



Photo 14.1 Rotuman teachers at language workshop in Suva, discussing ways to introduce mathematical terms into Rotuman for the purpose of teaching the vernacular language in Fiji schools, 2006. *Alan Howard.*



Photo 14.2: Rotumans in Melbourne, Australia, holding a fund-raiser (*kati*), 1998. *Alan Howard.*

14 Rotuman Identity in a Global Community

I know that I'm more Rotuman now than when I was growing up in Rotuma. Why, you ask? I have now realised the value of what I have always taken for granted, my island Rotuma. I know I'm lucky, I have the best of two worlds.

Sosefo Avaiki, *Rotuma Web site*, 1998¹

Rotumans began to migrate internationally from the time European vessels first recruited them as crewmen in the 1800s. While many of these early travelers found their way home, others ended up in faraway lands. Because they were isolated from their homeland, they ended up assimilating to new cultural environments, their attachments to Rotuma severed. Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, however, new categories of migrants emerged: those marrying expatriate Australians, New Zealanders, Americans, Canadians, and Europeans who went to live in their spouses' home countries; those who went overseas for further education or training; and those employed by international companies who were transferred to other countries. Although some stayed for a limited period of time before returning to Fiji, others settled in locations around the world. In addition, some Rotuman men serving as sailors on modern vessels have chosen to remain abroad. These transnational migrants have provided the foundations for Rotuman communities in several countries. This chapter concerns the formation of the more prominent of these communities and discusses the ways in which local contexts have affected Rotuman cultural identity.

The Genesis of Rotuman Identity

While confined to the island, Rotumans had little reason to think of themselves as a distinct ethnic group. Rather, they

paid far more attention to internal distinctions: between family lineages, between villages and districts, and following missionization, between religious denominations. They were well aware of "others," such as Fijians, Samoans, Tongans, and Europeans, but their conception of "Rotuman" remained vague—in large part because the great majority of people on the island interacted with non-Rotumans in limited, distinctly Rotuman, contexts. It was only after people gained a sense of what it was like to be treated as a *Rotuman* (rather than as a farmer, a man from the district of Oinafa, a chief) that a sense of ethnicity crystallized. This did not occur until a substantial number of Rotumans had migrated to Fiji.

In Fiji, Rotumans were recognized as a distinct group because they differed from Fijians physically and culturally, and their language was unique. They were somewhat marginal under British colonial rule in Fiji, where the categories of Fijian, Indian, and European formed the main template for colonial administrators. Rotumans, being a relatively small population, were often bureaucratically classified in the catchall category of "other." As they came to specialize in certain industries and occupations, and clustered in residential neighborhoods, however, other groups began to develop stereotypes about them. In response, Rotumans started to think about themselves in new ways.

Sexual unions between Europeans and other ethnic groups disrupted the "purity" of these distinctions and resulted in the category of "half-caste."² Initially "half-caste" was a pariah category for the British, emblematic of the breakdown of a proper hierarchy in which Europeans were distinguished conceptually as "civilized," while the rest, to varying degrees, were considered "uncivilized." By the mid-1930s attitudes had changed, and the term "half-caste" gave way to the label "part-European," which had very different, distinctly positive, connotations. Part-Europeans were placed immediately below Europeans in the reformulated hierarchy, with their European "blood" now considered an advantage. Part-Europeans were given preferential treatment and granted privileges sometimes overlapping with those of Europeans.

Rotumans had been engaging in sexual alliances with and marrying Europeans since the early 1820s (with renegade sailors and resident merchants), which contributed to their somewhat favored status within the colonial hierarchy. The 1936 Fiji census report describes Rotumans as follows:

The people of Rotuma are Polynesian stock, but are, nevertheless, somewhat of a mixture. During the last century the Island was not infrequently visited by Whalers, and it is known that at least three Europeans either settled ashore or deserted their vessels and remained on the Island. The men had large families who, intermarrying with inhabitants, were absorbed into the race.

Tradition says that at some time or another, either a Chinese or Japanese vessel was wrecked on the Island or perhaps arrived and stayed there. The definitely Mongolian features which are observable in many Rotumans may thus be accounted for.

The race to-day is a mixture of Polynesian, European and Mongolian, and it is in some cases extremely difficult to distinguish between a European-Rotuman and a so-called full blooded Rotuman.³

This confounding of racial categories gave Rotumans, if not a relatively privileged place in the hierarchy of non-European ethnic groups, at least some latitude for proving their worth, which they did through education and hard work, soon acquiring a reputation for responsibility and honesty. During the latter part of the colonial era Rotumans were considerably overrepresented in professional, management, and supervisory positions.⁴ One could therefore be proud of being Rotuman in Fiji, and Rotuman identity there coalesced into a distinctly positive self-identification.

Rotumans in Fiji organized into social networks when their population in an area reached a critical mass. In both the greater Suva area and in Lautoka/Nadi, where their numbers were greatest, they organized according to district of origin on Rotuma, suggesting that locality on the island remained uppermost in their minds as a basis for group identification. However, as Rotumans were exposed to higher forms of western education, they learned to think about their heritage in abstract terms—in terms of laws, social organization, beliefs, and most importantly, in terms of culture. "Rotuman culture" became an object of thought, analysis, discussion, and debate. This required both the capacity to distance themselves from their cultural experience and the ability to make meaningful comparisons with other cultures. The result was the development of a heightened cultural consciousness and a refined sense of Rotuman identity.

Australia

The first Rotuman migrants to Australia were participants in the Torres Islands pearl-diving industry, which was at its peak in the late nineteenth century. Resident Commissioner William Gordon reported in 1884:

A very considerable number of men...go to Torres Strait, to obtain employment in the pearl fisheries, where exceptionally high wages can be earned. There are at present over one hundred Rotumah men at Torres Strait—of these the majority are merely employed in the management of boats, at a comparatively small wage. About forty or fifty, however, are engaged as divers (who earn up to £40 per month).⁵

Gordon went on to bemoan the allegation that after the short fishing season the men usually went to Sydney and were relieved of their wages by "sharpers and prostitutes of the lowest class," who were on the watch for them on their arrival in Sydney—a lament repeated by W. L. Allardyce, the Acting Resident Commissioner in 1881.⁶

An unknown number of the men who had engaged in the pearl industry remained and married local women. Descendents of these early migrants have been identified in northern Australia and on Thursday Island (in the Torres Strait),⁷ and in recent years some have attempted to trace their Rotuman heritage via Internet inquiries or visits to Rotuma.

A later immigration stream began in the 1950s and accelerated throughout the remainder of the century. It followed two trajectories, distinguished by gender. The majority of Rotuman women who migrated to Australia married Australian men. Many met their husbands in Fiji before emigrating; others went to Australia for schooling or work and met their husbands there. In her study of Rotuman migrants in the Sydney area, Seferosa Michael estimated that "70–80% of all migration to Australia has been the result of marriage to non-Rotuman spouses, most of whom were Australian citizens."⁸ Australian men working in Fiji mostly occupied managerial positions with firms and banks or served in professional capacities. They were generally of middle-class background, and on returning to Australia, they brought their wives into middle-class Australian society, to which the women successfully adapted. These women and their children adjusted to mainstream Aussie culture and did

not consider themselves members of a disadvantaged ethnic group.

The circumstances of migration to Australia have been somewhat different for Rotuman men. Many of the first migrants came as sailors and jumped ship. Some were caught and sent home in disgrace, but others married Australian women and settled down. Most eventually legalized their status, although some did not do so for many years, placing them in a tenuous social position in the meantime. Compared to Rotuman women in Australia, Rotuman men spanned a broader range in the occupational structure, from unskilled workers to positions of management. On the whole, however, our research suggests that they aspired to middle-class living standards, which many if not most achieved.

By far the largest Rotuman enclave in Australia at the end of the twentieth century, consisting of well over one hundred families in which at least one person was of Rotuman extraction, was in Sydney, where migrants organized around churches. Rotuman Wesleyans initially joined a Polynesian congregation established by Rev. Jione Langi, who was assigned by the Fiji Methodist Church to serve migrants from Fiji in Sydney before he was posted to New Zealand. When the various Polynesian enclaves grew large enough, they split off, each establishing its own church and supporting its own minister. Soon after inception, the Rotuman congregation divided over the issue of language. Whereas a core group of cultural conservatives insisted that services be conducted in the Rotuman language exclusively, others requested English be used as well. The latter group started their own congregation, without benefit of an ordained minister. Catholic migrants in the Sydney area organized into a social group that met periodically; not until October 1999 was the first Catholic mass conducted entirely in the Rotuman language.

Other, smaller Rotuman enclaves developed in Brisbane and Melbourne. In both cities Rotumans organized and met on a more or less regular basis.

Rotumans, along with other non-white immigrants, experienced a shift in policies and attitudes in Australia over the years. During the post-World War II years, Australian immigration policy was exclusionist; the so-called "White Australia" policy prevailed. The category of "Rotuman" was essentially unknown; to respond "Rotuman" when asked one's ethnicity by white Australians required further

explanation and was generally avoided. One could say "Fijian," "Pacific Islander," or "Polynesian," or, if light-skinned enough (and especially if one had a European-sounding last name), one could pass as an "Aussie." For the most part, however, it was best to avoid ethnic categorization whenever possible.

With the demise of the White Australia policy and its replacement by a commitment to making Australia a "multicultural" society, the position of Rotuman migrants changed. It became chic to be "ethnic." Multiculturalism encouraged an emphasis on distinctiveness as opposed to identification with the unmarked, connotatively bland concept of "Aussie." Rotumans have therefore been encouraged to reevaluate their ethnic identity, to organize into groups based on their Rotuman heritage, and to give public cultural performances of various kinds. They are still confronted with the fact that, for many white Australians, Rotuma is unknown; thus, in most encounters they still identify themselves as from Fiji or Polynesia. Nevertheless, the climate has become much more favorable for maintaining a positive Rotuman self-identification.

New Zealand

In many respects Rotuman migration to New Zealand parallels the Australian experience. An additional factor in this instance was the presence of the New Zealand Air Force in Suva until Fiji gained independence in 1970. A number of Rotuman women married airmen—some officers, others enlisted men of varied backgrounds. Most melted into the social circles of their husbands, and those who could do so took advantage of their part-European identification possibility, which served them well in Pākehā (white New Zealander) society.

In 1994, with the assistance of Rev. Jione Langi, who by then was pastor at large for the Fiji Wesleyans in New Zealand, we were able to identify 125 families in the country that included at least one person of Rotuman extraction. Langi also helped provide information regarding occupation, year of immigration to New Zealand, and spouse's ethnicity if married. Of the 74 Rotuman women for whom we had marital information, 40 were married to or had been married to white New Zealanders, 15 to Rotuman or part-Rotuman men, 16 to other Polynesians (including Fijians or part-Fijians), 2 to Indians, and 1 to a Chinese man. Of the 36 Rotuman men in

our survey, 14 were married to Pākehā women, 10 to Rotumans, and 12 to other Polynesians. A higher proportion of women thus married Pākehā spouses (55 percent compared to 39 percent of men). Rotumans married to Rotumans or part-Rotumans accounted for only 23 percent of the New Zealand couples we identified, which suggests, along with the Australian data, that for Rotumans intermarriage and migration are strongly correlated.

Our information on year of immigration indicates that Rotuman migration to New Zealand began in the 1950s and reached a peak during the 1970s and 1980s, when New Zealand immigration policy was most receptive. For the seventy individuals on whom we have such data, 20.0 percent arrived before 1970, 35.7 percent came in the 1970s, 38.6 percent came in the 1980s, and only 5.7 percent immigrated during the first four years of the 1990s.

The largest concentration of Rotuman migrants in New Zealand was in Auckland, with smaller but nevertheless vital communities in and around Napier and Wellington. In the 1970s a first attempt was made to organize the growing Rotuman enclave in Auckland, but the effort was ill-fated and short-lived; a second attempt met with failure in the 1980s. Factional strife reportedly broke out, leading to disenchantment and bad feelings. Then, following the appointment of Rev. Langi to Wellington in 1985, a gradual process of reincorporation took place. Based on his experience with the Rotuman community in Sydney, Langi made an effort to identify Rotuman families in New Zealand and to organize them. In 1992, when he was appointed "pastor at large" to the Fiji Methodist community in New Zealand, he relocated to Auckland. He helped to establish the Rotuman New Zealand Fellowship as a formal organization with a written constitution, dues, and biannual meetings. The fellowship hosted Rotuman groups traveling to New Zealand, organized a Christmas sojourn to Fiji and Rotuma, and held fund-raising drives for various purposes. It was nonsectarian in character and divided into three chapters based on regions within New Zealand (Auckland, Wellington, and Waikato/Bay of Plenty).

Despite Langi's charismatic leadership, disputes jeopardized the integrity of the fellowship at times. Following a trouble-plagued group trip to Rotuma in 1993, during which limited transportation required some families to remain in Fiji rather than traveling all the way to the home

island, several members protested and dropped out of the fellowship, threatening the group's cohesion. After Langi was reassigned to Fiji, most of the protestors returned to the group, and the fellowship regained its vigor, with well-attended biannual meetings.

As in Australia, Rotumans in New Zealand have largely been integrated into the urban middle class. This is reflected in our data on occupation, which showed a preponderance of both men and women, and their spouses, in managerial/supervisory, professional, or white-collar occupations (75.0 percent of Rotuman women, 70.6 percent of their spouses; 55.9 percent of Rotuman men, 85.7 percent of their spouses).

Circumstances for Rotumans in New Zealand have been affected by the social visibility of the indigenous Māori population. The initial division between Pākehā and Māori remained the anchor of New Zealand ethnic distinctions, although substantial immigration of other Polynesians (particularly Cook Islanders, Samoans, and Niueans) following World War II made the situation more complex. As in Australia, "Rotuman" was a largely unknown category, and migrants generally identified themselves as from Fiji or Polynesia, but the connotations associated with being Polynesian in New Zealand are complicated by ambivalent feelings frequently expressed by Pākehā. The association of Māori and Samoans in many people's minds with violence and presumed irresponsibility have offset proclaimed liberal commitments to a society in which race is of no consequence. Rotumans found that the Polynesian component of their identity could be problematic at times and contextually variable.

Spreading Far Afield

Rotuman communities of lesser size and varying cohesion developed elsewhere, including Hawai'i, the San Francisco Bay Area, Vancouver in British Columbia, and Fort McMurray in Alberta, Canada. A substantial number of Rotumans emigrated to England, where they were widely scattered, making organization impractical. A few families with Rotuman members settled in other places, including Sweden and Norway, for example. Individual Rotumans, serving in various professional and skilled capacities, scattered around the globe. Everywhere they have gone, Rotumans have adapted well and successfully.

Success and the Problem of Community Formation

One characteristic that facilitated Rotuman success abroad is a highly developed social sensitivity that is ingrained in Rotuman culture. In foreign environments, this has translated into an ability to adapt quickly to a wide variety of social conditions. The drive for autonomy has been another contributing factor. Socialized to the importance of self-reliance, most Rotumans have been able to draw on their own internal resources when away from home. Rotuman socialization seems to result in what Vilsoni Hereniko calls "a quiet confidence,"⁹ which fosters a "can do" attitude. Repeatedly, in widely varying contexts, Rotuman migrants tell how they observed complex activities and role performances by seasoned veterans and said to themselves, "I can do that!" They go on to tell how they in fact learned to perform and achieved success.

A consequence of educational and occupational success abroad is that Rotuman migrants did not form ghettoized enclaves. Being readily employable, they have had multiple options, not only in places to work but in places to live. This dispersion means that they have interacted far more with others than with Rotumans, both as workmates and as neighbors. It also has made it difficult to sustain a strong sense of Rotuman identity, or to "do" Rotuman culture in an active way.

On the island of Rotuma, people do Rotuman culture as a matter of course. They do it unself-consciously, in an all-encompassing manner. People interact with one another according to generally accepted rules of conduct that are characteristically Rotuman; dress in suitable clothes according to context; sit on mats in gender-specific ways; plant crops, fish, and even buy food in shops in identifiably Rotuman ways. The way people eat, drink, sing, dance, plan events—the very rhythm of daily life—is clearly patterned by Rotuman cultural principles, regardless of how one chooses to define "culture." Even individuals who were socialized on the island as children but have been abroad for many years readopt the patterns they learned when young upon their return. Those who do not do so are targets of criticism, especially if they have the temerity to disregard the rules of decorum, or worse, to try to change the rules by fiat. In such a context, where the few non-Rotumans who live on the island have been largely assimilated, issues of cultural

identity are virtually nonexistent, or at least are heavily muted. People don't *choose* to act as Rotumans, or to honor their Rotuman heritage, so much as to "go with the flow" of social life on the island.

In Fiji, the situation is more complex. In some places—parts of Suva, Vatukoula, Lautoka, and Nadi, for example—the density of Rotuman communities is sufficient to sustain a daily routine that is comparable in many ways to that on Rotuma. People may be able to get along speaking Rotuman most of the time, interacting mainly with Rotuman kin, eating Rotuman dishes, and so on. But even so, people come into frequent contact with Fijians, Fiji-Indians, and others, requiring them to monitor their behavior in ways that are unnecessary on Rotuma. Furthermore, when holding characteristic Rotuman events, like weddings and funerals, dances and fund-raisers, certain accommodations must be made (e.g., substitute materials, untitled men taking the roles of chiefs) that require making choices. The process of deciding what substitutions would or would not be acceptable brings cultural consciousness to the fore and heightens a sense of Rotuman identity.

Migrants living apart from other Rotumans have more choices, and have to make a more self-conscious effort if they want to maintain their affiliation with one or more of the Rotuman communities in Fiji. Attending functions may require extensive travel, forgoing competing commitments, and other sacrifices. In general, however, Fiji offers the vast majority of Rotumans an opportunity to interact with one another relatively frequently, and to sustain a lifestyle that is not significantly different in many respects from the way of life on Rotuma. The fact that Fijian culture is in many ways compatible with Rotuman culture makes the transition easier, and the choices less drastic. Cultural identity under these conditions, while heightened in many respects, does not become salient, and for most people is subordinated to local, occupational, and other identities.

For Rotumans living in countries dominated by western cosmopolitan elites, the circumstances are quite different. Daily life in cities like Sydney, Auckland, and Vancouver requires patterns of behavior dramatically different from those on Rotuma. Most individuals spend their weekdays working as wage earners, attending school, or running their households. Since families tend to be geographically dispersed, there is little time for socializing, other than with workmates, schoolmates, and neighbors, few of whom are

likely to be Rotuman. This means that Rotumans abroad who decide to organize themselves into communities are restricted to weekends if they plan events that are distinctively Rotuman. A few of the larger enclaves, in Sydney and Auckland, for example, are able to sustain church congregations with Rotuman ministers who conduct services in the vernacular language. This allows people to socialize with one another as well, reinforcing ties and heightening cultural awareness (it also provides a venue for conflict, however, and for personal antagonisms to flourish). In such instances, Sunday is a day when one's Rotuman identity can be foregrounded. But the vast majority of Rotumans overseas attend churches where services are conducted by ministers or priests unfamiliar with the language or culture. For these individuals, the only time that can be allocated for Rotuman events is Saturday. Likewise, Saturday is the only day available for events that are inclusive of members of nearly all religious denominations.

Given these circumstances, organizing activities or events is no simple task. People often have conflicting commitments, even if they desire to spend time with their fellow Rotumans. Their children may be engaged in sports or other activities during the weekends that pull them away; non-Rotuman spouses may have obligations to their families and friends. Individuals' commitment to the local Rotuman community varies greatly, so that while some are eager participants, others have to be coaxed to become or remain involved, or even to attend an occasional event. Keeping an overseas Rotuman community viable thus requires the leadership of some committed individuals who are prepared to give the time and energy to organizing activities, to keep people informed by making phone calls, sending newsletters, or setting up Web pages, and to take responsibility for raising and allocating funds to meet expenses incurred by the group. Where there is no established hierarchy, however, leadership is a delicate matter, and concerns over the management of money have plagued overseas Rotuman communities wherever they have emerged.

Maintaining Rotuman Identity Abroad

When asked about which aspects of Rotuman culture are most important to preserve, the first thing mentioned by most migrants, particularly those of the older generation who

grew up on the island, is the Rotuman language. Language is key for many reasons. Not only does it encode aspects that are unique to the culture; it also provides the nuances of communication that are at the heart of intimacy and social life on Rotuma.

Independent of language, the ability to discuss genealogical connections, as well as politics, events, and personalities on Rotuma, identifies individuals as active members in the Rotuman community. Control of information about Rotuma, or about Rotumans in Fiji or elsewhere, is a valuable asset. Videotapes of key events have become an important cultural commodity, allowing migrants to experience them vicariously, or to remember and relive them. Migrants, their spouses, and children are increasingly acquiring books, musical CDs, and other publications about Rotuma. By seeking out and incorporating such information, they engage in the process of preserving and interpreting Rotuman culture and history as well as enhance opportunities for participating in discussions about it.

Of all the activities fostered by migrant organizations none is more important to cultural identity than Rotuman dance. Dance performances contribute to formation of Rotuman cultural identity in three fundamental ways:

1. They provide opportunities for Rotumans to interact with each other, especially during practices, in characteristically Rotuman ways (with much joking and banter) and thus create a venue for consolidating relationships.
2. The lyrics of dances characteristically idealize Rotuma and its culture. They place heavy emphasis on such notions as the beauty of the island, the bounty of food, gardening and fishing, and Rotuman values of hard work and generosity.
3. Dance engages people in performing publicly as representatives of Rotuman culture and thus encourages identification of performers as Rotumans.

Cultural artifacts also play a role in promoting identity, depending on availability. Rotuman fine mats are available in Fiji, for example, although they are mostly made on the home



Photo 14.3 Rehearsing for a *tautoga* dance performance at meeting of the Rotuman New Zealand Fellowship at a Maori marae in Auckland, 1994. *Alan Howard.*



Photo 14.4 Hugag'esea Club of British Columbia, Canada, performing a *tautoga* in a hotel ballroom for members of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania, 2003. *Alan Howard.*

island and are very costly. Still, they are presented at most ceremonies, along with the distinctive Rotuman *tēfui* garlands, and are highly prized as cultural emblems. In Australia, New Zealand, and elsewhere, however, fine mats are in short supply, so they have, for the most part, been withdrawn from circulation, or they may be used for display only, rather than exchanged. Other, more accessible items have come to signify Rotuman (or more generally, Polynesian) identity abroad. Dressing for special events in island-style clothes, eating island foods, and decorating homes with shell leis, woven fans, and photographs or paintings of scenes from Rotuma are all ways of making public or personal statements about cultural identity.

Communication and Cultural Identity

The pattern for early out-migrants from Rotuma—those who left in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries and did not return—was to break ties to the culture and, since they were not great letter writers, to terminate contact with friends and relatives. Descendents of some of these migrants have informed us that they were told almost nothing about the island by their Rotuman elders, who appeared to have had no interest in maintaining a Rotuman cultural identity. In part, this was a consequence of Rotuma's isolation. Ships went to the island only a few times a year, requiring major commitments of time for visits, and the only means of communicating with people there was by letter or, after World War II, a problem-plagued and erratic radio telephone.

As mentioned in chapter 12, the situation changed in 1981 with the construction of the airstrip on Rotuma and the inauguration of weekly flights from Fiji. Along with a more frequent shipping schedule, visits to Rotuma became more feasible for people abroad, with a consequent explosion of traffic between migrant communities abroad and Rotuma. During the 1990s a number of family reunions were staged on the island, in addition to group visits organized by Rotumans living overseas. Migrant communities in Australia and New Zealand have also hosted visits by groups from Rotuma. The installation of a satellite dish and telephone service in the late 1990s, which made possible direct dial telephone calls, further enhanced the degree of regular contact between migrants and their relatives on Rotuma. Making a telephone call, expensive though it may be, seems

to be much more congenial to Rotuman styles of communication than the more formal process of writing letters.

These developments have acted to bolster the cultural consciousness of Rotumans abroad by reinforcing ties between migrants and their kin on the home island. The emergence of e-mail in the 1990s provided an additional vehicle for emigrants with computer access to stay in touch, although finding one another on the Internet was not so easy at the beginning. Not long after getting wired for e-mail ourselves, we began to share news concerning Rotuma with a few colleagues who had also done research on the island. The network expanded through firsthand contact with Rotumans, or spouses of Rotumans, who were online. Eventually, in 1995, we started ROTUMANET, an e-mail list of interested parties with whom we shared news from any Rotuman community. People sent us news via e-mail, fax, or regular mail, and we relayed it to everyone on the list, which came to number more than sixty e-mail addresses.

In November 1996 we took the next step—to construct a Web site that would provide a place in cyberspace where emigrant Rotumans could not only keep up on news from Rotuman communities around the world, but also find and communicate with one another. Our primary goal was to do what we could to preserve a cultural heritage we greatly admire and to facilitate the development of a global Rotuman community. The Rotuma Web site features frequent postings of news and events contributed by members of various Rotuman communities, discussions of important issues, a members database that allows the scattered population to locate one another, an interactive Rotuman-English dictionary and many other features of interest to the broader Rotuman community.

If we define community as a body of persons having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests,¹⁰ then it is fair to say that an international Rotuman community indeed exists. It is a community whose focal point is the island itself, in which membership depends, to some extent at least, on an interest in Rotuman history, language, and culture. More importantly, it is a community defined by a common interest in one another's lives by virtue of kinship, marriage, friendship, or shared experience. Most people with attachments to the island want to stay in touch with friends and relatives; they want to share news and stay

informed of what's going on in Rotuma and in overseas enclaves where they have kin, schoolmates, and friends. Abroad, however, they must also contend with the demands of cultural contexts that require setting aside, or at least muting, their Rotuman identity.

The centrifugal forces that act to weaken Rotuman cultural identity abroad will probably increase with each passing generation. The Rotuma Web site represents a concerted effort on our part, as well as all those who contribute to it, to counteract those forces, and to promote Rotumans' engagement with their cultural heritage. We are committed to doing so because we believe that something vitally important would be lost if that heritage were forgotten. We see a link between the success Rotumans have enjoyed overseas and their childhood socialization into Rotuman culture, and believe that by nurturing the development of a global Rotuman community, and a continuing pride of heritage, that the children and grandchildren of migrants will be well served in the future.

At the heart of Rotuman culture has been a strong sense of personal and group autonomy. It has sustained Rotumans through Tongan invasions, European intrusions, colonial regimes, and in adapting to postcolonial cosmopolitan society. It is the foundation of a legacy of which Rotumans everywhere can be justifiably proud.

Notes to Chapter 14

Issues of Rotuman identity represent our most recent research interests and have resulted in two articles from which this concluding chapter draws its material and inspiration: "Where Has Rotuman Culture Gone? And What is it Doing There?" was published in *Pacific Studies* (Howard and Rensel 2001), and "Rotuman Identity in the Electronic Age," in *Cultural Identity and Politics in the Pacific*, edited by Toon van Meijl and Jelle Miedema (Howard and Rensel 2004). We have also included material first presented in "Rotumans in Fiji: The Genesis of an Ethnic Group," a chapter in *Exiles and Migrants in Oceania*, edited by Michael Lieber (Howard and Howard 1977).

¹ <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Forum/Forum5.html>

² See Fiji Census of 1911, Fiji Government.

³ Fiji Census of 1936, 11.

⁴ Howard 1966b, 1970.

⁵ Outward Letters, 24 November 1884.

⁶ Allardyce 1885–1886.

⁷ See Shnukal 1992.

⁸ Michael 1991, 8–9.

⁹ Vilsoni Hereniko, personal communication.

¹⁰ Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 1993, 233.

