maintain identity.

To do this the community and its leaders exercise collective memory through group solidarity at times of Christian worship, commemoration of special events and assistance to the home community on the island and in Fiji. Education of the younger members of the overseas Rotuman community in Rotuman custom, dance, story telling and exposure to Rotuman foodstuffs adds to the strength of their ability to relate to their culture. The importance to some Rotuman families of sending their children to family in Fiji and Rotuma itself speaks volumes about the value they attach to their culture.

However, it is unlikely that the strength of collective memory will be enough to maintain the cultural integrity of the Rotuman community in mainland Australia over the long term unless successive generations promote it vigorously once the

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<sup>467</sup> Alan Howard and Irwin Howard, "Rotumans in Fiji: The Genesis of an Ethnic Group," in M. Lieber, ed. *Exiles and Migrants in Oceania*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 1977, pp. 161-194.

seed population has passed away. Unlike the first wave of Pacific Islanders who went to live in an island group amongst a roughly equal number of indigenous people who had similar worldviews and lifestyle, the second wave of Rotuman migrants and their children are very much a minority in a multicultural society. Thus it is likely that third and fourth generation Australians of Rotuman descent will, unlike those in the Torres Strait who have kept cultural traits alive by successfully introducing them to the host society, maintain only the more meaningful cultural traits until they cease to be relevant.

**PART II**  
**BEING ROTUMAN IN AUSTRALIA**

-7-

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**VISITS, REMITTANCES, FUNDRAISING AND CULTURAL  
MAINTENANCE**

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*... if they were to take out a mortgage on a house of their own in Australia they wouldn't be able to go back to Rotuma to visit friends and relatives. So they stayed renting<sup>468</sup>.*

A Rotuman is “brought into the world amidst ceremony that places him immediately into a network of social obligations, ... he is ... [also] ... part of his parents’ social network, and his behaviour implicates them.”<sup>469</sup> First generation migrants have been strongly acculturated into the Rotuman way of doing things by the time they went to school and are very sensitive to the requirements of living in Rotuman society and thus of being a Rotuman in every sense of the word. Rotumans are accordingly already involved in a cultural set of obligations when they arrive in Australia and this set of obligations continues on to following generations. This occurs as children are introduced to the Rotuman world view by parents and grandparents through the medium of everyday life and storytelling and inclusion in the many community gatherings and cultural occasions.

Remittances, visits and fundraising form some of the physical avenues of connection that allow expatriate Rotumans to maintain their link with their

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<sup>468</sup> Semesi David, property developer of Rotuman descent based in Sydney, Australia, interviewed in Suva, Fiji, August 2003.

<sup>469</sup> Alan Howard, *Learning to be Rotuman: Enculturation in the South Pacific*, Teachers College Press, New York, 1970, p. 27.

cultural roots. Visiting – either connecting with their own local community or interstate communities, having relatives from Fiji and/or Rotuma visit Australia or taking the family home to visit them – reinforces cultural and family ties. Sending remittances back to Fiji and Rotuma enables family members at home to afford better education, improved living standards, to build a house or take a holiday. Another avenue of connection is the conduct of fundraising drives to enable services to be provided to the home community on Rotuma, such as generators or school books; or donated items – computers for the primary school, clothing or material. In this way old ties are maintained, with these strategies enabling Rotumans in Australia to feel that they remain a concrete part of the Rotuman community both here and at home. It also reminds those back in Rotuma that their kin in the diaspora continue to uphold the obligations necessary to maintain their rights in Rotuma. In this way these actions form new configurations in so far as the cultural traditions of reciprocity and personal connections are maintained despite the tyranny of distance.

Remittances are an important and expected part of the migration process particularly in the Pacific. Geoff Bertram, in revisiting the MIRAB<sup>470</sup> model, speaks about the continuing importance of remittances for Pacific islands and the relative success of the practice in the sense that island communities, regardless of their size or remoteness, were doing better than most of the impoverished nations of sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and South Asia. This was occurring despite the fact that copra had ceased to be profitable across the region, the Cook

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<sup>470</sup> Migrant-Remittance Aid-Bureaucracy

Islands had stopped production of orange juice, Niuean passionfruit was not being exported, Kiribati phosphate was depleted, Tuvalu was reduced to exporting postage stamps and Funafuti's tuna fleet was at the bottom of a lagoon.<sup>471</sup>

In 1989, according to Jan Rensel,

*Migrant involvement contributed directly or indirectly to the income of several households [in Rotuma]. Remittances were received by 13 households, and amounted to 14 percent of the total income received by the 17 households studied.*<sup>472</sup>

Research on the island of Rotuma in 2003 revealed that the previous year some FJD150,000<sup>473</sup> had arrived by Western Union money transfer through the Post Office at Ahau.<sup>474</sup> The Chairman of the Rotuma Council, the late Visanti Makrava, estimated that the amount entering Rotuma in one form or another was more likely to be in the vicinity of FJD1,000,000 given the amount of money being spent in the Post Office shop and other outlets across the island on imported food and other items.<sup>475</sup> This was confirmed by the *Fiji Times Online* in June 2007 when it was reported that “Rotumans living on Viti Levu repatriated \$1 million a month to relatives on their homeland ... the figure was confirmed by

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<sup>471</sup> Geoff Bertram, *The Mirab Model in The 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, a paper delivered to the Islands of the World VIII International Conference, November 2004 at Kinmen (Quemoy) Island Taiwan, pp. 752-53 at <http://www.giee.ntnu.edu.tw/island/>, accessed 15 August 2005.

<sup>472</sup> Jan Rensel, “The Fiji Connection: Migrant Involvement in the Economy of Rotuma,” in *Pacific Viewpoint* 34, 1993, pp. 215-240

<sup>473</sup> FJD – Fiji Dollar

<sup>474</sup> Postmaster, Ahau, Rotuma, 2003.

<sup>475</sup> Visanti Makrava, interview Ahau, Rotuma, 2003.

the elders of Rotuma.”<sup>476</sup> This amounts to some \$FJD500 each month for every Rotuman living on the island. Other funds arrive in the pockets of visitors.<sup>477</sup>

Bryant noted in 1990 that “[o]f all groups moving between the provinces and districts of Fiji, Rotumans are the least likely to undertake return migration to their island.”<sup>478</sup> Those who do return are usually the older migrants who return in their retirement.<sup>479</sup> Despite this reluctance to return (unless as a retiree), Bryant also noted that

*[t]he close ties between Rotumans and their home island, demonstrated by remittances and concern among Rotumans living abroad and in Fiji about the impacts of development on their island, ensure that contacts are strongly maintained.*<sup>480</sup>

These sentiments are echoed by Tevita Katafono, writing from Sydney on the Rotuma Net Forum in December 2003, who notes the level of remittances from Fiji and overseas contributed to a tripling in the disposable income of the average family on the island between the 1970s and 2003. During this period, and in the years since then, Rotumans have gained higher levels of education. This, in turn, has allowed them to obtain more lucrative employment and, as a consequence, to remit larger amounts of money to relatives in the island. Katafono goes on to observe that while this contributes to a “remittance-propped economy” it has also

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<sup>476</sup> *Fiji Times Online*, 12 June 2007, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/NewsArchive/Archive2007/archive0706.htm>, accessed November 2007.

<sup>477</sup> Visanti Makrava, interview Ahau, Rotuma, 2003.

<sup>478</sup> J.J. Bryant, “Rotuman Migration and Fiji,” in John Connell (ed), *Migration and development in the South Pacific*, Rsearch School of Pacific Studies, ANU, Canberra, 1990, p. 138

<sup>479</sup> Jioji Konrote, interview Canberra, 2003.

<sup>480</sup> Bryant, 1990, p.138.

had a role in assisting small business on the island and supplying some families with a small income.<sup>481</sup>

With the population on the island reflecting a higher number of older people and young children, as young adults move away and older retirees move back and look after grandchildren, the reliance on store-bought food has increased and this, coupled with the remoteness of the island, has increased the cost of living. This, in turn, has raised the importance of remittances. A survey of the two senior classes at the Rotuma High School found that, of the 30 responses to a question about possible reasons for emigrating away from the island, more than half responded in terms of the opportunities for making money and helping those left behind. The students saw the prospect of helping parents and grandparents on the island as a positive outcome of emigration and had themselves benefited from such remittances.<sup>482</sup> All students had relatives domiciled overseas; only one had no relatives in Australia. Although this thesis uses an estimate of 500 Rotumans in Australia of the 10,000 worldwide it is important to note that almost all have known relatives on the island of Rotuma. This speaks to the many interlinked networks that exist between Australian Rotumans in diaspora and those who continue to live on the island.

Remittances are an important issue in most expatriate Pacific Islander households. This is illustrated by the data gathered by Va'a from his sample of Samoan migrants to Australia. Of 137 households surveyed in 1992-1993 only

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<sup>481</sup> Tevita Katafono, [www.rotuma.net/os/Forum/Forum26.html](http://www.rotuma.net/os/Forum/Forum26.html), accessed November 2007.

<sup>482</sup> Survey conducted by Agnes Hannan at Rotuma High School 2003.

17 sent no money or gifts back to relatives in Samoa. The other 120 households managed to remit AU\$254,910 in cash as well as gifts to the value of AU\$70,165.<sup>483</sup> Similarly Helen Morton Lee records that Tongan immigrants in Brisbane in the 1990s remitted US\$2000 per migrant each year to family members in Tonga.<sup>484</sup> In this sense Rotuman immigrants are not different from their counterparts in the expatriate Samoan and Tongan communities.

However, as Ken'ichi Sudo has pointed out,

*The inducement for migrants to send remittances is not limited to the altruistic motivation of raising the standard of living of their family in the natal society ... [rather] ... that remittances have a strong correlation with migrants' attempts to maintain their land rights in the home island, personal investment and their life plans after retirement.*<sup>485</sup>

This is also shown in the continuing involvement of expatriate Rotumans in the business of the island and in the numbers of older Rotumans who are now building modern homes there in their retirement.<sup>486</sup>

Consequently, the migrants themselves benefit from the money and goods they send home in a number of different ways. It can be seen as a way of maintaining

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<sup>483</sup> Va'a, 2001, p. 177.

<sup>484</sup> Helen Morton Lee, *Tongans Overseas: Between Two Shores*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 2003, p. 32.

<sup>485</sup> Ken'ichi Sudo, "Introduction: Contemporary Migration in Oceania," in Ken'ichi Sudo and Shuji Yoshida (eds), *Contemporary Migration In Oceania: Diaspora and Network*, The Japan Centre for Area Studies, Osaka, 1997, p. 7.

<sup>486</sup> Expatriate Rotuman interest in the island economy and society is amply shown in letters to the Rotuma website as well as in conversation with the author who was also shown the new homes being built on her visit to the island in 2003.



reciprocal links with the island and the Fiji community – links that are crucial to their identity as Rotumans and their continuing physical connection to the island and its land. By remitting money they assist their relatives in practical ways through the ability to educate children, support the elderly, purchase tools and equipment to make cultivation of the plantation more efficient and improve their standard of living. In return the giver gains *mana*<sup>487</sup> in the sense of strengthening their connection to their family and to the Rotuman way of doing things – being generous, helping out, ensuring that all their obligations are fulfilled and in doing so maintaining appropriate levels of respect and obligation towards themselves. The latter is important when the migrant makes a trip back to Fiji or the island and assures them of a place at the cultural table, so to speak. Remittances can thus be seen as a two-way street with traffic in the form of benefits flowing in both directions.

Rotumans delight in visiting each other, in Rotuma, Fiji and in Australia. Visits take place for many reasons – births, deaths, weddings, Christmas, Rotuma Day, to attend the South Pacific Games, to make *tefui*<sup>488</sup> for a cultural gathering - or no reason – just a good gossip. No matter what the occasion or where it is physically situated culture – in the form of stories from the past, discussions about ceremonial format, who is related to who, land issues in Rotuma – is constantly being reinforced and revisited. It cannot be emphasised strongly enough how

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<sup>487</sup> *Mana* in Polynesian culture is analogous to respect, but it combines elements of respect, authority, power and prestige. Those who have *mana* have influence and authority.

<sup>488</sup> *Tefui* are garlands made up of several *fui* or flower-like discs made from the heart leaves of the sago palm and strung with fragrant flowers that can include *musko* or ylang-ylang and leaves onto colourful wool strings.

much importance is placed on community and knowledge of family linkages in these exchanges. Important as well, in these visits and in the exchange of information, is the involvement of the younger generation who are further educated at these times in the Rotuman way.

In December 2004 Rotuma was inundated with the largest group of returnees for some years. This is set to be repeated in 2007 with the charter of a special boat by the Motusa community in Suva<sup>489</sup> and also the scheduling of five return voyages by the Blue Lagoon Cruise line from Lautoka to Rotuma between 3 December 2007 and 18 January 2008.<sup>490</sup> The Christmas holidays are a significant rest time for the Rotumans and on the island this time is used to celebrate the birth of Christ, to socialize and have fun. It is marked by the custom of *fara* when people from different villages go around to other villages on the island singing and dancing. They are usually given gifts and with the huge influx of “tourists” some left the island with many gifts of local manufacture to remind them of their visit.<sup>491</sup>

The 2004 trip was organised by the Motusa Suva Group and invitations were extended to the Rotuman diaspora throughout the world. As John Muaror of Sydney said:

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<sup>489</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/bulletboard.htm> accessed November 2007.

<sup>490</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/News.html> accessed November 2007.

<sup>491</sup> Sanimeli Maraf, News Page, Rotuma Website, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/NewsArchive/Archive2005/archive0502.htm>, accessed August 2005.

*People were talking about the tour throughout 2004 and were excited about it, those from Motusa village and those from elsewhere. Not to forget friends from Sydney (including the Lalavi Group and families), Melbourne, and New Zealand. Altogether about 400 people were involved in the tour, a record for the books.*<sup>492</sup>

Not only were the visitors overwhelmed by the event so were the locals, as Pam Nataniela wrote in her letter to the Rotuma website News Page, “This has to be one of the best holiday times I can remember ... many visitors had not been back to Rotuma for so many years.”<sup>493</sup>

Some of the returning Rotumans were billeted in a camp set up at the Motusa Primary School and all were treated to a *kato’aga* in honour of the new electricity system installed at Motusa. They were understandably excited to see “homes lit and street lights turned on right throughout Christmas.”<sup>494</sup> Despite the abundance of stars in the Rotuma night sky it can be unnerving walking around in the dark especially if there is no moon. And even more especially if you are a Rotuman who still, and most do, has a hidden concern about the various *atua* who might be about the place.<sup>495</sup> While these beliefs appear to be specific to place – Rotumans

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<sup>492</sup> John Muaror, News Page, 22 March 2005, Rotuma Website, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/NewsArchive/Archive2005/archive0503.htm>, accessed August 2005.

<sup>493</sup> Pam Nataniela, News Page, 12 January 2005, Rotuma Website, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/NewsArchive/Archive2005/archive0501.htm>, accessed August 2005.

<sup>494</sup> John Muaror, News Page, 22 March 2005, Rotuma Website, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/NewsArchive/Archive2005/archive0503.htm>, accessed 16 August 2005.

<sup>495</sup> While Christianity has dispelled some of the belief in the supernatural spirits of old the belief is still prevalent amongst many Rotumans including those who live overseas. Kapi Patresio interview, Melbourne, 2003, Kapieni and Aggie Manueli interview, Brisbane, 2003.

in Australia spoke about *atua* only in relation to Rotuma and particular sites there rather than of any similar



Lunch under the palm trees on Rotuma<sup>496</sup>

situations in Australian towns and cities – one needs to remember that most places in Australia are well-lit at night.<sup>497</sup>

The visitors and locals sang, danced, played music and drank kava into the small hours most nights. According to all reports there

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<sup>496</sup> Photograph from John Muaror  
<http://www.rotuma.net/os/NewsArchive/Archive2005/archive0503.htm>, accessed 16 August 2005.

<sup>497</sup> Kapieni Manueli, interview Brisbane, 2003.

*were the fara trips around the island, journeys to Afgaha and Hatana<sup>498</sup>, visits to popular spots such as Lulu and "Ana te Siliga," to name a few. There were also invitations to weddings and church services in other villages.<sup>499</sup>*

The cultural importance of visits like this for the people is immeasurable and particularly for the young people who were able to experience at first hand the way things were done on the island. They were able to learn the *tautoga* in the place it was first performed amongst people who had been brought up there.<sup>500</sup>

The importance of this is that traditional ceremonial dances usually depend on the ability of people to remember the steps, the music and the story behind them to ensure the authenticity of the message they purport to send. In Rotuma visitors could participate in the fun of the *fara* and listen to the songs and the stories. Once back home they would be able to visualise their heritage and in doing so the meanings would be richer and more dense.

This raises the question of how important place is in the conduct of cultural pursuits such as traditional song and dance. "Rotuman (spiritual) beliefs seem to be strongly context dependent," writes Howard in the conclusion to his 1996

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<sup>498</sup> Afgaha and Hatana are islands off the coast of Rotuma, the former to the south east, the latter to the north west. Hatana is regarded as a significant place for Rotumans as it is Raho's final resting place and, as such, has great spiritual significance.

<sup>499</sup> John Muaror, News Page, 22 March 2005, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/NewsArchive/Archive2005/archive0503.htm>, accessed August 2005.

<sup>500</sup> Maa Emerite Littlewood, News Page, 29 April 2005, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/NewsArchive/Archive2005/archive0504.htm>, accessed August 2005.

paper “Speak of the Devils: Discourse and Belief in Rotuma.”<sup>501</sup> In contrast to the idea of spirituality – of *aitu* and *atua* – which appear to be linked to the island, song, dance and storytelling are viable beyond the geographic boundaries of Rotuma itself because they speak to the cultural origins of the islanders and do not interfere with the generally strong Christian beliefs to which migrant Rotumans espouse.

On their departure, the visiting expatriates experienced similarly bad weather to that of their arrival. The ship had to anchor out so first-time visitors had the experience, both coming and going, of being transported to and from the shore rather than walking on and off at the wharf. This is not an unusual thing on Rotuma but for the people from Australia it was something to remember. The mode of transport to and from the ship was by launch not unlike, perhaps, the old days of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when all cargo was loaded and unloaded that way. The contrast between then and now was of course in the type of launch used – to quote Sanimeli Maraf:

*There were five launches going back and forth taking luggage from the beach to the ship. Kids were swimming around. We noticed Dr John Fatiaki helping out in his flash boat.*<sup>502</sup>

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<sup>501</sup> Howard, “Speak of the Devils: Discourse and Belief in Rotuma,” in *Spirits in Culture, History, and Mind*, edited by Jeannette Mageo and Alan Howard. New York: Routledge, 1996

<sup>502</sup> Sanimeli Maraf, News Page, 26 February 2005, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/NewsArchive/Archive2005/archive0502.htm>, accessed August 2005.

These are experiences that will stay with the visitors for a long time and will form part of the cultural cues used to maintain their Rotuman-ness once back home. Ribbing Dr Fatiaki about his boat is so very Rotuman and many things of that nature will be gossiped about for months in yet another reinforcement of culture.

The research for this thesis indicated that the usual reason for non-planned familial visits from Australia to Fiji was to do primarily with death. The recent untimely passing of Reverend Jione Langi, President of the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma, called representatives of all the Rotuman communities, as well as close relatives, in Australia back to Fiji to pay their last respects to a man who had served the church and the Pacific Island people in Sydney when he worked at the Wesley Mission in the mid-1980's. Reverend Langi was an enthusiastic Rotuman minister who brought the Rotuman community together wherever he worked, whether in Australia, New Zealand or Fiji and was highly respected for his leadership and his dedication to both the church and the Rotuman people.<sup>503</sup>

It will be very important for those of his relatives, especially close ones, who could not get to the funeral to try their hardest to attend the *hot'ak hafu* or 'headstone raising' that occurs a year after the death. This ceremony has been described in the previous chapter but it deserves a further brief mention here because of its importance in maintaining family links and culture over time and space. This ceremony is an important one as much for its value in collecting the

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<sup>503</sup> Uniting Church President, Rev. Dr. Dean Drayton, News Page, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/News.html>, accessed August 2005; Brisbane Rotuman Community Website, <http://www.connectqld.org.au/asp/index.asp?pgid=24673>, accessed August 2005.

members of a family together with close friends to celebrate the life of the deceased and the cessation of responsibilities and obligations to that person as for its value in bringing people together to do this in a traditional and thus culturally re-energising way. These occasions are powerful ones for Rotumans and they feel extremely sad if they miss out on the opportunity to support and commiserate with loved ones at these times.

While some of the community travel for the weddings of close relatives, the research indicates that they are accorded less importance than funerals and *hot'ak hafu*. The cost associated with the travel and the decline in the traditional forms does not encourage more than very close kin to be present. This underlines one of the key ideas which differentiates Rotuman Australians from the home island community and perhaps, to a lesser extent, those in the main Fiji islands. It also emphasises the importance of the wedding invitations to those Rotumans who visited at Christmas 2004. These ceremonies would have been very traditional given their geographical location and the memories all the richer for it. Young Rotuman Australians attending would have been immersed in the Rotuman ways and, as a consequence, taken home a kinaesthetic knowledge of the experience which tends to remain in the memory longer than knowledge obtained only aurally. While weddings in Australia may lack some of the traditional features, they are usually very well attended and are likely to attract more guests than were actually invited as more remote friends and kinfolk hear about it and arrive to party. The costs for these occasions can be astronomical and to ensure no



embarrassment are heavily over-catered.<sup>504</sup> Accordingly they still maintain a degree of cultural integrity through the recognition of the wider Rotuman community and the principles of reciprocity and hospitality.

Sending children back to Rotuma to stay with relatives for a period of time is also a relatively common practice. This is especially so from the main Fiji islands but Australian informants have also spoken of it being employed as a means of giving the children some foundation in their culture. Most often the children go back with their parents for the Christmas holidays but others return for a full school term and take classes at the local island school for the duration of their visit. These children usually live with grandparents or aunts and uncles during their sojourn. Several Australian Rotumans said that they had sent their children home for a long visit or were intending to do so.<sup>505</sup> In Rotuman society children are often to be found living with their relatives at various times and it is not uncommon for grandparents to have their grandchildren for extended periods or for children to be “adopted” by relatives who are childless. Consequently the idea of sending children back to the island for an extended period may be painful for the parents and children alike, but it is an accepted part of being Rotuman.<sup>506</sup>

Accommodation is rarely a problem for visitors to a Rotuman household, whether in Australia, Fiji, Rotuma or elsewhere in the world. A spot, even if it is on the

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<sup>504</sup> Martoa Dickinson, interview Sydney, 2003.

<sup>505</sup> Sosefo Inoke, interview Townsville, 2002; Dr John Fatiaki, interview Suva, 2003; Martoa Dickinson, interview Sydney, 2003; Churia Barnes, interview Sydney, 2003.

<sup>506</sup> Makarita Wong, interview Sydney, 2003; Alan Howard, “Adoption on Rotuma,” in Vern Carroll, *Adoption in Eastern Oceania*, University of Hawai’i Press, Honolulu, 1970.

floor will be found; food will be prepared and the host family will go out of its way to ensure that visitors are as comfortable as possible. One young visitor to Rotuma remarked:

*When we had to go to sleep I asked where do we sleep and they pointed at the floor I thought it was pretty crazy since I'm not used to it but I guess it would cost a lot with like 10 people living in the house. The next morning I was a little sore but that didn't stop me from running around.<sup>507</sup>*

One way of looking at visiting the homeland, and to a perhaps lesser extent visiting other Rotumans in Australia, is as a form of secular redemption and cultural renewal. Loretta Baldassar's use of the idea of return visits as pilgrimage and as part of the migration process in discussing Italian migrants from San Fior in Treviso to Western Australia is pertinent to other migrant groups including Rotumans. "Migrancy," she says, "is not simply about geographical movement but cultural continuity, discontinuity and transmutation."<sup>508</sup> The pilgrimage model places returning migrants in the role of pilgrim travelling back to the secular shrine of the homeland or village in search of cultural validation and in the case of second generation returnees cultural transformation. Alongside the notion of pilgrimage Baldassar places the idea of connection to place and settlement abroad.<sup>509</sup> Her sample of about 200 San Fiorese is similar to the

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<sup>507</sup> Sosefo Gordon, Youth Section, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Youth/youth002.htm>, accessed August 2005.

<sup>508</sup> Loretta Baldassar, "The Return Visit as Pilgrimage: Secular Redemption and Cultural renewal in the Migration Process," in Eric Richards and Jaqueline Templeton (eds), *The Australian Immigrant in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Searching Neglected Sources: Visible Immigrants: Five.* Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra, 1998, p. 129.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

numbers of Rotumans, who certainly number no more than 500, in urban Australian cities.

In coming to her conclusion that return visits are akin to pilgrimages, Baldassar makes several points regarding the migration process that have relevance to the Rotuman experience. Migration, she contends, is both an economic strategy and a cultural process that does not end with settlement. Visits to the home country should be understood as stages in the process of migration, which can be seen as a trans-national interaction in which both losing and gaining communities participate, and it is the **idea**, rather than the actuality, of place that forms the migrant identity.<sup>510</sup> Often migrants leave their homeland with the intention of returning permanently at some time in the future. This option was aired often in interviews with Rotumans in Australia.<sup>511</sup> On return they find that changes have taken place not only in themselves and those left behind but also in the life and the place to which they perceived they would return. Thus the process of migration gains another step – the final settlement in the new country with the homeland taking on the role of exemplar. When return visits continue they may take on a different role in the process.<sup>512</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries migration has become a global norm with the rise of trans-nationalism, the process through

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<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>511</sup> Manueli, interview Brisbane, 2003, Barnes, interview Sydney, 2003, Konrote, interview Canberra, 2003.

<sup>512</sup> Baldassar, pp. 144-145.

which people establish and maintain socio-cultural connections across geopolitical borders.<sup>513</sup>

The work of Carol Delaney likens the annual return of Turkish seasonal workers in Germany to their natal villages in Turkey to the *hajj*, albeit in a secular frame, noting that it is “an integral part of their experience as immigrants.”<sup>514</sup> To Delaney, “while the journey to Mecca fulfils the obligation of a lifetime, the journey home represents a lifetime of obligation.”<sup>515</sup>

The notion of “a lifetime of obligation” resonates with the Rotuman cultural values of kinship and reciprocity. These values are key symbols which Rotumans overseas use to define to others what is important in their culture. Another key symbol for Rotumans overseas is the island of Rotuma itself. Sherry Ortner writes that “each culture has certain key elements which, in an ill-defined way, are crucial to its distinctive organisation.”<sup>516</sup> She divides these symbols into two types; the summarizing symbols, which sum up and represent what a system means for the participant and the elaborating symbols which provide the platform for “sorting out complex and undifferentiated feelings and ideas, making them comprehensible to oneself, communicable to others and translatable into orderly action.”<sup>517</sup> Thus the island of Rotuma is a summarizing symbol for expatriate

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<sup>513</sup> Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, Cristina Blanc-Szanton, “Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 645 July 1992, p. ix.

<sup>514</sup> Delaney, p. 513.

<sup>515</sup> Baldassar, p. 141.

<sup>516</sup> Sherry Ortner, “On Key Symbols,” in *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 75, No. 5, October 1973, p. 1338

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*, 1973, p. 1340.

Rotumans somewhat like the American flag is for Americans. The concept of the island, like the flag, embodies a plethora of ideas and values which are powerful motive forces. The cultural values of kinship and reciprocity on the other hand are elaborating symbols in the sense that it is through these symbols that Rotumans project their sense of themselves as Rotumans.

Both are important to the hypothesis of return as pilgrimage. The medieval (or Roman Catholic) Christian pilgrimage was predicated on a journey from home, often in the company of other like minded people, to a shrine where salvation could be sought, its antithesis being the home, family and community. With the Protestant Reformation came the modern or Protestant idea of pilgrimage which rests on the notion of a journey out alone into life and society, the reverse of which is reunion with family. In placing the Rotuman return to the home island as a pilgrimage, the island of Rotuma itself can be regarded as the sacred place to which the migrant journeys back for renewal or secular redemption. As G.K. Neville writes,

*[t]he Protestant pilgrimage comments on ... a world in which the person lives in a constant state of individual striving and self-actualisation but in which the religious imperative calls for communal life and loyalty to one's family and kin ... the pilgrimage acts as a vehicle for constructing meanings, for making sense of the contradictions, for attempting a ritual resolution of seemingly impossible cultural demands.<sup>518</sup>*

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<sup>518</sup> G.K. Neville, in Baldassar 1998, pp. 147-8.

Baldassar's use of the pilgrimage model as a cultural paradigm to try to explain the return visits to the homeland of her San Fiorans is particularly pertinent when looking at the Rotuman situation if one posits it in terms of a Protestant world view model of pilgrimage.

In this model the pilgrim is the member of the family who leaves home and hearth by necessity and makes a new "home" in the new place, a place where they are essentially an individual. They may have established a family of their own and an extended kinship or fictive kinship network with whom they maintain much of the tenets of their natal culture. Their reunion with kinfolk on the island of Rotuma is the pilgrimage – a return to the beginning, to the bosom of the family, the hearth and a reification of identity.

In the case of the Rotuman diaspora in Australia, identity is still firmly centred on the island of Rotuma and the Rotuman community in Fiji. It was obvious in many discussions in the course of interviews in 2003 that Rotuma was regarded as a paradise by more than one or two individuals including the Fiji High Commissioner to Australia, Major General Jioje Konrote. All other places were compared with the island and most Rotumans professed a desire to go back there if not for good at least for regular extended visits.

The occurrence of return visits does not feature strongly in any Australian studies of migration and thus the complexity of the migration process has not been fully

examined.<sup>519</sup> However, given the vision of Rotuma as a paradise it would not be unfair to say that visits home take on the aura of a pilgrimage. They are anticipated through the act of saving money for the trip and the accumulation of goods to take back. Sacrifices are made in order to undertake the trip. Rotumans are re-energised and their sense of culture and identity strengthened by visiting home.

Visiting Fiji and Rotuma thus contributes strongly to the reinforcement and maintenance of Rotuman culture in those who have emigrated and in the transmission of it to those younger Rotumans who were born overseas. Frequent visits back to the island or Fiji also maintain important cultural links as wealth in the form of foreign manufactured goods and appliances flow into Fiji and Rotuma and equally valued Rotuman articles – fine presentation mats or *apei* and the more utilitarian floor mats, woven fans and baskets are brought back. Being back amongst friends and relatives reinforces the collective memory of the group and enables them to return to their adopted country with a renewed sense of cultural identity.

Identifying as Rotuman involves members of the diaspora in the need to maintain their links to extended kin networks in ways other than personal remittances and visits. Consequently, fundraising events are organised on a regular basis by the Rotuman communities in Australia to raise money for their associations as well as for the church. From time to time the money raised is used to fund a project

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<sup>519</sup> Baldassar, p. 136.

back home in Rotuma. These projects have helped to pay for computers for the primary and secondary schools on the island.

At other times fundraising events, such as “Tropicana” conducted each year by the Drummoyne Rotuman Congregation, is especially for the church. This event like many others is usually well patronised, drawing a crowd of over 460 people. While not all of those attending are Rotumans – many would have been other Pacific Islanders and Australians – these events have the effect of drawing the Rotuman community together to have fun island style as well as to do something to support the church. One of the dishes they serve on the night is *fekei*, the Rotuman pudding.<sup>520</sup>

Donations are also an important way that migrant Rotumans can assist those on the island. The Rotuma Hospital at Ahau has been working for many years under fairly primitive conditions relative to those enjoyed by the Rotuman diaspora in Australia. The resident doctor and the other staff do not have the luxury of the latest equipment and the building itself was in great need of repair and renovation in 2003<sup>521</sup>. In 2002 Rotumans around the world donated a large amount of equipment including

*[a] ... defibrillator, patient monitor, autoclave, walkers, I.V. pole w/stand, computer system, electric typewriter, pallets of general medical*

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<sup>520</sup> Drummoyne Rotuman Congregation, News Page, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/NewsArchive/Archive2004/archive0409.htm>, accessed August 2005.

<sup>521</sup> Agnes Hannan, Field Notes, Rotuma, 2003



*stuff, pallets of clothing for children, and a desk and educational things for preschool kids.*<sup>522</sup>

Since then a computer system and program has been donated by Semesi David, one of the wealthier Rotuman migrants in Australia.

As Jan Rensel notes:

*Migrant Rotumans have become involved with their home island in significant ways that go beyond kinship reciprocity, notably district-based fundraising, large group visits, and collaboration and support in business affairs. These forms of involvement serve the purpose of allowing migrants to remain connected with their home island, and directly or indirectly affect Rotuma's economic well-being.*<sup>523</sup>

In this examination of the practice of remittance, fundraising and return visits to Rotuma and Fiji this thesis posits that these mechanisms can also be seen as waypoints in the Rotuman journey. As part of the migration process these behaviours take on the elements of the traditional values of reciprocity and exchange and perpetuate it as a legitimate part of the Rotuman culture framed by the diaspora.

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<sup>522</sup> Hanuarani Atalifo, News Page, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/NewsArchive/Archive2002/archive0207.htm>, accessed August 2006

<sup>523</sup> Jan Rensel, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Economy.html>, accessed August 2005, abstracted from Jan Rensel, 1993, "The Fiji Connection: migrant involvement in the economy of Rotuma" in *Pacific Viewpoint* Vol. 34, No. 2, pp. 215-240.

**PART II**  
**BEING ROTUMAN IN AUSTRALIA**

-8-

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**THE INTERNET AND CULTURAL CONTINUITY**

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*We see it as being a perfect place to put photos of the Rotuman group and our functions so that relatives all over the world can see them too. ... They access Alan Howard's website often to keep up-to-date with happenings in Fiji, ... they access the 'Fiji Times' and have started using the Queensland site. They also check out flights to Fiji and New Zealand .....<sup>524</sup>*

The role of the internet in creating and reinforcing a sense of being Rotuman in Australia is one of growing importance as more homes contain computers and trans-nationalism becomes the norm for many migrants. The growth of the internet has allowed Pacific Islanders abroad to maintain a virtual contact that substitutes, to some extent, for the close contact that is usual in their communities and societies at home.

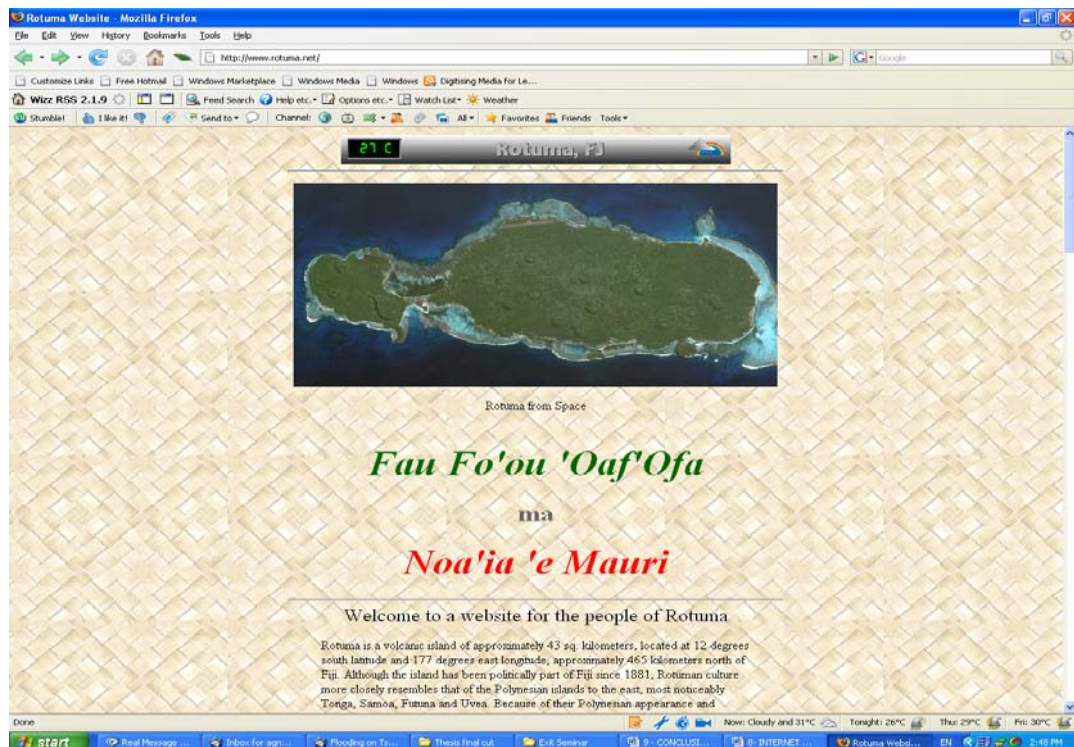
Since the research for this thesis began in 2001 the growth of Rotuma-related information on the internet has grown exponentially. From a single website put up by Alan Howard and hosted by the University of Hawai'i in 2001 there are now two websites in Australia posted by Rotuman communities as well as others run by similar groups in New Zealand and America. With the advent of *video.google.com* and other sites such as YouTube and MySpace many Rotumans from around the globe are posting videos of cultural events, interviews, music

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<sup>524</sup> Cheryl Mathewsell, personal communication 13 July 2005, in response to a question about the web habits of the Brisbane Rotuman community.

and scenes from the island for others in the international community to enjoy. Links to these sites are posted on the various internet sites dedicated to Rotuma and Rotumans and a count

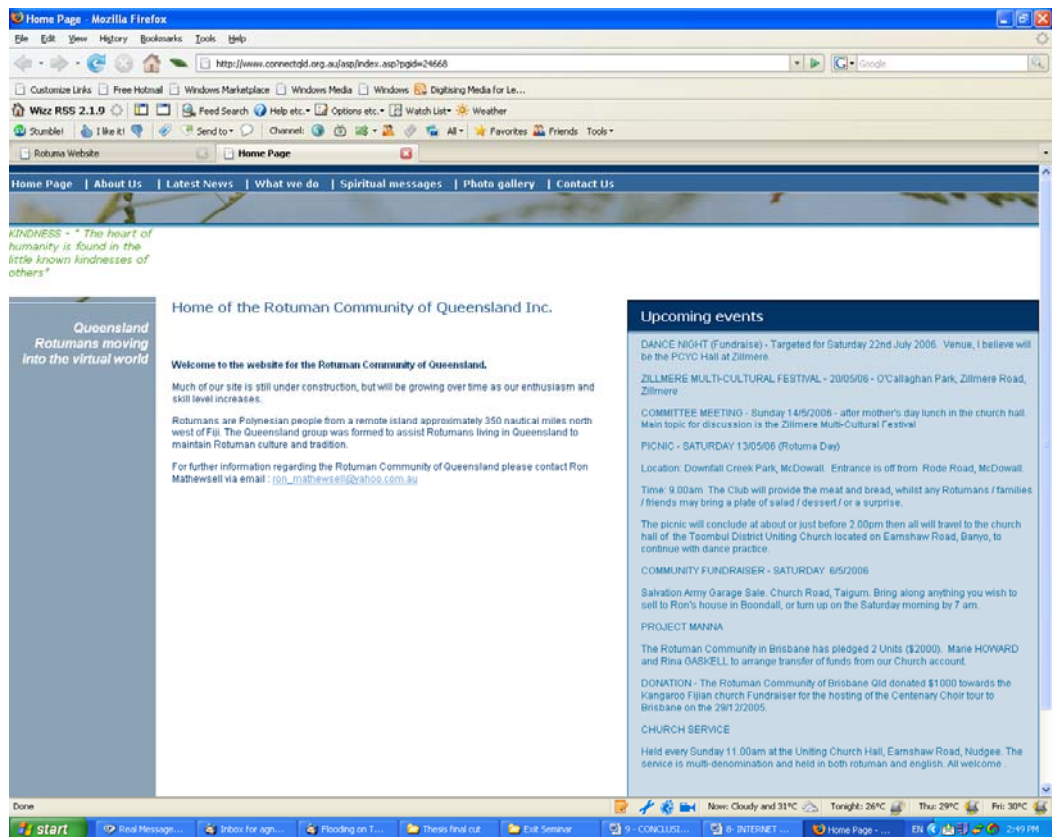
of the current videos available was in excess of twenty-five and growing.<sup>525</sup> It is clear, then, that expatriate Rotumans, young and older, are still keen to show and learn about the Rotuman way of doing things in ways that are very modern. The traditional methods of cultural transfer have gone global



Rotuma Net<sup>526</sup>

<sup>525</sup> <http://video.google.com.au/videosearch?q=Rotuma&num=10&so=0&start=0> accessed 25 November 2007.

<sup>526</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/>



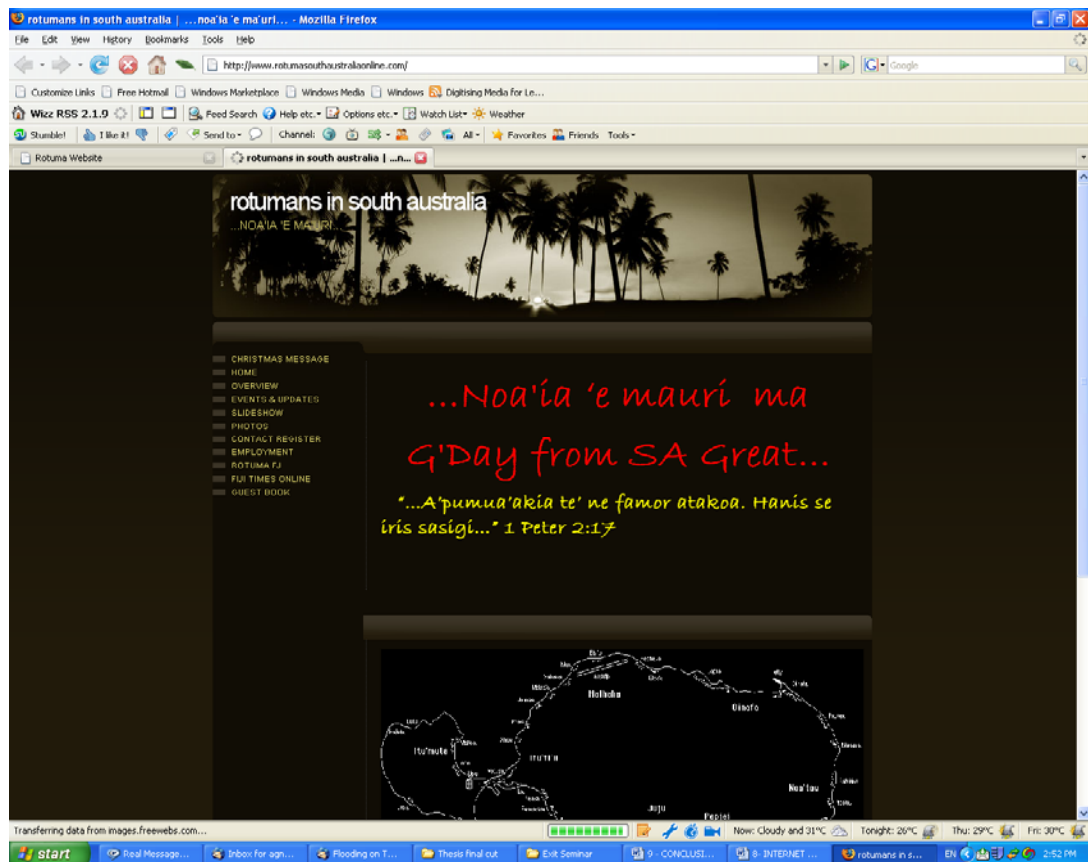
### Brisbane Rotuman Website<sup>527</sup>

It is unique in that it reduces the significance of geographical location for social interaction. The Rotuman diaspora in Australia and overseas have taken to the Internet with great eagerness and, since the establishment of the Rotuma website in 1996,<sup>528</sup> members of the community have regularly posted items on the News Page, the Bulletin Board and the Forum. Alan Howard, webmaster of the Rotuma website, noted that in its first year the Rotuma Homepage was visited 15,000 times.<sup>529</sup> This chapter contends that the internet has added another dimension to the ways in which Rotumans maintain their Rotuman

<sup>527</sup> <http://www.connectqld.org.au/asp/index.asp?pgid=24668>, accessed March 2008.

<sup>528</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/hanua.html>

<sup>529</sup> Alan Howard, "Pacific-Based Virtual Communities: Rotuma on the World Wide Web" in *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 11, 1999, pp.160-175.



South Australian Rotuman Website<sup>530</sup>

identity and culture in diaspora by enabling the transmission of collective memory and cultural messages to expand from the local to the global diaspora.

This has implications for the way the Rotuman diaspora worldwide sees itself and its accessibility may limit local variations on the Rotuman theme. While the use of the Internet will exert other more global influences on Rotumans just as it does on all Internet users, this thesis is primarily concerned with Rotuman agency in maintaining and constructing their own cultural mores and will concentrate on the role the Pacific-based websites, regarded as important and often visited by

<sup>530</sup> <http://www.rotumasouthaustralialine.com/>, accessed March 2008.

Rotumans in Australia, have in reinforcing Rotuman culture offshore. The primary internet source for this is the Rotuma Website,<sup>531</sup> however other important sources are the Brisbane Rotuman Community website<sup>532</sup> and the South Australian Rotuman Community website.<sup>533</sup> Other websites accessed by Rotumans in the diaspora are a website for Fijians in Auckland, New Zealand<sup>534</sup> and a website for Fijians in Sydney, Australia<sup>535</sup> as well as others such as the *Fiji Times* online.<sup>536</sup>

The Internet is a recent innovation in terms of its use by the average world citizen being reasonably widely utilized only in the last 15 or so years. Scientific communication was networked from about 1960 and the military from around 1975 but a formal “Internet” did not come into being until around 1982. Despite its youth the Internet and the number of people using it grew from 25 million in 1995 to 83 million in 1999. From January 2005 to July of the same year the number of web servers grew from 58 million to 67.5 million.<sup>537</sup> This growth has both good and bad implications for the Pacific as the research of Michael Ogden, of University of Hawai’i at Manoa, shows.<sup>538</sup> Telephone densities,<sup>539</sup> and therefore Internet opportunities, in the Pacific region are limited. “Most Pacific

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<sup>531</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/hanua.html>

<sup>532</sup> <http://www.connectqld.org.au/asp/index.asp?pgid=24668>

<sup>533</sup> <http://www.rotumasouthaustraliaonline.com/>

<sup>534</sup> <http://www.aucklandfiji.org.nz>

<sup>535</sup> <http://www.ozfiji.com/>

<sup>536</sup> <http://www.fijitimes.com/>

<sup>537</sup> [http://news.netcraft.com/archives/web\\_server\\_survey.html](http://news.netcraft.com/archives/web_server_survey.html), “Netcraft Web Server Survey Archive”, accessed July 2005.

<sup>538</sup> Michael R Ogden, see in particular, *Islands on the Net: Technology and development Futures for Pacific Island Microstates*, PhD dissertation, University of Hawai’i, Manoa – Political Science, 1993; “Islands on the Internet” in *The Contemporary Pacific*, Fall 1999, Vol.11, Issue 2.

<sup>539</sup> Telephone density is the number of telephones compared to the total population.

Island countries,” he notes, “have primarily digital international and domestic telecommunication infrastructures, ... [however] ... telephone densities remain among the lowest in the world (approximately 2.1 percent for the region overall; Cutler 1994)”<sup>540</sup> Ogden concludes that the “new communication technologies offer as many opportunities to erode indigenous language, traditions and history as they do opportunities to preserve and strengthen.”<sup>541</sup> Within the Pacific Islands themselves this may be so, especially if their governments do not closely monitor the information revolution to ensure that the gap between the information rich and the information poor does not become so wide as to fracture the economic and social fabric of the people.

The advantages to migrant Pacific Islanders of this fast, convenient and relatively inexpensive communication with friends and relatives in the islands or in other parts of the world as well as access to cultural information and news from home may well overshadow the possible disadvantages. For example Howard’s Rotuma Website and that of the Brisbane and South Australian Rotuman communities actively encourage the maintenance of culture and language. The former by publishing some postings in Rotuman, posting Rotuman language lessons and encouraging discussion of culture and customs; the latter two doing so by example – the elders advertising and participating in cultural and language meetings and encouraging involvement by all of the community or by posting news and photographs of families, weddings and other functions.

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<sup>540</sup> Ogden, 1999, p. 451; Terry Cutler, “Telecommunications: The Pacific Link”. A Green Paper report for the Pacific Forum on the development of the telecommunications sector in the region, Cutler and Co., Melbourne, April 1994, quoted by Ogden, 1999 p.451.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*

As Terence Wesley-Smith, political scientist at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, has written:

*most Pacific-related internet traffic takes place either between people residing outside the region, or between those in urban centres in the region and the outside world... [with] ... the most active Islander participants ... [being] ... resident overseas.*<sup>542</sup>

Rotumans are no exception. Howard admits that:

*Thus far, people residing on Rotuma have been excluded from participation by technical and cost factors. Although the island has satellite access, and can make use of long distance telephone, access to Internet servers is prohibitively expensive and equipment [including computers and modems] is lacking.*<sup>543</sup>

For most on-island Rotumans the internet has little relevance as few are connected. Two exceptions are Sanimeli Maraf, wife of the Chief of Noatau, and Elisapeti Inia who regularly contribute to the News Page presumably by either contacting kinfolk in the main islands of Fiji or during visits. Both of these women are concerned with ensuring that information about the island and Rotuman culture are accessible to the diaspora. The website is therefore accessed largely by the Rotuman diaspora and others interested in Rotuma for a variety of reasons.

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<sup>542</sup> Terence Wesley-Smith, "Net Gains? Pacific Studies in Cyberspace" in *The Contemporary Pacific* Vol. 15 No. 1, Spring 2003, p. 118.

<sup>543</sup> Howard, 1999, p.169.



What does this mean for the overseas Rotumans in terms of collective memory? The answer to that question lies in what is published on the websites and who accesses it. Howard's purpose in constructing his site was to "provide information about Rotuman history, language, population and culture and to provide viewers with news from Rotuman communities around the world."<sup>544</sup> At this stage the Brisbane and South Australia Rotuman community websites are more concerned with sharing photographs of events and people with relatives wherever they were in the world and alerting the community to cultural events.<sup>545</sup>

The Websites for the Fijian communities in both Auckland and Sydney are similar though perhaps a little less conservative in their design and one includes a forum where people can post unmediated messages to one another and the community as a whole. The *Fiji Times* is accessed by Rotumans mainly to keep pace with news and events occurring in Fiji and the greater Pacific.<sup>546</sup> It allows expatriates to be heard in polls gauging opinion on events, including government policy, for example the amendments to the proposed "Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill" which will, if passed, grant amnesty to perpetrators of the coup of 2000 as well as grant compensation to victims of it.

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<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.* p.163.

<sup>545</sup> Cheryl Mathewsell, personal communication 13 July 2005, in response to a question about the web habits of the Brisbane Rotuman community. See also <http://www.connectqld.org.au/asp/index.asp?pgid=24668>

<sup>546</sup> Cheryl Mathewsell, personal communication, August 2005.

It is difficult to state categorically that Rotumans access these polls since identification by ethnic background is difficult and it is the Rotuman nature not to “rock the boat” if at all possible.<sup>547</sup> It is unlikely, however, that the more proactive of Rotuman web-surfers amongst the diaspora would by-pass the opportunity to add their point of view especially if that view was not likely to hurt or show direct disrespect for other Rotumans. There is also a “Forum” on the Fiji Online site in which visitors can express their views on just about any subject and remain anonymous to the world at large. Perhaps most important is the existence of these sites and the ability of Rotuman expatriates to access them as their confidence with the internet grows.

The Queensland (Australia) Rotuman Community was founded in 1987 with the assistance of the late Reverend Jione Langi. This group of approximately fifty members based in Brisbane first put up its website in October 2004. No statistics are available on the site at this stage so it is not possible to gauge its readership. It is web-mastered by the President of the Association and is concerned to inform members of functions and events – Rotuma Day, fundraising socials and cultural meetings – as well as to inform others about the existence and aims of the association. It also contains photographs of the members at important events such as the Rotuma Day celebrations, the local Cultural Festival and member birthday celebrations. Most of its readership accesses the Howard Rotuma website and Fiji Online for news from Fiji and Rotuma.<sup>548</sup>

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<sup>547</sup> Howard, 1970, pp. 27, 44, 108-109.

<sup>548</sup> Cheryl Mathewsell, personal communication 13 July 2005.

The website established by Howard is an important one for the Rotuman expatriate community around the world because of its holistic approach to the island's culture and the ability of people to post news and information to the site as well as using it for the more esoteric purposes of finding information about their history, politics and culture. Howard and Rensel are well known on the island and amongst the diasporic community in the USA, New Zealand and Australia. Howard's work in Rotuma began in 1959 and continues into the present; Jan began her relationship with Rotuma in the mid-1980's after a few years in environmental education. She studied cultural anthropology and gained her PhD in 1994 from the University of Hawai'i. Her dissertation field work was conducted on the island of Rotuma and she has been involved, with her husband, in research on Rotuma and its people ever since. They visit the island and the diaspora regularly and are highly regarded by the Rotuman community. For these reasons the Rotuma Website is accepted by the Rotuman community as a very useful addition to the collective memory tools with which they construct their identity.

Evidence for the acceptance is the frequency of use of the site – 195,792 hits since July 2000 - and the range of respondents featured – 28.8% from Australia, 26.6% from the USA, 12.2% from new Zealand, 7.9% from the Fiji Islands and 6.2% from Canada and 3% from the UK, Norway and France.<sup>549</sup> The source of the hits suggests that those using the website are predominantly those countries with the larger centres of Rotuman diasporic settlement – Australia, the USA and New Zealand. The smaller numbers of Rotuman migrants in Canada, UK,

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<sup>549</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/hanua.html>, Nedstats accessed August 2005.

Norway and France account for their relatively low representation but it is interesting to see the relatively small representation from Fiji. Without more evidence it is not possible to say whether this is due to a lack of technology or to the possibility that the Rotuman population in Fiji is close enough to the island to return more frequently or has a collective memory base large enough to sustain cultural continuity.

A recent survey of approximately 150 readers of the Rotuma website by Caroline Anne Clark<sup>550</sup> from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, investigated the web culture of Rotumans as part of a study on virtual communities in the Pacific. Although the sample appears small, approximately 1.5% of the total Rotumans in Fiji and the diaspora, it will be taken as representative of all those accessing the site because the percentages relating to countries of access in Clark's data accord with those of Nedstats, the statistical company employed by the site to record the data from page hits.<sup>551</sup> The majority of respondents (84%) were born in Rotuma or Fiji with a further 7% born in Australia and 5% in New Zealand. The majority of respondents were women (58.9%) and the age group with the most responses was those in the 35-39 year age bracket (39.1%). Those between 26 and 34 years totalled 25.2% of responses and a further 17.2% were aged 50 to 64 years. More people over 65 years (5.3%) accessed the site than young people aged between 19 and 25 (.6%), indicating in conjunction with the previous set of data that the second generation migrants born

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<sup>550</sup> Caroline Anne Clark, "Survey Questionnaire, Virtual Communities in the South Pacific: Rotuman Web Culture", unpublished raw and tabulated data for an MA in Anthropology at University of British Columbia, Canada, Responses Version1: April 18, 2005.

<sup>551</sup> <http://www.nedstatbasic.net/s?tab=1&link=1&id=418079>, accessed August 2005.

in the diaspora are still in a minority. The other interpretation could be that they are less interested in Rotuma and their culture but the evidence from interviews with them and their families does not support this.<sup>552</sup>

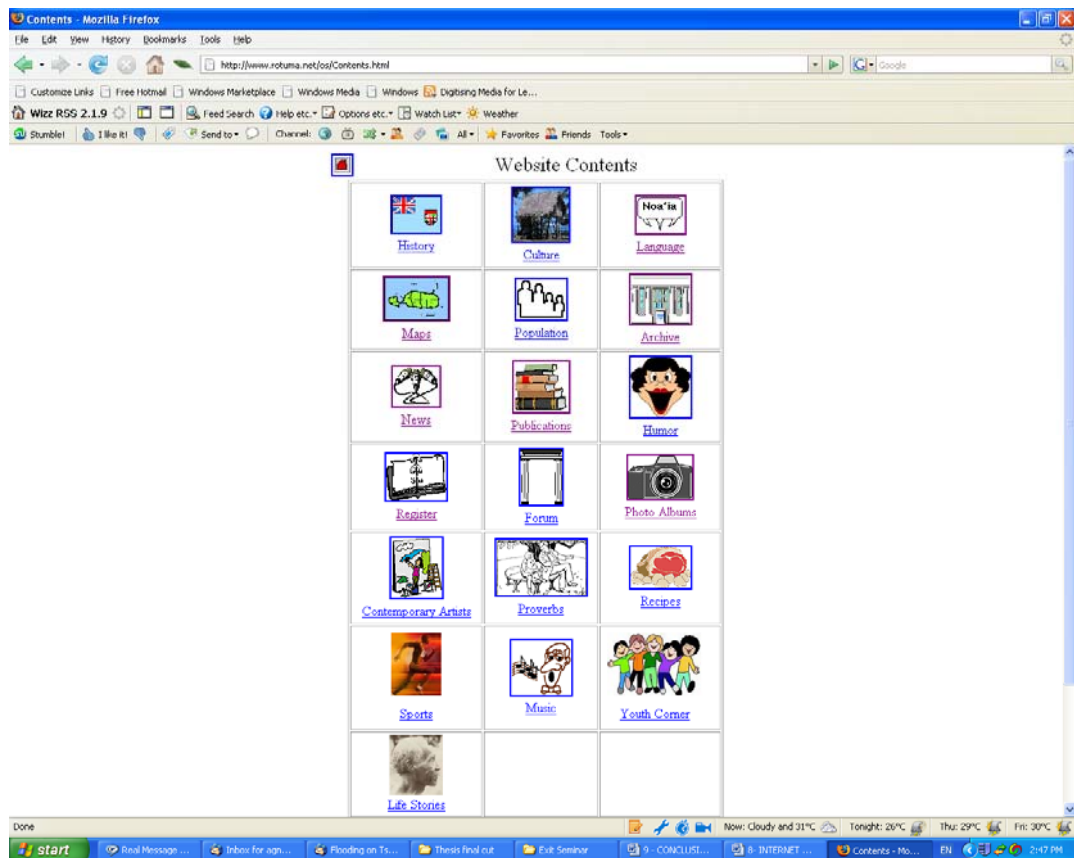
The greatest number (33.1%) accessed the web for the survey from Australia, 22.5% from Fiji, 15.9% from the USA, 11.3% from New Zealand, 6.6% from Canada, 4.6% from the UK, 1.3% from Sierra Leone, 1.3% from Egypt and .6% from each of Bahrain, Norway, Tonga, Scotland and Jamaica. These statistics again support the existence of relatively large settled diasporic groups outside Fiji in Australia, the United States of America and New Zealand. Fifty three percent visited the site once a week while 33.8% visited it daily. For most (72.1%) the visit lasted between six and thirty minutes, with 14.6% spending up to an hour, 6.6% more than an hour and 5.3% less than five minutes. The preferred languages were English and Rotuman (69.6% and 23.8% respectively) and most were directed to the site by a family member (37.8%) or via an online search (32.7%). By far the majority (68.2%) were able to access the web via high speed broadband connection with only 26.5% using a dial-up connection.<sup>553</sup> These figures support Ogden's work showing the lower telephone densities in the Pacific<sup>554</sup> as well as the higher income and living standards enjoyed by those migrating out of Rotuma and Fiji.

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<sup>552</sup> Agnes Hannan, Field notes and interviews, 2003-2004.

<sup>553</sup> Clark, "Survey Questionnaire," Responses Version 1: April 18, 2005.

<sup>554</sup> Ogden, "Islands on the Internet" in *The Contemporary Pacific*, Fall 1999, Vol.11, Issue 2.



### Contents page of Rotuma Website<sup>555</sup>

The Rotuma Website is divided up into nineteen information sections all of which have a direct bearing on the maintenance of the Rotuman culture in the diaspora. Some of the pages, in particular the News pages and the Forum, are examined in detail below as examples of the contribution of the website to the maintenance of culture via the net.

The other pages are the History page<sup>556</sup> which outlines the modern history of the Island from its “discovery” by the British Captain Edward Edwards in the *HMS Pandora* in 1791 to the present. Except for the explanation afforded by the Raho

<sup>555</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Contents.html>

<sup>556</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/History.html>

myth Howard leaves the account of the limited information on the “pre-history” of the island to Ladefoged whose paper is included under Publications.

The Language section<sup>557</sup> gives the reader a brief explanation of the language origins and a link to an interactive Rotuman/English dictionary. This latter inclusion is a very handy tool for the use of Rotumans and non-Rotuman speaking people to look up Rotuman words and their meanings or conversely, for non-English speakers to look up an English word for the Rotuman translation.

Three maps are available in the Maps section,<sup>558</sup> one is of the island in relation to the rest of Fiji, one shows the seven districts – Itumuta, Ituti’u, Malhaha, Oinafa, Noatau, Pepjei and Juju - and the third has most of the villages marked. These, in conjunction with the photographs included elsewhere on the website remind Rotumans in the diaspora of “home” and serve to illustrate the various stories and anecdotes relating to culture and life on the island.

The Population section<sup>559</sup> documents the population statistics from 1881 to 1996 and gives a brief overview of influences on population over that time such as disease and emigration. The Humour page<sup>560</sup> has a number of funny stories that appeal to the Rotuman sense of humour which leans toward gently making fun of others who do silly things. The Recipes page<sup>561</sup> gives a number of traditional

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<sup>557</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Language.html>

<sup>558</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/FijiMap.html>

<sup>559</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Population.html>

<sup>560</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Humour.htm>

<sup>561</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/recipes.htm>

Rotuman recipes such as *topoi* (a type of cassava and coconut cream porridge) and *fekai* (a sugar and starch dessert pudding); the Music page<sup>562</sup> points to a number of Rotuman sound and video clips of Rotuman songs and albums that can be purchased and Contemporary Artists<sup>563</sup> catalogues today's Rotuman artists, sculptors, writers, playwrights, singers and musicians.

The Register page<sup>564</sup> is an important one for expatriate Rotumans as it enables Rotumans to place their names, addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses on the site database to allow other Rotumans to contact them. This facility is well used, as Clark's data shows, with 100 out of 151 respondents having found friends and relatives with whom they had lost touch in the records held there.<sup>565</sup> 63.8% had placed their name on the Rotuma Register and 66.4% had used the register to find and contact others. These figures show the importance of having access to a larger pool of knowledge and wider links which are easily available on the World Wide Web.

The Proverbs page<sup>566</sup> offers a new proverb or saying each week, taken from Elizabeth Inia's book *Faeag 'Es Fuaga: Rotuman Proverbs*.<sup>567</sup> The proverbs provide an insight into Rotuman culture with their "liberal metaphorical and metonymic use of places, geographical features, and historical events that are

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<sup>562</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Publications.html#music>

<sup>563</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/contempart.htm>

<sup>564</sup> <http://128.171.9.94/register/>

<sup>565</sup> Clark, "Survey Questionnaire," Responses Version1: April 18, 2005, Part 2, p.6-7,.

<sup>566</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Proverbs.html>

<sup>567</sup> Elizabeth Inia, *Faeag 'es Fuaga*, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, Suva, 1998.



distinctively Rotuman.”<sup>568</sup> Inia has made her book available on the website in the same format as the hardcopy original thus making it available to as wide an audience as possible. In the past these proverbs have been largely passed on by oral means so this publication provides a conveniently accessible cultural memory bank for the use of Rotumans away from immediate contact with knowledgeable others and who are able to connect to the internet.

The Culture page<sup>569</sup> contains an overview of the Rotuman culture and is then further broken down into Political Economy with sub-headings of Economy,<sup>570</sup> Land Tenure<sup>571</sup> and Political Organisation;<sup>572</sup> Expressive Culture with sub-headings of Arts and Crafts,<sup>573</sup> Music and Dance<sup>574</sup> and Religion<sup>575</sup> and Mythology with sub-headings of Aspects of Rotuman Myth<sup>576</sup> – a discussion paper on the form and interpretation of myth as well as its performative nature in Rotuman culture – followed by four examples of myths and legends; the Legend of Raho,<sup>577</sup> the First Rotuman Kings,<sup>578</sup> ‘Aeatos<sup>579</sup> and Kirkirsasa.<sup>580</sup>

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<sup>568</sup> Alan Howard and Jan Rensel, in Inia, 1998, p. 212.

<sup>569</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Culture.html>

<sup>570</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Economy.html>

<sup>571</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/LandTenure.html>

<sup>572</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Political.html>

<sup>573</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/ArtCrafts.html>

<sup>574</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Music.html>

<sup>575</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Religion.html>

<sup>576</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/AsMyth.html>

<sup>577</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Raho.html>

<sup>578</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/FirstKings.html>

<sup>579</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Aeatos.html>

<sup>580</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Kirkirsasa.html>

A set of language lessons has also been posted specifically to help people with access to another Rotuman speaker to learn the language.<sup>581</sup> In recent months a separate site for Rotuman language lessons has been advertised on Rotuma net by Marit Vamarasi.<sup>582</sup> This is a further indicator of the importance placed on language by the Rotumans in diaspora and will assist those with children to teach them as well as to “brush up” their own language skills..

Other recent additions have been the Youth Corner section where young people under 18 are invited to post stories and essays and a Sports section which includes highlights of the achievements of successful Rotuman sports people. The first of the Youth Corner essays was about a trip to Rotuma at Christmas 2004 by a twelve year old Canadian boy, Sosefo Gordon. The essay highlights the differences between his home in Manitoba, Canada and life in Rotuma.<sup>583</sup> The things that made a great impression were the small size of the airport, the sand roads, sleeping on the floor and the ease of school lessons since his own class in Manitoba was a year ahead of the equivalent Rotuman class in mathematics and language studies. The importance of family and food gathering on the island is characterised by Sosefo:

*My brother, uncle and I went spear fishing, it was great and I caught 3 fish. The last day we spent there we planted coconut trees to see how big would be when we go back. The last day was really emotional for all of us ...*<sup>584</sup>

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<sup>581</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/LanguageLessons/lessons.htm>

<sup>582</sup> <http://www.neiu.edu/~rotuman/>

<sup>583</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Youth/youth001.htm>

<sup>584</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/oceanic/rotuma/os/Youth/youth002.htm>

Sosefo illustrates the role of the internet for the expatriate Rotuman youth in that he had the experience of going to see his island ‘home’ and then posted an account of his visit on the website to tell other Rotumans about it. So for expatriates home is a more immediate concept and this in turn makes the need for a return pilgrimage all the more pressing.

Rotumans excelling in sport received a share of ether time in the Sports section mentioned above as, like many other Pacific Islanders, Rotumans are competitive sports people. Thus Sports stories flow in from across the globe with Rotumans participating in basketball and soccer in Australia, football in the United States, weightlifting, powerlifting, golf and cycling in Fiji, rugby in England, rowing and outrigger racing in Fiji and Australia and karate in New Zealand, to name just a few.

The Archive,<sup>585</sup> compiled by the Howards, holds a comprehensive collection of articles and book chapters on Rotuma from the very early days of European discovery such as material of an historical nature pertinent to the European discovery of the island and first contact, the field notes from Gordon Macgregor’s 1939 field trip to the island<sup>586</sup> as well as all of the collected papers of Alan Howard and Jan Rensel containing information collected from as early as the late 1950’s to the present.<sup>587</sup> The collection of older literature is a boon for Rotumans and scholars alike who are interested in reading some of the hard to get sources

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<sup>585</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/oceanic/rotuma/os/Archive.html>

<sup>586</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/oceanic/rotuma/os/MacGregor/MacGregor.html>

<sup>587</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/oceanic/rotuma/os/howsel/papers.html>

on Rotuman history. Research trips into interviewees homes highlighted the great interest these held for the overseas Rotumans as well as those on the island itself. It could be suggested that having such information at their fingertips might tend to make web-savvy Rotumans in the diaspora more informed than those on the island; that having such a plethora of information about the past might fix culture and reduce the fluidity that allows the form of culture and history to be adjusted according to changing circumstances. During the conduct of fieldwork among both on-island Rotumans and those in the diaspora there did not appear to be any obvious signs that on-island Rotumans were in any way less informed than those living abroad. Sufficient communication exists between both groups to ensure that issues are well aired.

Along with the diaspora, Howard and Rensel are regular visitors to the island. Cognisant of the interest the internet engenders and the limited connection Rotumans on the island have Howard has, from time to time, copied the website onto CD-ROM so that the schools have access to the contents.<sup>588</sup> Given the relatively short period in diaspora, it is difficult to assess how the internet has affected the ability of Rotuman culture to adapt to change. It is true, however, that Rotumans, particularly those in the diaspora, show a strong interest in their past and in learning as much about it as they can even if it does come via outside academics. Howard himself does not comment, as have other Pacific historians and anthropologists, on any concerns he may feel about the way the website history and information is being used by Rotumans.

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<sup>588</sup> Agnes Hannan, field notes, Rotuma 2003.

The Publications page documents recent books, articles and music and links to them or where to purchase them. While the contents of these pages are determined by Howard and Rensel their stated intent is to provide information about the island, its culture and history, for Rotumans living abroad and to that end they include papers and books as well as music by Rotumans as well as their own works and those of non-Rotumans writing about the island and its people. The works by Rotumans include a paper on linguistics, *Austronesian Linguistics: Rotuma* by Marit Vamarasi, Elizapeti Inia's *Kato 'aga: Rotuman Ceremonies* and *Fäeag 'Es Fuaga: Rotuman Proverbs*, and "A Floristic Survey of the Coastal Littoral Vegetation of Rotuma," an MSc thesis, by Rejeili Rigamoto from the University of the South Pacific. The music section is devoted entirely to Rotuman music by Rotuman singers, bands and the Churchward Chapel Choir, a choir based at the chapel of the same name in Suva, Fiji. The expatriate Rotuman desire for this information is evidenced in the number of Rotuman homes that sport copies of the many books and articles noted on the webpage.<sup>589</sup>

The Bulletin Board carries more personal messages of interest to the global Rotuman community. It is an appropriate place to ask questions, to make announcements regarding events, to share information and opinions, and to find lost kainaga, friends, schoolmates, etc."<sup>590</sup> It replaced the original unmediated Message Board with a mediated facility to avoid the posting of "offensive

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<sup>589</sup> Agnes Hannan, Field notes from research among Rotuman families living on the eastern seaboard of Australia, 2003.

<sup>590</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/bulletboard.htm>

messages marked by foul language, nasty personal attacks, and disrespect for Rotuman customs.”<sup>591</sup> Because the offenders were anonymous it was not possible to tell if they were Rotumans or not but it was the Rotuman community who complained to Howard, thus precipitating the closure of the original message board facility. Of 151 respondents 127 found this facility useful and read it regularly.<sup>592</sup>

The Photo Albums link contains a number of collections of photographs from several contributors including a range of views of the island and its people and photos from the diaspora in New Zealand and Australia and historical ones from A.M. Hocart (1913), one of Oceania’s most important early ethnographers; H.S. Evans (1940) a past Resident Commissioner of Rotuma, and the Marist Archive in Rome, a collection taken by the Roman Catholic priests in the 1920’s. Respondents in Clark’s survey mentioned these on a number of occasions as being an area they accessed often because it made them feel closer to home if they could look at pictures of the island and their relatives and friends.<sup>593</sup> The early photographs show how little, on the surface, Rotuma and Rotumans have changed and how the ceremonial forms have been maintained. Comparison with photographs of similar ceremonies in the diaspora illustrate how hard, despite the distance in both space and time, overseas Rotumans work to keep their culture alive.

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<sup>591</sup> Alan Howard, “Pacific-Based Virtual Communities: Rotuma on the World Wide Web” in *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1999, pp. 160-75.

<sup>592</sup> Clark, “Survey Questionnaire,” Responses Version1:April 18 2005

<sup>593</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 1/3, pp. 6, 7, 11 – 14, 18.

The most frequently accessed page, however, was the News Page containing up-to-date news of interest to most of the diaspora. Clark's data appears to support this with 50% of respondents going directly to the news page while others (45%) check out the "What's New" page first. Howard noted in 1999 that feedback indicates a frequent following many of whom print out the News page and circulate it amongst those who are unable to access the net and Clark's data revealed that 72.3% of her respondents printed sections of the website and 91.7% shared these around with other Rotumans.<sup>594</sup> It should be noted that all information reported on the website is mediated through Howard, in the main to strain out any spurious and disrespectful commentary.

The News section<sup>595</sup> opens to the latest news posted on the website and has links to archived monthly News pages from 1996 to the present as well as a link to the Bulletin Board. The News page is popular because it is regularly updated with news about Rotuman communities all over the world. The importance of this news to the diaspora can be seen in the visitation rates. Here the diaspora can find information about activities, both past and imminent as well as events of particular interest including "hatches, matches and dispatches." From time to time commentary from readers is posted about individual stories.<sup>596</sup> The page started small in 1996 with only three items between September and December and encompassed the news that flights and boat passage to Rotuma that Christmas were fully booked; that Reverend Jione Langi had his ministry in New

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<sup>594</sup> Howard, 1999, p.164; Kerry Clark, "Survey Questionnaire," Responses Version1:April 18, 2005.

<sup>595</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/News.html>

<sup>596</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/News.html>

Zealand extended for a year to January 1997 and he would minister exclusively to the Rotuman community; the news from the San Francisco Bay area Rotumans of a new addition to the population and the “Kufesi Group,” a number of families from Lopta in Oinafa, held a fundraiser with a *koua* and an island band.

From 1997 onwards the page has carried information about a wide range of topics from the local Farmer’s Show on Rotuma to the news of the passing of the Rotuma Act giving Rotuma more autonomy. It saw the beginning of regular news from Sanimeli Maraf, wife of *Gagaj* Maraf Chief of Noatau, and Elisapeti Inia in Rotuma concentrating on the happenings on the island. These people send their postings to Alan Howard by “snail mail” or via an intermediary in Fiji with access to the internet. Over the years they have included the opening (and closing) of a new Bible School; the making of a documentary film on Rotuma by an Australian, David Gardner; and the expansion of the Post Shop to include the sale of supermarket items as well as National Bank of Fiji pass book withdrawals and deposits. This topic caused something of a stir on the island because it threatened the livelihood of small shop owners and when the latter complained, the Post Office Shop went on strike leaving people on the island without mail, telephone and banking facilities for a short period of time. Other reports concerned local church news, local events such as the Farm Show, the movement of *fa hua’i* or Church caretakers to new posts around the island, the scheduling of the Methodist Conference on Rotuma and other events; fundraising activities to build a garage for the ambulance donated to Rotuma by the French Government and Red Cross collection day; and news of the matters discussed at district



meetings, including health matters, cost of bus fares around the island, requests for information about telephone installation and on the problems of scale insects on trees and plants.

While these items may seem insignificant to an outsider, they are of considerable importance to the Rotuman diaspora for a number of reasons. In the first instance it is news from home involving kinfolk and at the same time some of these occurrences, such as the problems with telephone services and the infestation of the island with the scale pest, are things that have the potential to affect them in terms of the need to lend financial or material support to those suffering the effects. The need for such assistance is often seen in occasional requests for assistance from the *kainaga* or relatives abroad “toward maintaining and improving ... (the) ... hospital,”<sup>597</sup> or for equipment to furnish the Youth Council Office on Rotuma .<sup>598</sup>

Each year reports come in from around the globe on Rotuma Day celebrations, often replete with photographs and descriptions of the ceremony and the cultural shows put on by local and visiting dancers. These stories are an important part of the learning experience for the younger people in the diaspora as they show that the Rotuman culture is celebrated across the world.

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<sup>597</sup> Sanimeli Maraf, News Page, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/NewsArchive/Archive1998/archive9811.htm> , accessed March 2008.

<sup>598</sup> Victor Atalifo, News Page, <http://www.rotuma.net/NewsArchive/Archive1999/archive9906.htm>, accessed march 2008.

Other news reports that support the Rotuman view of themselves as a unique and exceptional group in the Pacific are the many success stories. These are well represented across the eight and a half years of the website and celebrate the successes of graduates in all fields of study, military promotions and award winning performance. For example, the *Herald Sun* Aria was won by Rejeili Paulo, a Melbourne Rotuman who now lives in Britain pursuing an operatic career. Vilsoni Hereniko, born at Mea on Rotuma and now an academic at the University of Hawa'ii, Manoa Campus, is also featured on the website from time to time celebrating his film awards. Other awards won by Rotumans have been the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) given to Vaivao Antonio of Sydney, Australia, for service to Pacific Island people in 1998. A special son of Rotuma is Major General Jioje Konroti, previously Force Commander of UNIFIL, who was welcomed home on a visit to the island in 1999 at the end of his tour of duty in Lebanon with a *kato'aga* in his honour. Good news stories, for example reunions of close relatives after many years of separation emphasize and reinforce the importance of close kin, especially at times of life crisis. Other positive accounts that pointed up the community orientation of the Rotuman culture consisted of descriptions of assistance from Rotumans in the diaspora, for example the project by the Rotary Club of Suva to refurbish the Rotuma Hospital in 2005 and the description of all the work done in a very short time. Many of these items show how dependent Rotuma is on its diaspora for even the most basic amenities and how isolating its remoteness can be.

Donations and grants by several countries were also given a prominent place in the news from the island. For example in the last five years, the Chinese Embassy gave \$30,000 in 1998 for two new buses, the French Government donated an ambulance, the Japanese Embassy gave a grant of US\$19,930 for upgrading Rotuma Hospital with solar powered generator, medical equipment, flyscreens and computer equipment and the Australian High Commission gave FJD5000 towards a back-up generator for the hospital.

Other academics also featured on the news. 1997 brought word from Antoine N'Yeurt, of the Marine Studies Program at the University of the South Pacific, that his *lumu* (seaweed) growing project, an experiment in charting the possibility of commercial farming of the weed in cages on Rotuma, was doing well. This project appeared not to engage the diaspora as much as another – one of the greatest concerns on Rotuma, and much spoken about by migrants, are the plagues of flies and another experiment taking place at the time of N'Yeurt's visit was the introduction of dung beetles to try to combat the fly problem. The flies and the reasons for there being so many have engaged members of the Rotuman diaspora in energetic discussions in the Forum with a number of suggestions being put forward for ways of ridding the island of their presence. At last report the beetles had made good progress in Noatau, and hopes were held of a fly free island in the future.

The web news also saw the beginning of reports on the ongoing air service problems which have continued to hinder Rotuma because of its remoteness.

That, coupled with news of the boat service also being disrupted due to weather and other scheduling changes interests the diaspora because the irregular nature of transport both air and sea can have a great impact on travel plans as well as the movement of goods to and from the island. Other transport changes often reported are the rising fares. Distinguished Pacific geographer R. Gerard Ward has noted how the increased sophistication and technological advances of modern transport, particularly air transport, have actually worked to increase the remoteness of the smaller islands of the Pacific. The introduction of air transport in the early to mid-1950s tended to reduce the number of islands served by regular cargo boats; however as aircraft have evolved to require less refuelling stops they have tended to overfly smaller islands thus leaving them less accessible.<sup>599</sup> This can be seen in the plight of the Rotumans as sea and air transport costs escalate, are regarded by providers as uneconomical.

Overseas Rotumans returning to the island in large groups for Christmas are often in the position of having to charter passenger boats to do so. These trips are regularly reported on the website, for example those in 1998-99 and 2004-05, with holiday makers from Fiji, Australia and New Zealand as well as some from the United States of America. The details of the trips and the fun of the *fara*, the enjoyment of being back on the island and being able to show children who had not visited before their “roots” could be seen as an important time for both the visitors and the island residents.

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<sup>599</sup> R. Gerard Ward, “Remote Runways: Air Transport and Distance in Tonga,” in *Australian Geographical Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2, July 1998, p. 177.

The first request for information of a cultural nature was posted in April 1997 and concerned the correct time to recite the *fakpeje* (ceremonial poem) at the *Hapagsu*, a ceremonial feast conducted after particular illnesses, wounds, imprisonment or when one has eaten forbidden food. This ceremony was to be conducted after the circumcision of a baby boy born in Brisbane. This was one of the many births announced in these pages in the ten years of its existence. This request is telling when considering the transmission of cultural traditions to Rotumans in the diaspora and supports the concerns expressed by older Rotuman during interviews about the weakening of culture when bringing children up away from Rotuma and Fiji. Until the convenience of the internet became apparent the ability to convey cultural information without the scaffolding of the extended family and community was difficult. As noted in the previous chapter the visits back to the island and to Fiji were important support mechanisms for the maintenance of culture in diaspora. This point is reinforced by the evidence of the limited number of traditional Rotuman cultural mores remaining in the Torres Strait noted in chapter 6.

Numerous weddings also graced the pages of the website along with pictures allowing friends and family overseas to share the family joy. And along with the happy announcements came the sad ones too, with the passing of the older generation on the island and elsewhere. The death of some younger Rotumans was a source of considerable grief to all the Rotuman communities since few did not have someone in them who was related to the deceased. Their ability to share the occasions with friends and family if not in person at least online and by

telephone appeared to be of comfort to them. Other events like the installation of a new Chief at Hapmafau in 1999 are also instructive for the diaspora as the ceremony was described in detail by Aisea Mua as were the ideal characteristics for a *Gagaj* (Chief) – kind and forgiving and good at making *fakpeje* or impromptu poems suitable for the occasion.<sup>600</sup> In order that important occasions can be celebrated correctly, Rotumans across the globe also have access to the full text of Elisapeti Inia’s book on Rotuman ceremonies to call on if they need to know the format and wording of particular occasions.<sup>601</sup> This is a well read resource according to informants in the Australian Rotuman community and is consulted if there is any doubt about the format for ceremonial events.<sup>602</sup>

Politics occasionally took a high profile on the News Page especially in 1999 when elections saw three Rotumans vying for the sole seat offered for the island – and then they had to share it with the provinces of Lau and Taveuni! The new minister, Rotuman Marieta Rigamoto, was given extra responsibilities as Special Advisor to the Prime Minister on development for the Rotuman people.”<sup>603</sup> In 2005 the news that the Rotuma Act definition of who qualified as a Rotuman, that is “anyone who can trace his or her lineage to Rotuma,” was too broad caused a furore. The broadness of the definition meant that the Rotuman shares in Fijian Holdings Ltd.,<sup>604</sup> would be delayed indefinitely until a less global definition

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<sup>600</sup> Aisea Mua, News Page, <http://www.rotuma.net/os/NewsArchive/Archive1999/archive9906.htm>, accessed March 2008.

<sup>601</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/ceremonies/toc.htm>

<sup>602</sup> Agnes Hannan, field notes, 2003.

<sup>603</sup> Fijilive, Bula Network, 20 July 1999.

<sup>604</sup> Fiji Holdings essentially embodied a free gift of \$20 million of taxpayers money for the 14 provinces of Fiji as well as Rotuma granted by the interim government of the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara in September 1989; see Samisoni Pareti, *Fiji Business*, January 2005.

could be worked out. According to the Fijian Holdings website the company was:

*[f]ounded in 1984 as a response by the Fijian Chiefs and people to accelerate Fijian participation in the economy ..... Its shareholders include Provincial Councils, the Native Land Trust Board, the Fijian Affairs Board, Tikina and village groups, Fijian co-operatives, individual Fijians and family companies. It's investments give Fijians significant shareholding in major companies thus helping to achieve the national objective of bringing indigenous Fijians fully into the mainstream of the country's economic life.<sup>605</sup>*

Fijian Holdings Ltd., the listed company, was not set up to benefit non-indigenous Fijians and the Fijian Government found the definition of Rotumanness could possibly allow people who were not indigenous to participate. Given the sensitivity of indigenous Fijians to involvement by non-indigenous people in Fijian affairs the situation was potentially explosive but it resulted in much derisive commentary from overseas Rotumans including one from Sydney, Australia. The broad nature of the definition is not open to negotiation as far as Rotumans, either on or off the island, are concerned and says a lot for the inclusiveness of their culture. The concern for the Fijian Government is that if the definition of who is Rotuman is not made less inclusive the value of shares in Fiji Holdings will be eroded by the impossibility of gaining an accurate estimate of the true numbers of Rotumans within and outside Fiji who may be eligible through investment in to benefit from the funds available.

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<sup>605</sup> <http://www.fijianholdings.com.fj/fhl/common/default.aspx?Page=aboutUs> accessed April 2008.

Thus the News Page is, with its reportage of news and current affairs, both on Rotuma and in the diaspora, a mechanism by and through which Rotumans overseas maintain their connection with the island and each other. The types of articles posted indicate an ongoing interest in the welfare and location of other Rotumans and in seeing how other groups operate. In their words:

*When you read about a community outside of Fiji & Rotuma having a Rotuman get-together with Rotuman dancing and feasting, it makes other communities want to do the same and in doing so they are teaching the younger generation part of the Rotuman culture.<sup>606</sup>*

The Forum is an avenue for Rotumans to publish their opinions on an assortment of topics from Rotuman culture and its maintenance to land tenure on the island and governance issues. It was designed to keep separate threads of “conversation” going about aspects of basic interest to Rotumans both on the island in the diaspora. The Forum proved to be a drawcard as Clark’s data showed that 87.8% visited it but only 50.3% had contributed an opinion to it.<sup>607</sup>

The Forum deals more in opinion than does the news page although some of the issues aired in the latter also appeared in the Forum in more depth. It is evident from the topics discussed in the Forum pages that the diaspora is keen to be very much involved in what occurs on the island and has some strong opinions on issues concerning Rotuma and Rotumans, not just those in the diaspora. The issues dealt with in the Forum range from infrastructure problems such as the

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<sup>606</sup> Clark, “Survey Questionnaire,” Responses Version1:April 18 2005, Part 3/3, p. 10.

<sup>607</sup> Clark, 2005.



generation and cost of electricity; the problems of transportation in terms of delays and high cost; the cost and provision of communications; and the state of the roads, wharfage and seawalls to political issues such as the governance of Rotuma; fishing rights for Rotuma; land disputes; the Rotuma Land Commission and the possible shift from the traditional rights in land from both parents to patriarchal only as in Fiji. Research for this work did not reveal a similar concern with municipal issues in Australia indicating either a limited attachment to the wider Australian community at this stage in the migration process or more likely the notion that, as a larger community, Australian suburbs and towns were more able to finance similar projects.

An issue that raised some heat was the idea of independence for Rotuma which was fuelled by three events – the appearance of the Gagaj Sau Lagfatmaro II in 1997 and his claims of sovereignty through his connection to the Molmahao clan (which were rejected) followed by the approach, in 2000, by David Korem, a so-called American millionaire and Head of the House of Elders of the Dominion of Melchizedek, to give the island all the assistance and money it needed for development if it seceded from Fiji and joined the Dominion; and the Coup in Fiji in 2000. These ideas of independence were roundly dismissed by the Rotuman Forum contributors who, in their responses, made it clear that while Rotumans were open minded about independence and would consider it if the outcomes were likely to be good, they were not about to sacrifice Rotuman values of honesty and integrity in pursuit of it.

One Forum issue of interest to a few writers was the question of whether to set up a morgue, which elicited interesting comments about the excessive cost of such a facility and also the thought that burial within 24 hours was the more traditional avenue as it was possible that people would feel uncomfortable, especially if there was “superstition and fear of the deceased’s ghost amongst some of the islanders.”<sup>608</sup> Others touched on the issue of women, kava drinking, the environment, the problems of youth on the island, the beauty and blessings the island has to offer Rotumans, leadership and the need to remember special Rotumans, tourism on the island and the use of the Rotuman language, the possible loss of which concerned writers. There was no apparent resonance from location with comments appearing to be a common Rotuman set of responses.

Development on the island was also a well addressed topic along with the Rotuma Investments Ltd. (RIL), a company formed on behalf of the Rotuma Council to develop projects on Rotuma. 99% of shares in the company were held by the Rotuma Island Council with the remaining 1% held in trust by the Chairman of the Council. The members of the board of RIL, most of whom lived in Fiji, were appointed by the Rotuma Council and donated their time to the company. This item, posted by Alan Howard, generated a strong response from the Rotuman diaspora with nine letters from six respondents exchanging views on the best ways to develop the island. The exchange regarding RIL revealed strong political undertones in the contributions from both Rotuma/Suva based correspondents and those in the diaspora.

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<sup>608</sup> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Forum/Forum17.html> , accessed March 2008.

It would be fair to say that the majority of the directors in RIL in 2003 were people with a relatively high level of education and some experience of the world beyond Rotuma and Fiji, for example Paul Manueli and Dr John Fatiaki. None of the directors of RIL contributed to the on-line conversation, however it was obvious from the letters posted in response to this article that differences of opinion on the correct way to pursue development on Rotuma most certainly exist between those in the Fiji community and some expatriates. It was thus obvious from these exchanges that, while a sojourn overseas may have changed the attitudes and expectations of some members of the diaspora *vis á vis* those who remain closer to the island, those in the diaspora continue to have great concern and involvement in the welfare of their island home.

Other, more culturally based business concerns have figured in internet correspondence. Commerce has long been fraught with problems where Rotuma is concerned because of the centrality of kinship relationships and obligations. These have tended to result in excessive pressure on small businesses to allow their *kainaga* to book up credit. Henry Enasio recalled the fate of the father of one of his childhood friends on Rotuma:

*Mr Amrit Lal was a very good businessman, but he lost most of his fortune in Rotuma. I vividly remember his parting words when the*

*family left Rotuma to settle in Nadi: “Rotumans like to ‘tinau’<sup>609</sup> but don’t like to repay their ‘tinau.’<sup>610</sup>*

He goes on to note that Wilson Inia, first Rotuman Senator in the Fiji government and long time teacher, taught that “for a business to be successful in Rotuma, the owner and all the *kainaga* cannot be mixed up with it.”<sup>611</sup> Inia managed to grow and expand the Rotuma Cooperative Association (RCA) because of his strong opposition to mixing business and family. On his death, however, RCA which had forced the Morris Hedstrom and Burns Philp traders out of Rotuma, dwindled and failed. Businesses in Rotuma fail regularly because of a “fear of being ostracised by the *kainaga* and friends”<sup>612</sup> if credit were to be refused.

While the forum on RIL revealed some gaps between attitudes of the island Rotumans and the diaspora it also showed how little had changed in relations between Rotumans. While family disputes were aired and long standing bitterness revealed, the thread of connection in all of the correspondence was a continuing concern for the health and welfare of the island and its guardians.

Throughout the offerings on the Forum was the recurrent theme underlying most of the website – that of culture and the desire to make life better on Rotuma but not to destroy or lose the basic traditions and values that it embodies. Interview results also supported this attitude and interviewees consistently spoke of strengthening, or at least maintaining, Rotuman culture in diaspora as well as the

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<sup>609</sup> The term *tinau* means debt – in other words

<sup>610</sup> Henry Enasio, contribution to the Rotuma Forum on RIL, [www.rotuma.net/os/Forum/Forum26.html](http://www.rotuma.net/os/Forum/Forum26.html), accessed November 2007.

<sup>611</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.*

importance of ensuring that those who were continuing to look after the island were appropriately looked after.

When Clark asked Rotumans their opinion on the purpose of the website they were in overwhelming agreement that it was an important communication tool. It, said one, “enable(d) Rotumans to communicate & share news & culture with the younger generation & make them treasure their identity & customs”<sup>613</sup> Another said, that it kept them “up to date with information, events and other happenings of Rotumans within the more global community as well as keeping people informed about issues that are more specifically pertinent to those still residing in Rotuma.”<sup>614</sup> Among the reasons the informants visited the website accorded with their answers about its purpose. Amongst comments were, “I feel closer to home;”<sup>615</sup> and “I tend to get homesick and visiting the website helps me to feel ... closer to my roots.”<sup>616</sup> Others were keen to practise their language skills, still others went to look at the photographs; one said “I recently downloaded a picture of my father, something that I don’t even have in my possession.”<sup>617</sup>

As far as cultural maintenance was concerned, by far the majority of the respondents to Clark’s questionnaire believed that the website worked to preserve the Rotuman culture (only one disagreed). One respondent noted that step-by-

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<sup>613</sup> Clark, “Survey Questionnaire,” Responses Version 1: April 18 2005, Part 1/3, p. 2.

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>615</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>616</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>617</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-7.

step instructions for everything “from weddings to funerals” were available on the web.<sup>618</sup> This relates to the importance of conducting life cycle ceremonies in the correct manner with the correct wording and actions. The central theme of Rotuman society is community and other comments made about the use of the site in maintaining cultural awareness reinforce this. Collective memory is not a maintenance tool that can be specifically practised in the sense of saying “we are going to do collective remembering now,” but is a transparent and seamless process as can be seen in the comment that:

*This website helps us stay connected with our communities everywhere and by that we are continually sharing and revisiting the unique experiences that each of us can identify with as being inherently Rotuman. We are able to maintain links with each other through this website, and so are able to feel that we are part of each other's experiences and celebrate and acknowledge that.*<sup>619</sup>

The unique experiences which this correspondent refers to are those which, in the past would have been conducted face-to-face: dancing, singing, storytelling, fishing, feasting, attending community ceremonial and the like. In diaspora these experiences are often diluted by distance and forgetting as the art of letter writing is not always practised sufficiently to maintain a timely cultural closeness. Indeed letters are a poor substitute, even when they contain photographs, for the immediacy of local community. The statement above and following sentiments expressed by Rotuman expatriates show that, while the telephone remains the most immediate avenue of contact, the Internet is rapidly overtaking the old collective memory mechanisms which consisted of letters and visits which could often be a long time apart. With the cost of telephone calls still high

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<sup>618</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 3/3, p.8

<sup>619</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

the internet provides an immediate contact which can include video, as well as audio files, bringing the feeling of reality and immediacy even if only in a virtual sense to the intra-diaspora contact. Communication with kinfolk on the island continued, despite the cost of telephone calls, to be by phone because of the limited web presence on the island and in Fiji.<sup>620</sup>

Other statements pointed up the awareness of the disruptive nature of living in another culture and its effect on one's own:

*...the website helps me not to forget my culture and to always have a reason to be proud of where I'm from. Sometimes I tend to be too absorbed in the American culture but when I visit the website I bring myself back to what and who I'm supposed to be representing. I'm very proud to be Rotuman and I hope that this website will provide the same benefits to other Rotuman youths who live far away from home.*<sup>621</sup>

For the younger generation the website provides easy access to information about the home island and this is recognised in the reply of one young person:

*The contents of this website are very helpful and help the younger generations like me understand the importance of preserving a culture such as ours. Our culture is our tradition and to learn and understand it makes us more proud to be called Rotumans.*<sup>622</sup>

The particular concerns of those Rotumans who married out of their culture is emphasized by this women who says:

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<sup>620</sup> Akata Muaror, interview Sydney, 2003.

<sup>621</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>622</sup> *Ibid.*

*Living so far away from home and being married to a non-Rotuman, this is one way I tell my children about my “heritage” – something they can be proud of because of the uniqueness of the Rotuman culture. Also when I read of the “Rotumans Happenings” across the Globe and on Rotuma it makes me proud to know that whichever part of the world Rotumans live, the Rotumanness [sic] in all of us lives on!*<sup>623</sup>

Thus the opinions of Rotumans accessing the internet are quite definite in the uses to which the site is put and its effectiveness in assisting the Rotuman diaspora around the world to maintain a commonality and relative constancy of culture that it might otherwise lose.

While collective memory within the community plays a large part in the perpetuation of cultural practices at Sunday lunches, community get-togethers and in ceremonies on such occasions as Rotuma Day, the Internet has now become another important tool in the ability of the global Rotuman diaspora to stay in touch and to exchange ideas, opinions, news, and so on. Those abroad who are unable to return regularly to Rotuma and Fiji not only maintain relationships within their diasporic community but also, where they are able, access the Rotuma Website and maintain contact with other members of Rotuman diasporas in all parts of the world..

For Rotumans living on Rotuma, identity is relatively uncomplicated. Children are taught the language, norms and values of their people as they grow up. They

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<sup>623</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.



are encouraged to feel proud of their Polynesian heritage and their reputation for hospitality, hard work and intelligence. In other words they live their identity every day and in living it, reinforce it.

In Australia being Rotuman involves putting a complex array of mechanisms in place to assist individuals to live in Australian society while maintaining a continuity of identity for themselves and their children. Language and culture must be transmitted in a deliberate way and celebrations planned to include as many of the traditional features as it is possible to provide in a foreign land. The normal “kainaga” ties of Rotuma are expanded to include people from other “kainaga” as kin. Ties of obligation can become slightly distorted but, off-island, the fictive relationships function to maintain Rotuman-ness. While weddings and funerals in Australia are less traditional, the Rotuma Day celebration follows much the same lines as it does in Rotuma with the exception of the inter-district games (dart throwing, basket weaving etc) usually held at that time.

The use of the Internet, email and the Rotuma website allows Rotuman communities in diaspora to maintain constant contact with other diaspora communities and the home island and to exchange ideas and stories, find family members and relate to one another in cyberspace similarly to the way they would in a traditional Rotuman village. While doing so, people are able to construct their own Rotuman identity, an identity perhaps more global through access to all the Rotuman diasporic communities and all the friends and relatives living in widely separated lands. The falling price and wider distribution of technology

such as telephone and internet has brought with it a rise in the use of these media to ensure migrants, their sending communities and the rest of their diaspora around the world are able to communicate as quickly as if they were all living in the same place. Migration is no longer a break in cultural continuity.<sup>624</sup>

As the past lives in the ceremonial still carried on by Rotuman migrants, so modern technology has had a hand in the perpetuation of Rotuman identity and culture. Rotuma, the physical place, is important in defining identity for those who regard themselves as Rotuman. Through the internet the Rotuman diaspora can access the idea of Rotuma in virtual space, hear news - the ties of place can be accessed through geographically neutral space.

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<sup>624</sup> Harry H. Hiller and Tara M. Franz, "New Ties, old ties and lost ties: the use of the internet in diaspora," in *new media and society*, Sage Publications, Vol.6, No. 6, p. 735.

## BEING ROTUMAN IN AUSTRALIA: CULTURAL MAINTENANCE IN MIGRATION

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### CONCLUSION

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*Islanders have broken out of their confinement, are moving around and away from their homelands, not so much because their countries are poor, but because they were unnaturally confined and severed from many of their traditional sources of wealth, and because it is in their blood to be mobile.*<sup>625</sup>

The focus of this thesis has been migration and culture change, that is movement from point A to point B and the cultural assimilation, integration or alienation involved – examined through the vehicle of collective memory – that engages with the ways Pacific Islanders think about their culture, identity and history. The Rotuman sense of belonging is more about cultural spaces and the places of memory, collective and individual, than physical spaces. Over a decade ago Tongan scholar Epeli Hau’ofa argued persuasively that such an approach was in keeping with Pacific Islander outlooks.<sup>626</sup> Oceania had been a “boundless world” before imperialism in the nineteenth century fragmented it and isolated its peoples. Global economic expansion from the mid-twentieth century enabled a return to the ways of earlier times and they have begun to move freely again,

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<sup>625</sup> Epeli Hau’ofa, “Our Sea of Islands,” *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1994, p. 156.

<sup>626</sup> *Ibid.*, p.154.

circulating “themselves, their relatives, their material goods, and their stories” through Oceania and beyond.<sup>627</sup>

This thesis thus addresses an area of study which has had limited academic exposure. Since Clive Moore’s early work on the Kanakas of Mackay,<sup>628</sup> 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.<sup>629</sup> 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 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 fashion their identity either at home or as migrants.

Rotumans are a people who seize the day and embrace change perceived to be beneficial to the community as a whole while maintaining a solid cultural identity. They take pride in who they are by collectively remembering their cultural base through myth, legend, stories, dance, music, religion and spirituality and now modern technology to weave their identity closely and carefully. They

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<sup>627</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>628</sup> Clive Moore, *Kanaka : a history of Melanesian Mackay* (1985). Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies and University of Papua New Guinea Press, 1985

<sup>629</sup> Helen Morton Lee, *Tongans Overseas: Between Two Shores* (2003); and Leulu Felise Va'a, *Saili Matagi: Samoan Migrants in Australia*, (2001).

are assisted in this by the flexible nature of their cultural core which enables them to choose cultural tools to suit their circumstances.

Familiarity with the “other” and readiness to adopt new ways which could be seen to benefit the community are, this thesis argues, key to understanding the ability of the Rotuman migrant to move easily into new situations. The role of the Rotuman group in the Torres Strait, where they often acted as mediators between the white administrators and the local Torres Strait people is a prime example of this ability. The Rotuman ancestry of many Erub Islanders and others in the Strait, as well as the remnants of Rotuman culture which have survived and been incorporated into the Torres Strait culture, is also testament to the ability of the Rotuman migrants of the nineteenth century to maintain and pass on select cultural artefacts in migration. Even when contact was lost, their Rotuman ancestry continued to be acknowledged. Today, with improved communications, modern Torres Strait islanders with Rotuman ancestry are beginning to reconnect with their past.

The history of the Rotuman migrants in the twentieth century Australian diaspora in comparison to those in the Torres Strait is young; so young that it might be thought that definitive statements about their ability to maintain their identity and culture within that of greater Australia cannot yet be made. This is, however, a waypoint of great importance to the Rotuman diaspora and also their families who remained in Rotuma and on the larger islands of Vanua Levu and Viti Levu in Fiji. It marked an era of immense change in the way of life of both

communities. Rotuman culture in the Australian diaspora is still vibrant and the strategies through which the community keeps their culture alive remain strong, assisted by the advent of modern technology and communication and the ease of travel to and from Fiji.

Collective memory has been a common thread throughout the Rotuman journey. It is collective memory which has fuelled the fires of cultural maintenance, re-invention and redirection as it surfaces in the consciousness of the diaspora. It reminds people of the values and mores which are the basis of culture and through these allows a degree of choice in change; change is possible but only in so far as it does not go against the values and mores that a people hold as most important. Rotuman migrants reinforce their collective memories through continuing to interact in a relatively traditional way in Australia and with kinfolk in their home islands and elsewhere through remittances, visits, participation in important rites of passage and celebrations and the medium of modern technology – the telephone and internet. Continuity thus comes via a highly adaptable collective memory toolkit.

For many Rotumans the church is a focal point for the community in diaspora and thus for their collective remembering. They gather to worship and also to socialise and in so doing they reinforce their collective memories through their common ancestry and background, through eating together, planning events together and acculturating the younger generation together. Gossip, memories of *kainaga*, talk about Rotuma and Fiji all add to the collective memory passed on to

the children in their midst and thus contribute to cultural vibrancy, maintenance and in some instances change.

Migration itself, especially in the twentieth century, held many positive factors for both the migrant and the home community in terms of adventure, self-advancement and economic gain. Rotumans are keen to improve their own personal situation as well as that of their kinfolk in Fiji and Rotuma. Doing so allows them to maintain the set of obligations that tie them to Rotuma and vice versa. The *kainaga* on the island continue to tend their island paradise and thus those living away are obligated to them for that care. Maintaining these links ensures the ability of those in the diaspora to return to the island should they wish either permanently in retirement or for extended visits. Thus important milestones like Rotuma Day with traditional dancing, singing and feasting are important dates on the diaspora calendar. Ensuring that children and young people actively perform in these celebrations reinforces the collective memory of the people into the future and instils into them the obligations of their culture.

Maintaining links with the island and Fiji also allows influences from the western world to flow back. In this way Rotumans “back home” become aware of the conditions in which their relatives are living and visits in the other direction add the immediacy of personal experience. This in turn gives intending migrants a sense of what awaits them and paves the way into the diaspora and assists in successful inclusion into a busy, western capitalist society to occur. This is the argument made in the latter chapters of this thesis that collective memory

waypoints are crucial in the ability of Rotumans to maintain a dual identity in diaspora, allowing them to maintain their cultural mores and values and also supporting them in their other roles as citizens of their adopted country.

The latest tool in the maintenance of culture has been the Internet. This is dealt with extensively in the thesis because of the potential it has to reach the widest possible audience in the Rotuman diaspora. It has allowed Pacific Islanders throughout the world to maintain virtual contact with one another thus enabling the transmission of collective memory and cultural messages to expand from the local to the global diaspora. It has been shown to encourage diaspora members to join in. As one “surfer” noted, reading about get-togethers “makes other communities want to do the same and in doing so they are teaching the younger generation part of the Rotuman culture.”<sup>630</sup>

Migration has been a constant in the journey of the Rotuman people through time and space. Since first settling on their island home the Rotuman culture and identity has undergone subtle changes as interventions from outside their purview have occurred. The modern era, along with the phenomenon of globalisation, has wrought further changes in the culture and identity of the Rotuman people. It is unlikely that the strength of collective memory will be enough to maintain the cultural integrity of the Rotuman community in mainland Australia over the long term unless successive generations promote it vigorously once the seed population has passed away. Unlike the first wave who went to live in an island

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<sup>630</sup> Clark, “Survey Questionnaire,” Responses Version1:April 18 2005, Part 3/3, p. 10.



group amongst indigenous people who had similar worldviews and lifestyle, the second wave of migrants and their children are very much a minority in a multicultural society. Thus it is unlikely that future generations of Australians of Rotuman descent will, like those in the Torres Strait, be able to see elements of their culture become naturalised into the dominant one. One cultural belief, however, that of the Rotuman understanding of what counts in descent – one drop of blood – will continue to link the diaspora back through time to the place of its beginning.

Throughout their history Rotumans have been exposed to a variety of interventions from others. I have used the metaphor of “waypoints” to describe the Rotuman journey because it is evocative of collective memory, the tool through which most cultural maintenance and change is achieved; of the process of migration and also of the structure of belief, multi-layered and progressively built over time. Rotumans have taken selectively from each intervention to construct their identity, navigating their cultural passage through space and time. It is the contention of this thesis, firstly, that the migratory history and the consequent adaptive attitude of Pacific Islanders informs the Rotuman ability to interact easily with white outsiders and migrate easily. Secondly, encounters with other islanders over centuries of intra-Pacific seafaring encouraged an ability to tolerate and on occasion live amongst “others.” Thirdly, contact with Europeans of varying hues from rough seamen to missionaries after the late eighteenth century allowed Rotumans to gather knowledge and familiarity with European ways that enabled them to live comfortably within a European-style community

while maintaining their own identity. European customs were filtered in a controlled way into the Rotuman consciousness. Fourthly, the basic strength of Pacific culture lies in community, and the Pacific Islander community involves an abiding value of, responsibility for and obligation to kinfolk in most of the major waypoints of a person's life and relationships with others.

Finally, the thesis concludes that expatriate Rotumans are actively maintaining and growing their cultural identity while living and working comfortably within the Australian community and notes that, while this could create a chasm between island and diaspora it appears not to have done so yet within this first generation of migrants because of the constant communication between the two.

The following quote epitomises the current circumstances and attitude of young Rotuman Australians. It comes from Matt Bray, a young 14 year old Rotuman living in Canberra who wrote, in a letter to the Forum on the Rotuma website in 2004,

*I am biologically only half Rotuman and yet, although I've never actually been there, and have only experienced interpretations and versions of our culture in Fiji, here in Australia, and in books, I feel still connected and drawn to it. The thought that, if I one day have children, that they or my grandchildren, may have to grow up without the chance to hear a "tiap hi'i," wear a "tefui,"<sup>631</sup> ... go*

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<sup>631</sup> *Tefui* are flower garlands.

*“fara,”<sup>632</sup> greet someone with a friendly “Noa’ia,”<sup>633</sup> or hear of Raho ... [and] ... Tokaniua, brings me great sadness ... Rotuma constitutes a lot of how we see ourselves. The values and traditions of the society make us the people we are, and the people we want our children to be ... Ours is a gift that should last forever. Rotuma is a treasure of this world, which, if it were lost, would be the ultimate loss.<sup>634</sup>*

His words embody the conclusions of this thesis – Rotuman culture is being maintained in diaspora using collective remembering of myth, legend, family stories, language, song, dance and community. The case of Matt Bray is not unusual for young Rotumans, he is perhaps more inclined to show his feelings by writing of them and publishing them on the web than others. The cultural identity he has soaked up through the medium of collective memory – effected through hearing about Raho, of listening to stories of the intimate connection between people and animals, fish and mythical beings on the island, attending Rotuman gatherings, visiting relatives in Suva and surfing the Rotuma website show that second generation Rotumans in diaspora continue to receive the messages of Rotuman culture and identity and to transmit them to others. The forces for cultural change are enormous in migration but the forces of collective memory are as powerful. The interaction between these two powerful forces has provided

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<sup>632</sup> *Fara* occurs on Rotuma in the December holidays when Rotumans and their visitors travel around the island singing and dancing in the villages until the early hours of the morning.

<sup>633</sup> *Noa’ia* is the Rotuman equivalent of “Good Day.”

<sup>634</sup> Matt Bray, Forum, <http://www.hawaii.edu/oceanic/rotuma/os/Forum/Forum37.html>, viewed March 2007.

and will continue to provide both cultural stability and economic opportunity for Rotumans overseas.

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