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CONSERVATISM AND NON-TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP IN ROTUMA

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IN A PREVIOUS PAPER on Rotuma it was pointed out that the majority of emergent leaders ¹ on the island accept the community's social conservatism rather than try to force social change. ² In this paper I intend to expand upon this statement and demonstrate that not only are non-traditional leaders prone to accept traditional culture patterns, but that in some ways they actively foster conservatism beyond the ostensible desires of the traditional leaders, the chiefs.

In using the term "conservatism" I do not mean to imply resistance to all change; indeed, virtually every Rotuman agrees that any change which will improve their standard of living is desirable. It is the very task of the emergent elite to instrument changes toward that goal. They are responsible, as teachers, government officials, businessmen, medical personnel and religious leaders for adapting Rotuman society to the modern world. Rather, by conservatism I am referring to the maintenance of traditional patterns of behaviour manifest in ceremonies and other 'non-adaptive' custom, as distinct from what might be conceived as resistance to 'adaptive' change. In other words, when used in this manner, conservatism implies the preservation of a distinct cultural identity within the framework of an encompassing socioeconomic system. In Rotuma's case this is minimally the Colony of Fiji, maximally, Western civilization.

Traditional leadership in Rotuma is in the hands of hereditary chiefs, theoretically chosen on the basis of their affiliation with a highly ranked bilateral descent group, or *kainaga*. There are three categories of hereditary chieftainship: *gagaj es itu*, *fa es ho'aga* ³ and *as togi*. *Gagaj es itu* are chiefs of the largest social divisions on the island, which are districts (*itu*). Each district, of which there are seven, is divided into a number of *ho'aga*, which consist of unrelated households

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in the same locality. ⁴ Each *ho'aga* functions as a work group under the direction of a head man, the *fa es ho'aga*, whenever district work needs to be done. The *ho'aga* also comes to the aid of any of its component households in times of need; at weddings and funerals its functions overlap with those of the personal kindred of the persons affected. According to tradition, both *gagaj es itu* and *fa es ho'aga* are supposed to be selected by the descendants of known ancestors who 'belonged' to a specified house-site, or *fuag ri*, within the relevant district or *ho'aga*. Associated with each chiefly *fuag ri* is an hereditary title, and in most cases sections of bush land over which the titled person automatically becomes steward, or *pure*. ⁵ When formal custom is adhered to, the choice of a successor is made at a meeting of the *kainaga*, and the senior male member of the group is chosen. The chiefly title is passed down from generation to generation, and were custom strictly followed, each successive title holder would reside on the ancestral *fuag ri*. ⁶

In fact, however, the rules of chiefly succession are not strictly adhered to. Various Colonial Administrators ⁷ have exerted pressure toward the democratic election of chiefs, while others have virtually appointed as *gagaj es itu* men whose leadership qualities they have admired. *Fa es ho'aga* are more often chosen in the traditional manner (i.e. at *kainaga* meetings), but they are prone to leave Rotuma or their home district whenever it suits them, and though

retaining their title under such circumstances, they turn over the duties of leadership to an untitled relative. In actual fact, then, some of the men acting as *fa es ho'aga* were never properly selected. In addition, some properly selected *fa es ho'aga* do not assume the chiefly title, since there are no practical advantages involved and a feast would be required to take it. ⁸ As *togi* are titled chiefs who are neither *fa es ho'aga* nor *gagaj es itu*. Their titles are derived in the same way as the other two categories of chieftainship, from ancestral *fuag ri*, and their selection is likewise supposed to be by members of the *kainaga* associated with it. ⁹ They do

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not, however, hold authority over a social group and strictly speaking are not leaders. At most they act as lieutenants for the head man of their particular *ho'aga*.

When freedom of choice can be exercised, chiefs are generally selected on the basis of their being 'good men' in accordance with basic Rotuman values. The necessary attributes are generosity, humility, and consideration for others. To choose such a man is, of course, a most expedient move on the part of the selectors. Such a chief's generosity may be tapped in times of need, his humility opens him to persuasion, and his considerateness constitutes an assurance that no harsh demands will be made. The same combination of attributes, however, when viewed from the other side, constitutes a set of expectations that renders chieftainship a most difficult role to play. For *gagaj es itu* the role is particularly stressful, since it is a function of the district chief to arbitrate petty quarrels and make decisions on controversial matters. It is almost inevitable that delicate decisions will antagonize someone, and in return the disgruntled parties may do their utmost to make the chief's life miserable. Accusations are continually made that the *gagaj es itu* favour their relatives, that they are acting to benefit themselves and not their district, or simply that they are bad chiefs. There are numerous instances of chiefs' orders having been ignored or even flouted outright when people felt that they were unjust or contrary to their interests. In such circumstances the chiefs have no recourse except to complain to the District Officer; a course of action rarely taken since it not only amounts to an admission of ineffectiveness but also may compound the antagonisms.

The strains inherent in the role of *gagaj es itu* can perhaps best be illustrated with autobiographical data. ¹⁰ For example, one man who had served as a district chief for many years gave the following account of his experiences:

At that time, after my wife and I had our first two children, the problem of choosing a new chief arose in our district. To my surprise I was chosen and I had no idea how I was going to lead my people. I felt so strange and nervous sitting in front of so many people; old people, young men and women, and children. How would I speak to them? I knew that being their chief I was their servant at the same time. I took my place as chief and because my wife was a good woman my task was made easier. Everybody seemed to like her. At the beginning my father helped me, telling me how to act and how to make the people like me. Unfortunately he died two years after my election, leaving me alone to lead my people. Not long after that my poor wife became seriously ill and died, leaving me with five children to take care of. How sad I was to lose two people in so short a time. My mother was too old and feeble and couldn't care for the children

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properly. For a whole year I led my people alone, and my sister took my wife's place as leader of the women's activities.

I then re-married, taking for my wife a woman from my district. How different I found the people this time. They seemed to hate my new wife and began to disobey my words. Even my own children did not like this woman, and I, too, noticed that she was not as nice as my first wife; there was really a great difference.

Now we have stayed together for many years without a child, but since she's my wife I love her. Many times people have refused to show her the respect due to a chief's wife, but she is my wife and I must support her position. It's not all her fault; she has something to say, too. I noticed that many people did not like me because of my wife, but I would not leave her for them. Many of them grumble and say that they should have someone new in my place because I was not doing the right things at times, but none of them have had the courage to air their views at the district meetings. Sometimes I knew I was doing the wrong thing, but if my wife wanted things done a certain way I did not like to oppose her. Sometimes my wife has caused my people to be angry with me, but I care more about her than I do about them; she is the one who takes care of me.

I am now still chief of my district and am trying my best to look after the people. Many of them like me, but many hate me. They think I am getting old and am no longer suited for this kind of work.

This particular case illustrates the conflicts that may develop between kinship obligations and the requirements of good chieftainship, although in this instance the problem was no doubt exaggerated since the offending kinswoman, the chief's wife, is in a position of authority (over the women in the district). The tone of the informant's comments should be noted, for it typifies the rather passive defiance with which chiefs respond to the passive defiance of their subjects.

The reluctance of people to obey commands regarded as unjust is reported in the autobiography of an ex-chief:

I was later chosen to take over as chief of a district with the approval of all the people, and I ruled over them. Even the adults were like children; sometimes they were so naughty that I had to speak to them like children. I made them cut copra for me, or do any work I wanted done. My wife did her very best and the women in the district all liked her. Whatever she wanted done, they were ready to help. But for my part, whenever I called my men to do my work only a few came out of more than a hundred who lived in the district. My people built a house for me and cut my copra, but they were not satisfied with what I had done for them. One day I received a letter from the District Officer telling me that another man had been appointed to take my place, because the people were no longer willing to let me be their chief. I felt sorry, because whenever I had difficult work to do they would come and do it for me in a short while. Now I had to do the work myself. I can remember how glad the people were when I was told I was no longer to be chief.

The authoritarian attitude of this informant contrasts markedly with the attitude of the previous informant, who, despite his limitations, had been eminently more successful as a chief. It is apparent that the subjects of this man felt themselves intolerably oppressed, and

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by complaining *en masse* to the District Officer managed to bring about his removal. His use of their labour for his own private ends was entirely contradictory to the spirit of chieftainship on Rotuma and went beyond legitimate chiefly rights.

This man's failure as chief has some interesting corollaries. He was chosen not long after he had returned from receiving secondary education in Fiji. His selection was thus an experiment on the people's part with an educated chief, chosen on the basis of Western rather than traditional considerations. As is apparent from his account, the experiment was a failure.

Still one more example is instructive. During my stay on the island a new chief was chosen in one of the districts. He was a young man, 32 years old, and following his election ¹¹ he voiced these apprehensions in an interview:

Now I am a chief and it is the first time in my life I feel really bad. Being a chief is very difficult and I am very unhappy. From the night that I found out I was the new chief, for about four days I could not think properly or remember what I was doing—just like I had no brain. One day I went to the bush to weed my garden and I left my knife stuck in a tree. I didn't feel like working so I just prepared my food and when I finished I couldn't remember where my knife was.

Now I've been chief for three weeks and I still have trouble thinking and worry a lot. It would be better to live like I did before than to be chief. If you're a good chief the people will all like you, but if you are a bad chief they will hate you. I'm worried about whether I'll be a good chief or not. A worried life is no good.

An obvious impression one gets from reading this man's comments is his apparent lack of psychological preparedness for assuming the role he has been selected to fill. The reader will note that the first informant reflected upon similar apprehensions he experienced when called upon to assume office. A lack of psychological preparedness for assertive leadership seems to be characteristic of men about to become chief, the second informant being a rare exception.

This situation tempts theoretical speculation. It is apparent that in the current system, at least, the differential probability of one man rather than another becoming a chief is quite small. There are over one hundred potential titles available, and since a man can trace his ascendants bilaterally, the chances of his being eligible for one or another title are considerable. ¹² Thus as some Rotumans say, not without a tinge of irony, "Everybody thinks himself

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a chief." The important point is that differential privilege does not begin in childhood as it does in systems with more clearly defined succession rules, such as primogeniture. Under the latter circumstances, everyone knows who is the legitimate successor to a chief from the time he is born, and they treat him accordingly. The people are conditioned over many years to accept his leadership, and he in turn is psychologically groomed to accept a superordinate position. In Rotuma, however, no one knows who will eventually become a chief, and consequently interpersonal relations between all non-chiefs tend to be stabilized on an egalitarian basis. When a man finally is selected he suddenly finds himself chief over people who only yesterday were his friends, and who may have been taking joking license with him. One can hardly expect a man under such circumstances to be a self-confident, assertive leader. Add to this the personal attributes of humility, generosity and consideration for others that are the criteria of selection and one can well understand why chiefs in Rotuma regard themselves more as servants than leaders. ¹³

The position of *fa es ho'aga* is only slightly freer from stress than that of *gagaj es itu*. Since the groups over which they hold authority are relatively small (ranging in size between about 20 and 75 persons), their control is more direct and their relationship with the people more personal. Furthermore, they are rarely called upon to arbitrate internal disputes. Nevertheless, antagonisms often arise, and they may be even more bitter as a result of intimacy. It is not at all uncommon for a man to quit one *ho'aga* to join another, a fact which has resulted in the dispersal of *ho'aga*

households in some districts,¹⁴ and thoroughly unpopular men may be forced to relinquish their positions.

Traditional leaders are thus continually under stress, and they tend to view chieftainship as a role with few advantages and many disadvantages. Indeed, the only apparent advantage is the right to special ceremonial treatment at large scale feasts; this, and in some cases, better land holdings. It is also significant for the purposes of this paper that the burdens of chieftainship are enhanced by many traditional customs. This is particularly true in the ceremonial sphere, where chiefs are expected to contribute a disproportionate amount of economic

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support. In traditional times, when the economy was self-contained and wealth reckoned in mats and perishable foodstuffs, this presented no problem. Each chief acted as a distributive agent for his entire group, the prestige of the group (mostly kinsmen) being dependent on his wealth and generosity. His subsistence level was not materially affected by these ceremonial exchanges. Today, however, with the intrusion of a market economy, the drain is largely on money and negotiable commodities; hence standard of living is directly affected.

As a consequence of these circumstances, Rotuman chiefs tend to manifest considerable ambivalence when it comes to matters of custom. On the one hand they enjoy the overt respect shown to them on formal occasions; on the other they resent the burdensome demands involved. This ambivalence was reflected time and time again in answer to my inquiries. During the period of field work a substantial number of chiefs were interviewed and asked to compare European and Rotuman 'ways'. Only one of them, a *fa es ho'aga* who taught Rotuman custom in the schools, was unequivocally complimentary to *fak Rotuam* (Rotuman custom). The rest expressed opinions like the following young chief who, on the one hand, answered the question "How do you think European culture has affected Rotuma?" by stating:

The Europeans came to Rotuma and brought their food which made the people sick; some of the food like candy is too sweet, and some foods are too soft. It makes the teeth all fall out. In the old days the people all had good teeth and they were very strong. The European foods have made the people very weak. Also the people have left the Rotuman ways and are following European ways. The young boys haven't learned to be *mafua*¹⁵ or to call a *fakpeche*.¹⁶ Before the people didn't know how to steal from a business, but now they've learned ways to steal.

Yet, after this apparent indictment of European influence, when asked what he would do for Rotuma if it were entirely up to him, the same chief replied:

If it were up to me, I would want the people to follow the European ways. If we did that we wouldn't make things like *hapag su*,¹⁷ and things like that where everyone comes whether they are invited or not. The Rotuman way costs too much money—sometimes they kill seven cows to make a wedding. Also at a wedding the bride and groom have to give back all the mats. At a European wedding they keep all their presents. That's the right way I think.

Thus, after a man has been chief for a while he is likely to become disillusioned. Finding it impossible to please everyone, his behaviour is apt to be governed by personal expediency above everything else, for this is the only principle which is likely to bring him a measure of satisfaction. In matters of custom, he is likely to lend support when it appears to be to his advantage, but to denigrate *fak Rotuam* when it suits him better.

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The non-traditional leaders are men whose prestige accrues from their success in Western occupations. All these persons are responsible for making decisions in specialized areas, but more important for our concern is that as a result of their prestige they exert influence in spheres not covered by their authority. Such generalized influence gains support from the traditional emphasis on humility, since this leads people to exaggerate the problem solving abilities of others in comparison to themselves. The underlying premise seems to be: "You are a knowledgeable man and I am not; therefore you are able to solve problems better than I." It is noteworthy that in contrast to the nontraditional leaders, the chiefs do not possess specialized knowledge upon which the community depends and hence do not qualify as 'knowledgeable' men. As far as everyday life is concerned they are thoroughly expendable. The influence of the non-traditional leaders is further enhanced by the fact that most of them are in positions of real authority; again in contrast to the chiefs. Some of them are able to apply stiff sanctions—the District Officer¹⁸ can sentence people to jail or fine them, and the religious leaders can impose religious sanctions (e.g. Deprive persons of church membership or withhold grace). Another advantage enjoyed by the non-traditional leaders is that they are able to remain aloof from localized and kinship entanglements to a greater extent. For one thing, they are economically independent, since their income depends on salary rather than copra. The chiefs' income depends on the latter product, and is therefore rooted in the amount of land under their control. Land rights in Rotuma are a touchy business and involve a complicated network of interpersonal obligations from which it is impossible for an individual to extricate himself. Since chieftainship often induces a drain on one's economic resources, chiefs may be driven to

manipulate land rights beyond what is regarded as proper, and by so doing arouse resentment. Finally, since the nontraditional leaders are in positions of essentially bureaucratic authority, their decisions are shielded by the impersonality of established policy, while those of the chiefs are inevitably regarded as personal.

The full implications of this situation cannot be appreciated until it is realized that in weighing matters of policy, the Rotuman people ordinarily take specific issues less into consideration than their general confidence in the person or persons making the decisions. When their confidence in a given leader is great, his decisions, unless they are thoroughly objectionable, will be accepted and his orders or suggestions carried out; when such confidence is lacking it is difficult to get people to do anything, even if there are no specific objections to the decision made. The same is true for both types of leader, but as a result of the differences in their roles, the chiefs are much more likely to lose the people's confidence.

There are two sets of circumstances in which the differences in attitude between chiefs and non-traditional leaders are manifest. One is at meetings, particularly on the district or island-wide level. It is

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not unusual at these meetings to hear a chief speak out against maintaining a custom he regards as inexpedient, while the same is given ardent support by teachers or government officers. In one instance, when the traditional custom of offering ceremonial food to *gagaj es itu* was raised, it was attacked by an elderly chief (himself a *gaga es itu*) who suggested that the ceremony be eliminated and a cash payment given in its stead. His stand was strongly opposed by a university educated teacher who pointed out that the chiefs would lose the respects the people still paid them if such ceremonies were eliminated. Largely on the strength of his argument the chief's motion was defeated.

A distinction is also manifest on the level of personal behaviour. While the chiefs tend to be somewhat haphazard about their dress, often wearing trousers instead of the traditional lavalava, the two most prominent non-traditional leaders on the island, the District Officer and headmaster of the main school, both wear well-tailored lavalava on all public occasions. The former is also a recognized expert on Rotuman custom and has been known to get quite upset when custom is ignored or ceremonies improperly carried out.

To be sure, not all non-traditional leaders hold such attitudes, nor exert conservative pressures, but enough do to ensure that the community as a whole assumes a markedly conservative social climate. Those who dissent do so in the face of strong social pressure, and they are likely to leave the island after a minimal stay. The crucial point is that, in general, the non-traditional leaders have a greater stake than do the chiefs in the continuance of Rotuman custom and in the perpetuation of Rotuman identity for its own sake. To uneducated persons being a Rotuman is simply a fact of life. Sometimes it is regarded as a fact that can hinder social and economic advancement in the modern world. Rotumans are a pragmatic people, little concerned with ideological reflections on the significance of group identity. The majority are concerned that Rotumans do not get a bad name in Fiji and elsewhere, but this follows from the fact that they are identified by others as a group; it is not a result of their own efforts to sustain group identity. In short, for the uneducated Rotuman expediency rather than a set of abstract principles is of primary consideration. If following custom is expedient, then fine, let it be followed; if it is not, the devil with it.¹⁹ There is little reverence of custom for its own sake, and the chiefs, none of whom are highly educated, tend to hold such attitudes.

The non-traditional leaders, on the other hand, have much to gain from the perpetuation of Rotuman culture. In the first place their high status depends to a considerable degree on the existence of a distinctly Rotuman community. They are leaders because they are educated Rotumans among uneducated Rotumans. If they were among non-Rotumans their pervasive leadership would be much less readily accepted. It is the fact that they are 'insiders' that matters most to

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their followers. It should not be presumed, however, that the nontraditional leaders' conservatism is motivated simply by its expedience for supporting their status. A genuine idealism seems to be involved, and appears to be of greater consequence. Each of these persons has passed through a process of European schooling, and their success attests to a mastery of at least a portion of the content of Western culture. At one level they have been taught the 'mechanics' of European culture, usually with a good deal of ethnocentrism when the teachers were Europeans. But covertly a secondary learning process takes place that ultimately can be of far greater significance—learning to evaluate phenomena in terms of abstract concepts and relationships, as, for example, these are expressed in systematic models of law and social organization (e.g. The Government of Great Britain). This kind of cognitive activity, while it had corollaries in traditional Rotuman society, was much less significant in the latter, which was distinguished by a present-oriented concreteness. Some Rotumans who go through this educational process turn away from their childhood culture and direct their efforts toward successful participation in the modern 'Europeanized' world; but these same people, by the very nature of their choice, are not likely to influence Rotuman

society. Others, however, intensify their self-identification as Rotumans, and from their educational experience derive an idealism which they direct at Rotuman society. Very often they are struck with the inconsistencies between ideology and behaviour in Western society, and they see in their own Rotuman culture a far greater consistency, not only between Rotuman values and Rotuman behaviour, but between Western (particularly Christian) ideology and Rotuman behaviour. Rotuma then becomes a model community to them, and they add an ideological dimension to the culture that was not inherent in the traditional society.

The significance of this alteration can be better understood in ethno-historical perspective. When only one way, the Rotuman way, existed, prior to European contact, there was no need to idealize the culture and justify it with an abstract ideology. ²⁰ Most things were done in a prescribed manner, not because they were regarded as being abstractly 'right', but because it was the way of the land. Even the myths used to justify custom implied that this is *why* (in the historical sense) things are done as they are, not that this is the reason that they are the right things to do. The distinction is perhaps subtle, but it is important. Formal social sanctions were not applied to breaches of abstract 'moral' principles, but to behaviour which infringed on the rights of others. In other words, within the traditional society the matrix of social interaction was of prime importance; belief, conviction and ideology were of minimum importance. A person could use a wide variety of possible precepts to justify what he had already done on

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impulse or on the basis of personal expediency, but there was no overriding 'model' or abstractly conceived system of law or ethics.

European contact exposed Rotumans to a completely different culture; one which held many contrasts to the 'Rotuman way'. With contact came an expansion of the socio-cultural milieu. The number of alternative behaviour patterns multiplied and correspondingly a great many new precepts were found to justify them. Tendencies towards Westernization were fostered by a recognition of European superiority in the technological sphere, and those who could master technical skills gained prestige rapidly. Along with technological competence and earning power often went initiation into European social ways, and for most Rotumans the ability to participate in Western social functions became a source of pride. This is reflected in the romantically coloured tales and songs composed by Rotuman sailors during the last century describing their experiences. It is true that some berated this Europeanization and criticized Western ways, but they did so in 'sour grapes' fashion. It was asserted that European ways may be all right for Europeans, but for Rotumans it is better to stick to known ways. During this stage virtually all Rotumans attributed to Western culture an outright superiority, and tended to look upon their own as backward.

A large portion of the Rotuman people, including the majority of the chiefs, still manifest such attitudes. Their behavioural conservatism (as distinct from ideological conservatism) is rooted in a felt inability to participate successfully in European society, rather than in a conviction that Rotuman culture is valuable for its own sake. They follow the Rotuman way because it is the way they know best, and because they feel inadequate in the face of the demands of modern society. Their sensitivity to ridicule is a reinforcing factor, for if they were to try to act in a European fashion and fail, ridicule would surely follow.

The conservatism of the recently emergent non-traditional leaders is a different kind of phenomenon. They have become thoroughly acquainted with Western society, and for the most part, have demonstrated their ability to participate in it successfully. They are therefore not awed by it, and can compare European and Rotuman cultures more objectively. The roots of their conservatism lie in the ideological sphere; they recognize the value of Rotuman custom for its own sake, from a moral-ethical point of view. They can also recognize its significance as a source of common identity, and make efforts to endow custom with dignity. To paraphrase the statements of one such leader:

I want to be able to help the Rotumans make a good adjustment to the modern world. To do this they will have to learn many European ways, especially in the field of economics. They need Western education. But we should not accept everything from Western society without regard to whether it is good or bad. Many Western customs are bad, and some of our Rotuman ways are good. I think we should take from Western society those things which can benefit us, but we should keep what is good in our own, and should never stop being Rotuman.

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His comments illuminate still another contrast between the nontraditional leaders and chiefs. The latter are identified with limited social groupings *within* Rotuma, while the former are identified as having responsibilities toward Rotuma as a whole. Their leadership is less parochial than the chiefs' and therefore less subject to suspicion on the grounds of local favouritism.

As previously mentioned, not all educated Rotumans lend their weight to conserve custom. Some minimize their Rotuman identity and concentrate on being successful in modern society. The pivotal attitude apparently lies along the dimension of individualism versus community responsibility. The latter is strongly emphasized in Rotuman culture, and most young people raised within it come to stress its importance. This is confirmed by the answers to an

essay question written at my request by students in Forms III and IV on Rotuma. The question was presented in the following form: "What kind of person do you want to be? i.e. what kind of life do you want to have when you are an adult?"

The results, tabulated by occupational preference, were as follows: ²¹

doctor	11
teacher	11
nurse	10
sailor	5
carpenter	1
architect	1
cook	1
health inspector	1
actress	1
veterinarian	1
farmer	1
pilot	1
reader of comics	1

By far the most frequent justification offered for occupational choice was the benefit to the Rotuman community. ²² Even the students who chose architecture and carpentry elaborated on the advantages of improved housing. The aspiring veterinarian pointed out the advantages of healthy animals and suggested that Rotuma's position might be improved by making the island into a cattle raising area. A typical example, extracted from the essay of a prospective doctor, is the following:

The reason why I like to be a doctor when I grow up is that to help the sick people in my country. When I am going to be a doctor I will give them good hospitals in every place in Rotuma so that when one has sudden accident then the hospital standing near him.

A girl who desired to teach wrote:

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I should like to bring and teach new methods to the children of my mother country and not only teaching but I should like to help them in every way I could. And my last reason is that, if I am a teacher I should like to do my best to raise the standard of Education in my dear country, Rotuma.

These attitudes of community responsibility are in part directly transmitted by the teachers, who themselves have chosen careers of public service, but the traditional Rotuman emphasis on aiding others is a reinforcing factor.

CONCLUSIONS

The conservative process taking place in Rotuma undoubtedly has many parallels throughout the world. It is much less spectacular than nativistic movements or the nationalism of newly formed countries, but the very fact of its subtleness makes it vitally important that the process be understood. Perhaps the most obvious parallels can be found among the American Indians and the Maori in New Zealand. Many aspects of the conservative process described for Rotuma seem to exist in both these areas, and have caused 'assimilationists' a great deal of frustration. Ironically, the more a policy of assimilation is stressed, the more such conservatism is likely to occur, since a counterpart of the assimilationist philosophy is 'equality'. Once it is granted that the indigenous people are equal, their culture tends to be legitimized, and participation in it is less of a threat to one's status in Western society. The educated Rotuman is able to participate in two cultural systems, each one yielding its own advantages. I have been told not only by Rotumans, but also by acculturated American Indians and Maoris, approximately the same thing at different times. Their comments can be summed up as follows: "I feel sorry for you white men; you have only one way

of life to choose from. We not only have yours but our own as well.”

One can hardly expect people in such circumstances to willingly abandon something so valuable, and alternative way of thinking and feeling. It seems to me the burden is better placed on the white man to make the adjustment. A person would be foolhardy indeed to presume that Western culture has been so successful that Occidentals can afford to close the door on alternative ways of looking at things.

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¹ In this paper the term ‘leader’ should be taken to mean one who is sought out by others to give advice and /or make decisions.

² Howard 1961:297.

³ The words *gagaj* and *fa* are actually interchangeable. Strictly speaking, the former is the word for any person of high rank and is also used as a term of address; the latter is the word for ‘man’. *Fa es ho’aga* thus translates as ‘man of the *ho’aga*’, and Rotumans sometimes speak of district chiefs as *fa es itu* (man of the district). It would be equally possible to speak of *gagaj es ho’aga*. The forms used in the text are the most common ones in ordinary use.

⁴ The evidence indicates that *ho’aga* were originally local kin groups which were altered by the pressures of acculturation. The locality aspect was retained and strictly speaking a *ho’aga* should consist of adjacent households. cf. Howard 1962.

⁵ Not all chiefly titles, but most, involve corresponding rights over land. Those not involving land rights are generally names associated with a specific role in the traditional system, such as the district fishing expert (*tautei*).

⁶ The present treatment of descent and succession is necessarily brief, since the details are not central to the main theme of the paper. These topics will be treated in more detail in a forthcoming paper on social organization.

⁷ Since 1881 Rotuma has been governed by a Resident Commissioner, or District Officer, appointed by the Governor of Fiji. The island is now politically regarded as part of the Colony, under the jurisdiction of the Commissioner, Eastern.

⁸ This is only one example of the lack of concern chiefs may show for Rotuman custom when there is a ‘price’ involved.

⁹ In actual fact a *kainaga* meeting may not be held, the title being assumed by a son or other close relative of the former title holder. Under these circumstances *kainaga* approval is implicit in a lack of opposition. Generally speaking, only when there is more than one aspirant to a title is the formal procedure undertaken. This same qualification applies to the position of *fa es ho’aga*.

¹⁰ The autobiographies were taken as life histories in the Rotuman language by a hired assistant and were later translated into English with her aid.

¹¹ The election was carried out in a thoroughly democratic fashion with all the men in the district participating. Nominations were taken by the Acting District Officer (himself a Rotuman) who urged that traditional considerations be put aside and the best man chosen. A secret ballot was held, but in fact, the man chosen belonged to the *kainaga* of an eligible *fuag ri*.

¹² The number of titles includes all types, many of which are not in active use. Of these perhaps fifteen to twenty are eligible for *gagaj es itu* status. The population of Rotuma has ranged from between 2,000-3,000 persons during this century, thus making one or another title accessible to virtually every adult male.

¹³ If these speculations are valid, one would expect to find a cross-cultural relationship between powerful chieftainship and tightly defined rules of succession. In Polynesia this generalization seems to hold. In those societies where primogeniture is the dominant principle (e.g. Hawaii, Tonga, Society Islands) powerful chieftainship is most prominent, while in societies where the rules of succession are looser (e.g. Samoa, Futuna, Uvea, Rotuma and the atolls) chiefly powers are more limited. cf. I. Goldman, 1955 and 1957; M. Sahlins, 1958. In a recent paper on the Samoan political system Ember (1962) relates the lack of centralized authority to the ‘sept’ type of social organization. If my thesis is correct, this decentralization is reinforced at the psychological level by the mode of *matai* selection, which has many features in common with Rotuma.

¹⁴ Theoretically such a change can only be made with the approval of the district chief, but the latter are likely to accept what has already been done in order to avoid further antagonisms.

- 15 An elder learned in ceremonial affairs.
- 16 A ceremonial speech given when kava is presented.
- 17 A feast given to propitiate the ancestral ghosts (*atua*) after a mishap to insure that it will not occur again.
- 18 The first Rotuman was appointed as District Officer in 1945. Since then a Rotuman has held the position most of the time.
- 19 I am using the term 'expedient' in its broadest sense; i.e. taking into account all the foreseeable consequences of an action.
- 20 The statements made in this section of the paper are necessarily speculative since documentation on the traditional culture is sparse. They constitute general impressions based upon a thorough research into what evidence is available and are consistent with everything I have learned about Rotuma.
- 21 The essays were written in English as a class assignment without assistance from the teachers.
- 22 Thirty-seven of the forty-six students specifically mentioned the benefits of their chosen occupations to the Rotuman community.