

CONTEXTUALIZING HISTORIES: OUR ROTUMAN EXPERIENCE

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Alan conducted fieldwork on Rotuma in 1959–1960 and did not return until 1987, this time with Jan. Together, we have returned nine times since, for visits ranging from one week to six months. During this period the “field” has changed. About four-fifths of Rotumans now live abroad. We have visited Rotuman communities in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the U.S. mainland, and Europe, and we keep in touch with Rotumans via the Internet. Prolonged involvement has resulted in a shift away from a scientific generalizing viewpoint to one emphasizing context and personal histories. It has also forced us to re-examine our commitments. We now choose to spend our energies in service of the Rotuman community rather than seeking recognition within academia. As a result, we are actively engaged in assisting knowledgeable Rotumans to publish cultural accounts of their choosing and in operating a Web site that serves the global Rotuman community.

REPEATED FIELD TRIPS to a community make it difficult to maintain the detached observational posture that is the hallmark of the scientific method. Although both of us went to Rotuma for the first time (Alan in 1959, Jan in 1988) with science-oriented projects, we found a scientific stance less satisfying with each return. This was not only because our objectivity tended to fade as we became more deeply involved in community affairs, but also because the scientific requirement of parsimony—the foundation for making generalizations—dropped by the wayside. As we developed a personal history in the community, and coexperienced with Rotuman people changes in physical, social, and cultural aspects of community life, our knowledge of context came to overwhelm any general understandings we had formu-

lated during our initial visits. The more context we included in our understandings, the less consistency we were able to see. What this has meant for us—and we suspect it is a common experience for others like us—is that we have progressively shifted from a scientific to a historicist perspective. We now find ourselves playing the role of community historians, embracing all the context we can muster.

In this spirit we present a personal, historical account of our multiple visits to Rotuma, describing how Rotuma and the Rotuman community have changed, how we have changed, and how our changed relationship to the now-global Rotuman community has transformed the nature of our work.

Part 1: The Initial Fieldwork Period (1959 to 1961)

by Alan Howard

I first went to Rotuma in 1959 as a twenty-five-year-old graduate student to do dissertation research. The choice of Rotuma as a field site was more a happy accident than a well-formulated plan. I had obtained a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) to conduct research on bereavement on the island of Ponape (Pohnpei) in the Caroline Islands. However, the administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands refused permission on the grounds that a government anthropologist was already resident on the island, and as far as they were concerned one anthropologist per island was enough. I was left with a grant and no place to go. My advisor at Stanford University, Felix Keesing, suggested Samoa (where he had worked) and Fiji as possibilities, so I immediately wrote letters of inquiry. The Fiji colonial government promptly replied, informing me that enough anthropological research had already been done among the Fijians and suggesting I go to New Guinea. If I insisted on doing research in Fiji, however, they offered me the possibilities of working with Fiji Indians or going to the island of Rotuma.¹

In truth, I had never heard of Rotuma, so I rushed to the Stanford library to look it up. In a 1930s edition of the *Pacific Island Handbook*, a one-page article began with a statement to the effect that "Rotuma is one of the most beautiful and romantic islands in the South Seas." I didn't have to read further to make up my mind. The article provided some basic information about the island's size and population, which suited my research plans. It also mentioned a nine-hole golf course and reported that several of the chiefs were adept at the game! Fortunately I did not bring my golf clubs along, for as I later discovered, the golf course, which had been laid out by a British resident commissioner in the 1930s, had long since been replaced by copra sheds.

Getting There

I made all the necessary arrangements and left California in early October 1959. My first stop was Honolulu, where I spent several days at Bishop Museum trying to find out as much as I could about Rotuma. I also met with Alex Spoehr, the museum's director, who warmly encouraged my research. I arrived in Fiji on October 12 and on Spoehr's advice booked into the Korolevu Beach Hotel, on the road between Nadi and Suva. There I met my first Rotuman, Alex Rae—an incredibly impressive man in his sixties. Mr. Rae was well read in several fields and knew more about the history of boxing than anyone I had ever known. He was gracious and supportive of my intentions, suggesting I contact his sister, Faga Hoefflich, when I got to Suva. Only later did I discover that he was the grandson of Maraf Mamatuki, the fabled paramount chief of Rotuma in the late nineteenth century (see Howard 1990b for a more detailed account of my meeting with Mr. Rae and his sister).

When I arrived in Suva I got a rude shock. After my departure from California the colonial secretary of Fiji had sent a telegram to Stanford rescinding permission for me to do research on Rotuma because of recent problems on the island. A land commission had been charged with surveying and registering Rotuman lands, but because of a provision in the regulation establishing the commission—a provision that effectively converted Rotuman land tenure from one based on bilineal inheritance to one of patrilineality—the Rotuman people had rebelled and forced commission personnel to leave the island. A great deal of anger and hostility had been aroused, and the governor of Fiji, Sir Kenneth Maddocks, had decided that an anthropologist arriving in the aftermath of this fiasco might be identified as a government agent, further aggravating an already tense situation.

The governor was away attending a meeting of the South Pacific Commission in Noumea, New Caledonia, but the assistant colonial secretary, Mr. Hill, was encouraging. He told me that he thought an anthropologist could play a constructive role in resolving Rotuma's land problems, so I did not lose hope. Mr. Hill suggested that I make an appointment with the governor following his return to present my case. I agreed, and feeling buoyed by the rapport I had already established with Rotumans I had met, decided to persevere. I knew that Alex Spoehr was one of the U.S. representatives to the South Pacific Commission and sent him an express letter in Noumea, explaining my situation and requesting that he speak to the governor on my behalf. I felt reassured by his return note, offering encouragement and informing me he had talked with Sir Kenneth.

My interview with Governor Maddocks went well. He asked about my research plans and listened patiently. His only concern, he explained, was that

nothing happen to further unsettle the people there. He said that he would cable the district officer on Rotuma, Fred Ieli, and have him ask the Rotuma Council to decide whether to let me come. This was a wise, practical solution and suited me very well. Rather than being "sent" to the island by the colonial administration, I would be "invited" by representatives of the Rotuman people—if they agreed. When I informed Alex Rae and his sister, Faga, about my meeting with the governor, they immediately offered to contact the district officer, a close relative, to support my request. I was grateful and delighted when permission was finally granted, on November 13, a month after my arrival in Fiji. The governor's only stipulation was that I avoid inquiring into land matters or politics while on the island.

Excited about the prospect of going to Rotuma I tried to make a reservation on the next boat, the *Kurimarau*, but was told that the few cabins aboard had already been booked. I insisted that didn't matter, that I would happily travel aboard deck, like most other passengers. "No," I was told emphatically, "Europeans are not allowed to travel on deck. It would set a bad example." Since I had already become aware of ethnic segregation in its many colonial forms, I was not surprised, but found the situation extremely frustrating nonetheless. The next boat on which I was able to book a cabin was the *Yanawai*, scheduled to leave early in December. I decided to be philosophical about the delay and ended up using it to advantage by immersing myself in government archives, learning what I could of the Rotuman language, and taking part in various activities with my newfound Rotuman friends.

As it turned out, the *Yanawai's* departure was anything but routine. The day before the boat was scheduled to leave, Fiji's workers staged a strike that grew violent, causing much damage to downtown Suva and shutting down transportation. The city was tense, and getting to the ship meant navigating through dangerous territory. It was with great relief that I boarded the boat on December 11, and watched the troubled city fade into the horizon as we sailed away.

The trip to Rotuma took five days, with stops at Levuka, Savu Savu, Taveuni, and Rabi. We reached Rotuma at midnight, December 16, and anchored outside the reef off Motusa, but did not go ashore by launch until shortly after dawn. I then met for the first time the family who would host me for the following year.

There were no public accommodations on Rotuma. Visitors were required to make arrangements in advance to stay with a host family. While on Viti Levu I had been given the option of having the district officer arrange something for me, which I declined in favor of an offer by Lisi, one of my Rotuman friends. She suggested that I stay with her uncle and aunt, Sakimi and Seferosa, in the district of Itu'muta, at the western end of the island.

They had a large house, she said, and only one daughter, Akeneta. Lisi said she would talk to her uncle, who was visiting Suva at the time, and told me that since I planned to go to Rotuma on the same boat, I would meet him before my arrival on the island. As it turned out, Sakimi went on the *Kurimarau* and assumed, since I was not aboard, that I was not going to Rotuma after all. He had therefore made no arrangements to accommodate me and was not present when I disembarked. I did not know this until many months later, however. What I experienced was an initial sense of confusion in which people asked with whom I would be staying, followed by a period of waiting around while being assured that a lorry was coming to take me and my luggage "home." Akeneta showed up after a little while and without hesitation welcomed me warmly. I cannot say enough about how wonderful this family was to me during my time on Rotuma, and how much they made me feel at home.

Adapting to an Isolated Community

As I imagine to be the case with most fieldwork in isolated communities, I experienced intense highs accompanied by periods of great productivity, and depressing lows when all I wanted to do was get away from everyone. When I watched the *Yanawai* depart, realizing the next boat would not likely come for three or four months, I was apprehensive and full of doubt. But it did not take long to feel at home, which in retrospect is quite a testament to the tolerance and patience of my host family and of Rotumans in general. My adjustment was facilitated by the fact that most Rotumans spoke English, which, on the one hand, made it easier to begin substantive research, and on the other, served as a disincentive to learning the rather difficult Rotuman language. On balance my experience during that year was overwhelmingly positive, almost magical at times, as I gained new insights into cultural values and human relationships.

I tried to abide by the restriction placed on my research by the colonial administration, that I not inquire about land matters, but because the land commission's recent visit was uppermost in people's minds they kept initiating the topic in their conversations with me. To my knowledge, few people thought I was a government agent, perhaps because more exotic rumors circulated—that I was a communist spy, or that I was a descendant of Charles Howard, a renegade English sailor who married and made his home on Rotuma in the mid-nineteenth century. One of Howard's grandsons reputedly had left for America in the 1920s and had not been heard from since. "Is it true that Charlie Howard's grandson is your father?" I was asked several times. "Have you come to Rotuma to find your roots?" It was tempting to

leave the answer ambiguous—Charles Howard had sired many children and being his descendant would make me kin to more than half of the population—but I did my best to squelch both rumors.

People wanted to express their views about the land commission fiasco, and wanted me to know why they were incensed—and in the process taught me a good deal about the nature of land tenure. I was therefore gratified, several months later, when Commissioner Eastern Christopher Legge (under whose jurisdiction Rotuma fell) asked me to include land tenure in my research and to suggest ways to deal with the problems confronted by the commission. I was happy to oblige, and produced a report pointing out the practical benefits of the current tenure system, which was remarkably flexible. My recommendation was that they avoid tampering with the rules of succession and encourage Rotumans to work out disputes informally as much as possible.²

My research on Rotuma was aided tremendously by two hardworking research assistants, Amai Sakimi and Rejieli Mejieli. They conducted a comprehensive census of the island, recorded migration and marital histories, wrote down life histories, and collected data for a number of special surveys.³ In addition, my brother Irwin, who was an undergraduate at Reed College at the time, joined me on Rotuma during his summer vacation; he enjoyed the experience so much that he decided to take a semester off to assist me. My field trip on Rotuma lasted almost exactly one year, but with Irwin's help, I spent another six months collecting survey data among Rotumans in Fiji.

The Evolution of Research In Situ

For my NIMH-funded study of bereavement behavior, I had hypothesized that a variety of cultural variables, and especially the centrality of elaborate funeral rituals, would mitigate the severity of bereavement problems. The issue of grief-related mental health problems had become a hot research topic at the time.⁴ My dissertation proposal had a somewhat different focus; it specified that I would conduct an ethnoscientific study of ceremonial structures, ethnoscience being the current fad in anthropology. During this initial visit, though, abstract theory gave way to a topic of compelling practical concern among the Rotuman people, and I ended up doing my dissertation on land tenure (Howard 1962; also see Howard 1963, 1964a).

In fact I ended up collecting data on just about everything that I could imagine might interest my anthropological colleagues. I organized a census of the entire island; copied all the registers of births, deaths, marriages, and divorces back to 1903; recorded genealogies; analyzed court cases concerning land disputes; collected life histories; administered thematic apperception tests and interpersonal relations questionnaires; and spent lots of time

attending ceremonies of all kinds. In the final analysis I think I learned more from just talking and hanging out with people I came to feel comfortable with. In retrospect, however, my relationship with Rotumans at the time seems rather superficial compared to now. They came to recognize that I was a student interested in their history and customs, and for the most part they were appreciative and prepared to help. Still, I was cast in a rather restricted role, not only by them but also by my own obsession with collecting data. From their standpoint I was to be treated like an honored guest, which meant with formality. At ceremonies and feasts I was seated with the chiefs and required to sit cross-legged for hours while being served enormous quantities of food and entertained by well-rehearsed dancers.

I came to understand the underlying rules of social relations in terms of restraint (a product of respect) and license (a product of intimacy) (see Howard 1964b for a formalization of this approach to social relationships). Because I was categorized as an educated "European," people treated me with far more respect than I felt entitled to, which meant their dealings with me tended to be somewhat formal and restrained.

Within my home village of Lopo I became a familiar figure, and people eventually relaxed their guard when I was around. I didn't realize how much I had become a part of the community until shortly before leaving, when an



FIGURE 1. Alan Howard celebrating his twenty-sixth birthday on Rotuma at Upu Catholic Mission Station, in April 1960.

elderly woman neighbor (with whom I had had little contact aside from the polite greetings one exchanges with casual acquaintances) burst into tears when I said farewell. I must admit that I eventually shed quite a few tears of my own, in part, I suppose, because I never expected to see any of these people again.

During the year I was on Rotuma I went through a series of phases concerning my understanding of the culture. At first everything seemed strange and undecipherable, particularly that part of the culture embedded in the Rotuman language, which I found difficult to learn. Then, after a couple of months, I found everything falling neatly into place—the result of a sweeping theory of the culture, devoid of any significant complexity. It didn't take long for that first set of insights to collapse, to be followed by periods of confusion, revisions involving somewhat more complex understandings, more confusion, more revisions, and so on throughout the year. By the time I left I felt I understood the culture pretty well, but I realize now that the illusion of understanding is a difficult thing for an ethnographer to shed. After all, the quest for understanding is a major part of our motivation for doing fieldwork, and to admit to ignorance or confusion is to risk being seen as a failure, by ourselves as well as by our colleagues.

Superficial as my understandings may have been, by the time I left the field I had collected an enormous quantity of data, most of it extremely well organized. I had made a point of not letting more than two or three days go by without taking time to type and organize my notes, using a modified version of Murdock et al.'s *Outline of Cultural Materials* (1945) as a guide. I also spent time writing down whatever theoretical insights I had. It took a lot of discipline to stick to this routine because it sometimes meant not attending events of considerable interest, but it turned out to be an excellent investment in the long run. My early organizing efforts not only made writing my dissertation a breeze (I finished it over a nine-month stretch while teaching fifteen hours per week of first-time courses in anthropology, sociology, the psychology of adjustment, and marriage and the family at Cabrillo Community College in northern California), but they served me well for years afterwards when opportunities arose to publish papers on a variety of topics I had not anticipated writing about.

The Interim

After a year at Cabrillo I took a temporary teaching position at the University of Auckland in New Zealand (1962–1963), where I was given ample opportunity to write. From there I went to Honolulu to take up a joint appointment at Bishop Museum and the Department of Anthropology at the University

of Hawai'i, eventually moving full-time to the university, where I remained until retiring in 1999. Transportation difficulties and time constraints made returning to Rotuma difficult. Boat schedules remained irregular, and not until 1981 was an airstrip opened on the island. I could never be sure, even if I went during summer vacation, that I could get back to my teaching responsibilities in time for the fall semester. In addition I became involved in other research projects in Hawai'i, which occupied what time I did have available. I didn't get an opportunity to return to Rotuma until a sabbatical in 1987.

My contacts with Rotumans during the interim were sparse. I discovered that Tivaknoa Ieli, a young Rotuman woman, was attending the Church College of Hawai'i (renamed Brigham Young University-Hawai'i in 1974) in Lā'ie, on the windward side of O'ahu. I made a point of visiting her for the purpose of clarifying some of the information I had collected on Rotuma. This was during my cognitive anthropology period (in the mid-1960s), and having a knowledgeable informant helped to extend my fieldwork experience in significant ways. But after Tiva graduated my contacts with Rotumans ended, except for two brief encounters. In the late 1960s I was visited in Hawai'i by Josefa Rigamoto and his eleven-year-old son Walter. Josefa had been awarded an MBE by Queen Elizabeth and was on his way to England by ship to receive the award. When the ship stopped in Honolulu for a day I picked him and Walter up at the dock and spent the day showing them the sights. Then in 1969 I was on the *Oronsay* en route to Australia when the ship stopped for a day in Suva. This gave me an opportunity to visit with a few Rotuman friends, including Josefa. I also discovered that my host family was in Suva attending the funeral of Sakimi, who had died a few days earlier. I was only able to spend a short time with the family, but it was a poignant and tearful reunion that moved me deeply. After this, for the next eighteen years, my contact with Rotuma was essentially confined to fading memories and forays into increasingly lifeless field notes and archival data. Unfortunately the Rotumans I knew were not great letter writers, and attempts to maintain a correspondence proved futile. I continued to publish about Rotuma in the "ethnographic present" until the mid-1980s, completing a book (Howard 1970) and twelve journal articles and book chapters.

My first return to Rotuma after a hiatus of twenty-seven years was a dramatic and emotional experience. I had mixed feelings about going back, on the one hand reluctant to disturb idyllic memories, on the other hand curious about changes. The desire to see old friends and to introduce my new wife, Jan Rensel, to the culture that had so definitively shaped my professional life proved decisive. The changes that had taken place in the Pacific during the interim were profound. Fiji gained its independence from Great Britain in 1970 and economic development had resulted in significant material

changes. Rotuma now had not only an airstrip, with weekly flights to Fiji, but also a new wharf at Oinafa, where ships could dock. It was no longer necessary to load and unload cargo and people onto punts to convey them between the ship and shore. Knowing that I was going back to a society that had been drawn increasingly into the modern world, I was somewhat apprehensive about what I would find. (For an account of my reflections on changes, see Howard 1991.)

Part 2: Many Happy Returns (1987 to Present) **by Alan Howard and Jan Rensel**

Our visit in 1987 was only for two weeks; it barely gave Alan an opportunity to become reacquainted with people and places, but for Jan it provided a kaleidoscopic introduction to life on the island. Despite changes, Rotuma had retained its charm. The people radiated the same warmth and generosity of spirit they had in 1960, and to Alan's delight, Jan was as taken with the island as he was. She had recently completed a master's degree in anthropology at the University of Hawai'i and was in a quandary about whether to continue toward a doctorate or to seek other outlets for her talents. Her experience on Rotuma settled the issue. We mutually decided to return to the island the following year so that she could begin dissertation research. A return visit would also give Alan an opportunity to study changes that had occurred since his first visit.

We ended up spending three months on Rotuma in 1988 and returned during each of the next three years—for six months in 1989 (when Jan received a Fulbright Grant to support her research), for two months in 1990, and for a week in 1991. We went again for two weeks in 1994. The 1994 visit was part of a three-month excursion to Fiji, Australia, and New Zealand, where we visited Rotuman migrant communities. Jan received her Ph.D. from the University of Hawai'i in May 1994 for a dissertation focusing on the impact of the cash economy on social life (Rensel 1994). In 1996 we attended the 150th anniversary of the Catholic mission on Rotuma and returned again in 1998 when we also revisited Rotuman communities in Australia and New Zealand. Our most recent visits to Rotuma were in 2001 and 2004.

Going back to Rotuma on a regular basis has given us a completely altered perspective. Although previously Alan had been aware of historical changes to the culture, his understanding of those changes was limited to reflecting his 1960 field experience against historical documentation. Our return visits not only afforded a perspective over four decades but also allowed us to witness changes from year to year, greatly enriching our sense of culture as a dynamic process.

1987: Renewing Relationships

Interestingly enough, our 1987 visit also began with a mix-up concerning where we would stay. There were still no hotels or public accommodations on the island, so we had to make arrangements to stay with a family. We had been invited to stay with a woman who had befriended Alan in 1960, Elisapeti Inia, the widow of Wilson Inia, Rotuma's first senator in the post-independence Fiji parliament. Elisapeti's daughter, Betty, informed us that she sent her mother a telegram advising her of our arrival. But it turned out that Elisapeti did not receive the telegram in time and was not at the airport when we arrived. So Josefa Rigamoto's nephew, Tarterani, who had been notified by his uncle of our impending visit, offered to take us to his home in Oinafa, on the northeast side of the island. He and his wife, Fakrau, were gracious hosts and we ended up staying with them for our two weeks on the island.

We spent much of our time wandering around the island seeking to renew old acquaintances. Alan had brought with him eight-by-ten-inch enlargements of black-and-white photographs he had taken in 1960, and showing them evoked warm memories. We had pictures of adults who had been children at the time, and photos of people's parents and grandparents, many of whom were now deceased. It became a game to identify the individuals in the photos and the circumstances in which the pictures were taken. Sharing the pictures proved to be a wonderful icebreaker and stimulant for people to talk about the trajectories of their lives. The photos were treated as treasured gifts by the people to whom we distributed them.

Concordant with the changes that had taken place on the island was an intensified flow of people between Rotuma and Fiji, and a steady growth in the number of Rotumans who had settled in Fiji. Whereas the 1956 census revealed that two-thirds of Rotumans within the colony were resident on Rotuma, by 1986 more than two-thirds were living in Fiji, mostly in Suva and other urban centers on Viti Levu. The population of Rotuma itself had actually declined during that period, from 2,993 to 2,588, despite a high birthrate. (For more on the increased flows of people, as well as material goods and ideas, between Rotuma and Fiji, see Rensel 1993; Howard and Rensel 1994.)

During the brief time we spent in Suva that year (at the home of Ron Crocombe), we had an opportunity to see a number of Rotumans—some of them Alan's old acquaintances, some who had read his book *Learning to Be Rotuman* (Howard 1970) and wanted to meet him, some by chance. These encounters with well-educated, articulate, and accomplished individuals added an important dimension to our experience. For one thing, they brought home to us that Rotuman culture was now firmly embedded in the cosmopolitan world, that one could no longer legitimately think of it as con-

fined to the island. These encounters also presented us with new opportunities for establishing friendships, not simply as a result of experiences shared within a limited time frame, but on the basis of more general understandings of life experiences, historical and political events of worldwide significance, art and literature, music, humor, and so on. What this meant was that the "work" of establishing rapport was considerably reduced, and that "making friends" became an easy, natural, unself-conscious process. Another way to put this is that the cultural barriers that existed in 1960, the gulf that had to be overcome by prodigious effort and constant monitoring, had eased to the point of disappearing, at least with educated and urbanized Rotumans. On the island itself, where traditional rules governing license and restraint still prevailed and many people had limited experience with cosmopolitan urban culture, it was still necessary to maintain vigilance, to monitor one's language and behavior, to remain acutely sensitive to others. However, even on Rotuma one could sense the effects of cosmopolitanism's inroads, making it easier for our hosts to understand us and vice versa.

1988 and 1989: Restarting Fieldwork

Our visits to Rotuma in 1988 and 1989 involved intense fieldwork, paralleling in many respects Alan's research in 1960. We conducted systematic census surveys, in 1988 within the district of Oinafa, in 1989 over the whole island. This allowed us to make comparisons with data from 1960 and to infer a good deal about the processes of change. We also participated in as many events as possible and donated our services in a variety of contexts (e.g., as advisors to a group contemplating business ventures, as photographers at weddings and funerals, as judges at singing competitions, as guest speakers at the high school and teachers' meetings).

Being full-fledged adults and the fact that Alan was now a professor still resulted in our being treated as honored guests, but on a rather different basis than in 1960. On his first field trip Alan had been treated with formal respect despite his youth, primarily because he was a "European," a white person. This kind of behavior was mandated by the colonial government at the time. Since then quite a few Europeans had visited the island, so we were less of a novelty. Also, the colonial regime was gone, and with it the imperative to treat every European with great respect. Indeed, some European visitors had rapidly worn out their welcome and been treated with disdain. The courtesies we were now shown were more a function of the ties we ourselves had established with specific families and an acknowledgement of our commitment to Rotuma and Rotuman culture, manifested by our return visits and Alan's publications.

In preparation for our longer visit in 1989, we arranged to have a separate dwelling refurbished on land belonging to Tarterani's extended family. The building was a concrete-block shell, without windows; we paid for the materials needed to make it livable. Tarterani took pride in his ability as a carpenter and craftsman and did most of the work himself; he expressed delight at the opportunity to rebuild the derelict structure and had finished enough of it by the time we arrived to permit us to occupy it. The semi-independence we enjoyed allowed us to establish a more "normal" routine. We still had to rely on Tarterani for some necessities but now began to engage in reciprocal exchanges with others in the village. Having a gas stove and kerosene refrigerator that we purchased in Suva allowed Jan to prepare cooked foods to share. This made it possible to establish relationships on a basis more like those between other households, who frequently shared labor and resources.

As part of Jan's research on the economics of village exchange, she conducted a thirteen-week survey during which she interviewed a member of each of the seventeen households in the village daily concerning food production, labor expended, and reciprocal exchanges. People seemed to relish the attention and came to anticipate her visits, often providing gifts of food and thanking her for the work she was doing. In addition to giving each family a gift of five dollars per week,⁵ Jan reciprocated with banana and pumpkin cakes (we had a prolific pumpkin patch just outside our dwelling and her pumpkin loaves became a village favorite), and pineapple jam and chutney. Her daily visits and increasing familiarity with household members facilitated the cementing of relationships with many people.

The new levels of intimacy we reached with the villagers as a result of Jan's survey did not come without a cost, however. Our increased independence and reciprocal friendships with other households posed a problem for Tarterani and Fakrau. From their point of view we were still members of their household and were expected to order our relationships to mirror theirs. Unfortunately, they had been involved in disputes with a number of families and were unsettled by our friendly relations with them. In addition, Fakrau's father, Kausirif, who was the district chief, had become increasingly unpopular in the years prior to our visit. The conflicts he had with families in the village affected Fakrau and Tarterani's relationships as well. Though little was said, we could sense the tension and noticed a distinct cooling of our relationship with the couple (though not with other members of their family, including their sons and Tarterani's elderly father).

Exacerbating our problem was the fact that we were now providing our own food, so we reduced the amount of money we had been giving the family while they had been looking after us. People in the village criticized Tartera-

ni and Fakrau for using the money we had given them for their own purposes (rather than using it for our welfare); this kind of gossip criticism may have contributed to their alienation from other households and our alienation from Tarterani and Fakrau. In addition, we learned that the money we had been sending them in our absence to make payments on a car had been spent for other purposes, so we arranged to send the car payments directly to the bank. Furthermore, although Tarterani had earlier agreed to help us conduct research in other districts around the island, on our return in 1989 we found that he was too busy renovating his own house, so we had to arrange for several schoolteachers to assist us instead, and we paid them the money that Tarterani might have expected.

Our friendships with other Rotumans were not confined to the village. We made a habit of visiting the schools on a regular basis and spending time chatting with the teachers (all of whom were Rotuman) and got to know many of the people employed at the government station. Since they were all wage earners, this gave Jan a more general perspective on her dissertation topic—the effects of money on social relationships. In addition, we took the time to reinforce friendships Alan had formed in other villages in 1960 through visits and reciprocal exchanges.

By the time we left Rotuma in December 1989 we felt very much at home on the island. We loved our little cottage on the beach, which we had outfitted with a solar panel that ran our lights, a fan, and a newly acquired computer. We had come to cherish the friendships we had formed and looked forward to additional visits in the future, not so much because we were eager to enrich our knowledge of the culture, but because we wanted to nurture the friendships we had come to value so dearly.

1990: The Crisis in Oinafa

When we returned to Rotuma in June 1990 the tensions in Oinafa were palpable. This came as something of a surprise to us, because the year before, despite a history of conflicts and factionalism, a healing process seemed to be taking place in the district, climaxing in a wedding between the offspring of two of the most vocal antagonists in prior disputes (see Howard 1990a). But after that, a conflict had developed between Kausiraf and members of his kin group that resulted in the kin group's deciding to depose him and select a new chief. Although Kausiraf refused to accept their decision, the group leaders proceeded with their plans to install a new chief. They recruited from Fiji the brother of one of the key disputants and persuaded him to return to Rotuma to take on the responsibilities of chieftainship. We arrived when the issue was unresolved and feelings were intense on both sides. Kausiraf was

in Fiji seeking legal advice and the man chosen to replace him had not yet been installed. About 80 percent of the people in the district favored deposing Kausiriaf and were prepared to support his replacement. The main support for the incumbent chief came from members of his immediate family, including his daughter, Fakrau, and her husband, Tarterani.

From the time we arrived it was apparent that we had fallen from grace as far as Tarterani was concerned. Our cottage had not been finished, as he had promised, and many of the materials we had purchased before our departure the previous year to complete the job had disappeared. We discovered later that he had taken some of the items to expand his own house and had donated the paint we had ordered to the church. We took these losses philosophically since the house was still in fact quite livable, but his and Fakrau's coolness to us was disconcerting.

Our fieldwork during this two-month sojourn involved a shift away from systematic data collection toward simple participant observation. We continued to take notes and discussed between us the significance of what we observed and heard, but we made no special effort to collect data on any particular topic. For the most part, we enjoyed visiting with friends, listening to the talk about what was happening in the village, and just being there. Tarterani became increasingly agitated by our visits with people in the village who wanted Kausiriaf to step down. For the first three weeks he avoided talking to us almost entirely, and when he finally did it was to harangue us about the injustice being done by the kin group. He later admonished us for not being loyal to his family and told us explicitly that we were not to speak with anyone who opposed his father-in-law. We tried to explain to him that we were neutral in the dispute and that our work required us to talk with as many people as possible, but he was unmoved.

The last straw for Tarterani was our attendance at the installation ceremony of Poar, the man selected to replace Kausiriaf. We had never before witnessed a chiefly installation and were delighted at the opportunity to document it, but to Tarterani this must have seemed an act of betrayal. Realizing on our way home from the ceremony that Tarterani was going to be incensed, Alan went to visit a Methodist catechist neighbor who had managed to stay neutral in the dispute. While they were discussing our desire to make a formal apology (requiring a roasted pig, ceremonially presented) to Tarterani and Fakrau for any distress we had caused them during our stay, Jan burst in, crying, and said that Tarterani had told her he wanted us out of the house immediately. She had pleaded with him, explaining that we were scheduled to leave in a week anyway, but he was adamant. Alan talked to him, but to no avail. Although it was already late afternoon, Tarterani still demanded that we be gone by nightfall.

What happened next astonished us. In a matter of minutes, as word of our plight spread around the village, people began to show up to console us, to propose alternate accommodations, and to offer assistance in moving. Before long two trucks pulled up at our front door with almost all the men from the village. They moved our furniture, appliances, and personal possessions onto the trucks while Tarterani looked on from his verandah. The men then proceeded to strip the solar power wiring from the house, and offered to pull out the louvered windows and iron roofing since we had paid for them too, but we requested that they not do so. The men expressed considerable anger at the way we were being treated, feeling it reflected badly on the whole village. One of the subchiefs later apologized for not coming to help: he told us he was so angry that if he had seen Tarterani he would not have been able to control himself.

Several people offered to buy things from us, knowing we now had no place of our own to put them. We offered the appliances, including our solar setup and a generator, at nominal prices (in order to "legitimate" the transfer, should it be questioned) to some of our friends, and we gave away the furniture (most of which Tarterani had built out of materials we had purchased). We spent the night at the home of an outspoken critic of Kausiraf, a man who was instrumental in trying to depose him. The following day, at our request, we were taken to the district of Itu'muta, where we had been invited (prior to these events) to spend time with the family of Harieta and John Bennett (a Rotuman woman and her American husband from Rhode Island). It was a comfortable arrangement since John had built a small apartment with modern conveniences and a delightful verandah overlooking Maka Bay. Many of the Oinafa villagers accompanied us on the truck. For Alan, in a way this was returning home, since he had lived in Itu'muta during his initial field trip.

In the course of fieldwork, anthropologists sometimes experience transformative events, events that significantly shift the way the people they are studying perceive them, the way they perceive their subjects, or both. An event might be as simple as eating food that people think of as uniquely theirs and repugnant to outsiders. It might involve a shared experience of danger, or be the consequence of performing tasks (like planting crops or weaving mats) that define a people's personhood. Sometimes these transformations are incremental, describing a gradual trajectory from being seen as a stranger to being accepted as a "normal" human being. Sometimes events are dramatic, involving a shift from outsider to insider, from someone who is "other" to someone who is "us." It was the latter kind of transformation that we experienced following this episode. A number of people explicitly said to us, "Now you know what it's really like to be a Rotuman," implying that

the facade of polite respect had been penetrated and they could no longer present themselves in a purely positive light. People began to tell us their own stories of fractured relationships within their families, spontaneously revealing intimate details they would never have exposed before. In addition, our stance of neutrality in the chiefly dispute had been shattered. We were now identified with one of the factions, in a strangely heroic-martyred way—and thus became insiders to that faction (fortunately a much larger one) and outcasts to the other. It was as if the frame for our relationships changed from one of ethnicity and nationality to one of political allegiances within Rotuma.

We left Rotuma several days later with mixed emotions. Despite the hurt feelings and a sense of having failed in our roles as neutral anthropologists, we relished the new levels of intimacy that resulted. The somewhat idyllic perspective we had of Rotuma had been shaken, but at the same time we felt more emotionally attached to it. Our experiences had awakened intensified emotions that were previously muted, perhaps because we had been trying to get along with everyone equally well. Following the episode with Tarterani and Fakrau, and the growing intimacy that developed with others during our return visits, we were experiencing emotions much closer to those we experience with our own relatives—complex mixtures of love, joy, irritation, frustration, and so on. And as our relationships grew more complex, we felt our intellectualized understandings of Rotumans (as a category) give way to an affective interplay with specific individuals that depended on circumstances, events, gossip, and other contingencies. This ultimately led us to abandon our analytical pursuit of the kind of systemic understanding that lies at the heart of scientific analysis. Instead, we began a highly contextualized, historically informed quest to comprehend events. The episode also motivated us to become closer to individuals we had come to like or love, without regard for what we might learn about Rotuman culture.

1991: Expanding Horizons

In 1991 we spent the (northern) summer in New Zealand and Australia, with brief revisits to Fiji and Rotuma. When we got to Rotuma we found the split in Oinafa still unresolved. Kausiraf had won the legal battle; the high court in Fiji decided that under Fiji law only the prime minister could depose a Rotuman chief. Most of the people nonetheless supported Poar and refused to participate in activities presided over by Kausiraf. Tensions remained high, with people from one faction shunning those on the other side (for a detailed account of the dispute, see Howard and Rensel 1997).

Finding the social atmosphere in Oinafa oppressive, we accepted the invitation of Elisapeti Inia to host us at her home in the village of Savlei, in Itu'ti'u district, on the southwest side of the island. We were invited to stay with other friends and accepted some of their invitations, including an overnight stay with Poar in Oinafa. This further cemented our identification with his faction, and resulted in an exceptionally warm reception by his supporters. We repeated this pattern on subsequent visits to Rotuma. On each occasion we were hosted by Elisapeti and made overnight visits to friends who invited us.

Staying with Elisapeti was especially rewarding for us. Not only had she become our teacher and a dear friend, but Alan had also begun work on a biography of her late husband, Wilson (Howard 1994), and this gave him time to peruse Wilson's papers and to interview Elisapeti at length. Doing a biography seemed a natural outgrowth of the process that had engulfed us. It was an opportunity to focus on the life of a man Alan greatly admired, quite apart from the fact that he was a Rotuman. In a sense the project mirrored the shift in our orientation toward fieldwork: culture was shunted to the background with individuals foregrounded. We were now more interested in coming to grips with how people managed their lives than with the culture that may have patterned their behavior.

After reaffirming relationships with Rotuman friends in Fiji, we flew to New Zealand to enjoy a pleasant holiday, including a week's excursion in a camper van. Although we did not think of this as a field trip, we took the opportunity to visit with the Reverend Jione Langi in Wellington. Langi was a Rotuman who held the position of pastor to Fijian, Fiji-Indian, and Rotuman Methodists in New Zealand. He also had been a student of Wilson Inia's and credited him with having influenced his career path. This presented a double opportunity for us: Alan was able to interview him about his relationship with Wilson, and we were able to find out something about the Rotumans who had immigrated to New Zealand. We learned that there were perhaps a hundred Rotuman or part-Rotuman families in New Zealand and vowed to find out more about them in the future (we were also enchanted with New Zealand and thought this a great excuse to return).

From New Zealand we went to Australia, where we spent most of our time in Sydney at the Mitchell Library scouring their archives for Rotuman historical materials. While in Sydney we encountered several Rotumans, including Saumara Foster, a librarian at the Mitchell who provided considerable assistance. We also received an invitation from a Rotuman woman, Martoa Dickinson, to spend a day at her home. She invited a number of Sydney Rotumans to meet us, providing our first opportunity to get to know Rotumans who had migrated to Australia. We thoroughly enjoyed the experience and decided to return to do fieldwork there in the near future.

1994: Fieldwork in Cities Down Under

The near future turned out to be 1994, when Alan took another sabbatical leave. We spent three months visiting Rotuman communities in Fiji, Australia, and New Zealand, including two weeks on Rotuma. Our time in Suva was momentous since Alan's biography of Wilson Inia was being launched by the Institute of Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific. The launching was attended by a cross-section of the Rotuman community, and we were gratified with the book's reception. Whether it was the book or simply the fact that we had come back once again, the warmth of our welcome had noticeably increased. To be sure we had already formed some enduring friendships that transcended time and distance, but Rotumans who had been mere acquaintances before made a point now of seeking our company.

Our reception on Rotuma was also exhilarating. We brought copies of the book with us and they quickly circulated around the island. Elisapeti held a traditional welcoming ceremony in our honor and, as in Suva, we sensed a new level of acceptance within the community at large. Wilson Inia had been a leader of considerable moral authority on Rotuma and our association with him—indirect as it was—gave us enhanced legitimacy. The book was written for Rotumans rather than for academics and documented aspects of their lives they could relate to easily. One consequence of writing for an academic audience is that unfamiliar jargon creates distance between the anthropologist and the people studied. The Inia biography had the opposite effect.

From Rotuma we returned to Fiji for a brief period before going on to Australia via New Zealand. As we were waiting in the transit lounge of Auckland airport we were startled to see the Reverend Langi—we had heard that he was in Fiji at a Methodist conference. He informed us that Martoa Dickinson, our host in Sydney, had invited him to participate in a cultural night she was arranging as well as a joint service of the two Rotuman Methodist congregations. This was the first inkling we had that something major was being planned in our honor. The cultural night was a gala affair held at a posh lawn-bowling club. Approximately 150 Rotumans attended, some from as far away as Melbourne. In addition to providing a feast, members of the Sydney Rotuman community danced a traditional *tautoga* (group dance) and a Tongan band, hired for the occasion, played various kinds of Polynesian music. Alan was eulogized prior to giving a speech concerning his research experience on Rotuma and the importance of maintaining Rotuman identity in migrant communities abroad. Needless to say, this was a wonderful way to be introduced to Rotumans in Sydney, and we spent the next four weeks familiarizing ourselves with the community. We were greatly impressed with the economic and social successes Rotumans enjoyed in Australia. Most people

we met held white-collar, managerial, or professional positions and had comfortably assimilated into the middle and upper-middle classes of Australian society. Although we took notes and kept a diary recording our observations and reflections, it felt less like fieldwork than an extended vacation, visiting people who quickly became extremely dear to us.

From Sydney we drove to Melbourne, where we were hosted by Kapieni Patresio and Torika Sanerive (Torika had attended the cultural night in Sydney), and introduced to the small Rotuman community there, which at the time was struggling to organize. We then went on to Adelaide and spent a few days with Injimo "Oni" Hanfakaga and his Australian wife, Betty. Only a handful of Rotumans lived in Adelaide, giving us a sense of the isolation experienced by migrants who lived apart.

We left Australia for New Zealand, where we were hosted in Auckland by the Reverend Langi and his family for several more weeks. This was a most fortunate happenstance since Langi was at the heart of the Rotuman community in New Zealand. He had formally organized the "New Zealand Rotuman Fellowship," which held semiannual meetings, and he conducted Sunday services in Rotuman for the Auckland community. A constant stream of Rotumans visited his home and he spent a good deal of time on the telephone talking with others. He made every effort to involve us in community activities, going out of his way to introduce us to people he thought would be of interest. We were also fortunate enough to attend one of the fellowship's semiannual meetings, held on a Maori *marae* over a long weekend. It was a delightful experience of *communitas*. Langi gave us rather prominent roles, including Alan's giving a speech ("Twenty reasons Rotumans are so successful") and Jan's giving the children's sermon ("Three key Rotuman values") during the church service. What perhaps made everything even more rewarding was the fact that by now we knew many of the relatives of the people we were meeting—relatives we had met in Rotuma, Fiji, and Australia. We also had a pretty good command of the news and gossip circulating throughout the broader community and felt more like "insiders" than ever, more so than many of the migrants who were only marginally involved with other Rotumans. Our familiarity with Rotuman history (including recent events) sometimes led people to exaggerate the extent of our cultural knowledge, which on occasion proved embarrassing.

We also visited the small Rotuman community in Christchurch, New Zealand. There, too, we were feted, although in a more informal manner. We were hosted by Sanimeli Gibson, who later married Maraf, chief of Noa'tau district, and moved to Rotuma. Our reputation as people who were knowledgeable about Rotuman genealogies was put to the test there by Munue Tivao and Akanisi Nafrue, a Mormon couple eager to identify their ances-

tors. Fortunately we had with us a laptop computer with a database of births, deaths, and marriages between the years 1903 and 1960—incorporating the information Alan had copied from registers during his initial fieldwork in Fiji and Rotuma, which he had since collated. This made it possible to go back as many as five or six generations for young adults, and sometimes even further if known ancestors articulated with genealogies collected by A. M. Hocart in 1913. The incident with Munue and Akanisi stands out because it was so meaningful to them, as it allowed them to identify ancestors whose souls they could pray for. We had provided this kind of information for interested parties in Fiji and Australia. Some people had offered to pay us for the service—which we refused, of course, happy to have the opportunity to reciprocate the many kindnesses being shown us. We continue to receive periodic requests for such information and more often than not we are able to provide it. It is especially gratifying that data originally collected for anthropological purposes are so highly valued by Rotumans themselves and we are delighted to be able to make the information available to them.

The trips to Australia and New Zealand brought home to us the degree to which the Rotuman community has become global in scope. We became acutely aware of the continuous flows of people, goods, and information that take place between localities with Rotuman populations, and of the futility of drawing boundaries around communities (for more on the transnational Rotuman community, see Howard and Rensel 2001).

One of the by-products of our visits Down Under was a list of names and addresses of Rotumans who were living in Hawai'i, relatives of people we had met in our travels. After returning home we sent out invitations to everyone on that list to a gathering at our place, asking them to inform other Rotumans they knew, and suggesting they bring their favorite Rotuman dish to share. The party was a great success; it brought together people unaware of one another's proximity and stimulated a desire to get together on a regular basis. The result was the formation in 1995 of the "Rotuman Association of Hawai'i," the Tefui Club. (A *tefui* is the distinctive Rotuman garland.) In addition to monthly meetings the club held weekend campouts, celebrated "Rotuma Day" (May 13, the day marking Rotuma's cession to Great Britain in 1881), organized fund-raisers for various purposes, and performed Rotuman dances on several occasions. For us, this extended "the field" into our own backyard, so to speak, and offered the same sorts of pleasures (and disappointments) as fieldwork abroad.

The high point of this newly formed community for us was Alan's retirement party, in September 1999. The event was hosted by the Tefui Club and attended by friends and colleagues from the University of Hawai'i and the broader community. Rotuman friends came from Rotuma, Fiji, Austra-

lia, New Zealand, and Alaska for the party and participated with Tefui Club members in preparing the feast, making *tefui* and other decorations, and entertaining the guests. The club members performed a traditional ceremony honoring Alan and danced a traditional *tautoga* in his honor.

In addition to our subsequent visits to Rotuma and Rotuman communities in Fiji, Australia, and New Zealand (mentioned above), we have also attended Rotuma Day celebrations in the San Francisco Bay area in 1999, 2001, and 2003, and in British Columbia in 2003. We have also been privileged to accept invitations to visit with Rotuman families in Europe—England, Scotland, and Norway—whose close-at-hand Rotuman networks are smaller but who are nonetheless active participants in the global Rotuman community.

Serving the Community

Each visit helps to confirm and consolidate the friendships we have formed. As a result of repeated visits to “the field”—wherever it is—we have experienced a shift in our priorities and allegiances. Whereas we began with a firm commitment to the anthropological community—a commitment that entailed spending most of our energies writing for other academics, and communicating and socializing with them—we have ended up with a strong allegiance to the global Rotuman community and a desire to serve that community in multiple ways. Two of the most central forms of service have been creating and maintaining a Web site dedicated to the Rotuman community and helping knowledgeable Rotumans write and publish their own books.

Toward the end of 1996, enchanted by the possibilities of the Internet for anthropological and, particularly, ethnographic purposes, Alan began construction of a Web site for Rotumans. Our goals were modest at the time. We wanted to create an accessible place in cyberspace where Rotumans could share news and communicate with one another. The site also aimed to provide basic information about the island’s history, culture, and language for interested Rotumans and non-Rotumans alike. Toward these ends we created Web pages containing news, maps, information about recent publications, and a set of essays on population, history, economics, politics, myths, and other cultural topics. We also scanned photographs from Rotuma and created a digital photo album. The positive feedback we received from Rotumans encouraged us to invest more of our energies in the Web site and to include new features. We have since added a bulletin board where people can post messages, pages of Rotuman recipes and Rotuman humor, a forum where individuals can post their views on issues of concern to the community, sound clips of Rotuman music, and information on contemporary Rotuman artists.

Concerns over preserving the language led us to incorporate an interactive Rotuman-English dictionary that allows visitors to the Web site to search for glosses from one language to the other. This is an abbreviated version of the *New Rotuman Dictionary* on which we collaborated with German linguist Hans Schmidt, Elisapeti Inia, and Sofie Arntsen, another Rotuman woman with considerable linguistic gifts (Inia et al. 1998). The expressed desire of people to keep in contact with one another across national boundaries resulted in our developing a Rotuman Register, a database where people can fill out a form with personal information allowing searches by various criteria (e.g., name, parents' names, home village on Rotuma, current residence).

We also created an archive of significant nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century writings about Rotuma. This, along with the posting of our own published articles and book chapters about Rotuma, is a way of repatriating materials that languish in obscure volumes and journals, making them unavailable to most Rotumans (see Howard 2002 for more on the issue of repatriation).

The Web site has facilitated fund-raising on a worldwide basis for various causes, including obtaining needed equipment and supplies for the hospital on Rotuma, and funds to support a program of environmental education (LäjeRotuma) organized by a group of well-educated young Rotumans in Suva.

The feedback we have gotten from Rotumans who visit the Web site has been enormously gratifying. We get a constant stream of e-mail messages from grateful Rotumans who have located long-lost friends or relatives, or who simply express delight over being able to keep abreast of happenings in the various communities. The Web site now averages over two hundred visits per day, and many people have told us that they visit daily, especially to get the news (we now have regular correspondents who send reports and photos from their respective communities). The URL for the site is <http://www.rotuma.net>.

We have also devoted ourselves to assisting Rotumans to publish their own books. In particular we have worked with Elisapeti Inia, who has a vast knowledge of Rotuman culture and a passion for preserving it. We have brought her from Rotuma to our home in Honolulu on several occasions, providing her with an opportunity to focus her energies on recording her knowledge. This has resulted in two books, one a compilation of Rotuman proverbs (Inia 1998), the other a detailed how-to-do-it description of Rotuman ceremonies (Inia 2001). We played the roles of scribes, editors, and typesetters, while constantly asking questions that required her to clarify what she was writing about. Though we make no claims to coauthorship of these volumes, they are among our most gratifying accomplishments.



FIGURE 2. Jan Rensel helping Elisapeti Inia to edit the manuscript of her book, *Kato'aga: Rotuman Ceremonies*, in July 2001.

In the Final Analysis

Our experience with long-term fieldwork among Rotumans has resulted in several transformations. It has progressively changed our research orientation from science to history, has altered our relationship to Rotumans with whom we interact from one governed primarily by respect and restraint to one characterized by intimate friendship, and has resulted in a shift in commitment from the academic community to serving the now-global Rotuman community.

Although we feel we have gained a richer sense of individuals' histories, we can't claim to have a deeper intellectual understanding of Rotuman culture as a result of our repeated visits. In a sense, we feel we understand it less, in part because our analytical selves have receded into the background while emotional aspects of our relationships with people have become central. The complexity of our relationships has increased many times over, and just as we sometimes have difficulties understanding members of our own families because we know too much about them, we sometimes have trouble understanding friends with whom we have developed profound relationships. Ultimately, articulating understandings requires simplification, and

our immersion in the relationships we have formed with Rotumans is too rewarding to employ the kind of analysis required. When we go to the field nowadays it is only secondarily to increase our understanding of Rotuman culture; our primary reason for returning is simply to be with people who are among our closest, most intimate friends. If our work provides a service to the community, we are doubly rewarded.

NOTES

1. Although Rotuma is nearly three hundred miles north of the Fiji archipelago and is distinctive culturally, linguistically, and in the physical characteristics of its people, the British decided to incorporate Rotuma into the Colony of Fiji when Rotuma was ceded to Great Britain in 1881. After Fiji gained independence in 1970, Rotuma remained a part of the nation of Fiji. However, Rotumans and Fijians alike continue to make a distinction; for example, the Methodist Church is officially "The Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma." In this article, whenever a distinction is made between Rotuma and Fiji, we follow local custom in referring to Fiji as an archipelago rather than as a nation.

2. The Rotuma Land Act of 1959 is just now being revised, and a new land commission is expected to go to Rotuma sometime in the near future; it will be interesting to see how things play out this time.

3. An indicator of Amai's abilities and his hardworking commitment to duty was his being awarded an MBE by Queen Elizabeth in 1998 for his long service aboard cable ships.

4. I eventually coauthored a paper on the topic titled "Cultural Values and Attitudes Towards Death" (Howard and Scott 1965).

5. Jan made it clear that the money was a gift and not payment for services, which would have entirely altered the nature of her relationship with them. In fact several people initially refused to accept the money on the grounds that what she was doing was of value to the community and that it was she who should be compensated. Only after Jan convinced them that the cash was a gift to show her appreciation for their assistance did they accept it.

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LIVING A "CONVENIENT FICTION"

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Long-term fieldwork offers a unique perspective on the complex, interactive process of interpretation on which ethnography depends. Through shared experiences, the ethnographer(s) and host community collaborate in constructing reciprocal identities tailored to their respective needs and the local situation. The mutual expectations and assumptions grounding this relationship become more visible as they are defined by subsequent events and encounters over the years. Our article analyzes some significant twists and turns in our thirty-year relationship with the Tuvaluan atoll community of Nanumea. In initially defining us as "of the island," the community established us in a local category resonant with key emic values (community solidarity, equality). As time passed, this fieldwork identity was reinforced, and constrained, by local interactions and decisions. Similarly, research products and opportunities were informed by the expectations the community held regarding our identity. Using a long-term reflexive lens, this case study reveals how complex and interconnected is the process of creating an ethnographic relationship.

THE CREATION OF ETHNOGRAPHIC INFORMATION is a highly complex process, as the last thirty years of anthropological analysis and debate have demonstrated. Recognition that ethnographic writings themselves are interpretations (Geertz 1973), though "fashioned" and "constructed" to be as authentic as the ethnographer can manage, has focused attention on the process of fieldwork immersion and necessitated a more subtle and reflexive description and delineation of key events, historical relationships, and social interactions. Attention has been directed to the internalized "interfering intermediaries" that inevitably "maintain outposts in [the ethnographer's]