

LIFE STYLE, EDUCATION, AND ROTUMAN CHARACTER

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THE ROTUMAN WORLD VIEW

[In this chapter we will] consider the relationships among the style of life on the island, the educational practices that nurture it, and the psychological character of the people. Let us begin with the basic premise that underlies Rotuman culture: *social life should be harmonious and free of conflict*. Achieving economic success, being able to support a family comfortably, having friends, and being free from inner conflict are also valued, but they are subordinate to this more central theme. To fail to understand this is to fail to understand Rotuman culture, for almost everything important about the islanders' style of life follows from this premise. It is toward this goal that Rotuman socialization practices are aimed and it is within this framework that they must be understood.

That does not mean, of course, that conflict is nonexistent. On such a small island, where people are in face-to-face contact year after year, conflict is inevitable, but for precisely that reason its management is given high priority in the Rotuman hierarchy of values. Covert conflict is considered less threatening than open confrontation, for the latter forces individuals to take sides, creating social schisms between groups of people and endangering the harmony of the entire community. Many Rotuman cultural practices can best be understood as a means of reducing the possibility of interpersonal conflict to a minimum, and keeping it socially contained when it does occur. Perhaps the most far-reaching example is the body of custom that governs interpersonal relations.

Interpersonal Relations

By providing clear-cut guidelines for behavior, the rules governing interpersonal relations are an aid to avoiding embarrassment and insult. With individuals of higher rank, including senior kinsmen, one is expected to be restrained and compliant. If the person is of especially high rank, a Rotuman

is likely to restrain himself to the point of complete silence until asked for an opinion, in which case compliance is expressed by agreeing with the other's view. This has led some European officials to label the Rotumans as "yes men" who offer no ideas of their own. They fail to realize that agreement is a mark of respect rather than an expression of concurring belief. Especially when a European official expresses a strong opinion, as many are prone to do, Rotumans are reluctant to contradict him publicly; to respond with argumentation would be viewed as an attempt at humiliation. Reservations can be expressed, but they are subtle enough to be missed by persons unfamiliar with the expressive code within which they are embedded. Thus, whereas another Rotuman is able to *sense* the difference between "ritual" and personally motivated agreement, an outsider may not be able to make the necessary discrimination.

With persons of lesser rank one can be less restrained and more freely expressive. Nevertheless, Rotuman ethics require that authority be tempered by consideration. It is nearly as bad for a person of senior rank to be publicly disrespectful of someone of lesser rank as the other way around, unless the latter has committed such a blatant offense that the entire community has been offended.

The rules governing relations between persons of equivalent rank are less explicit, but there are guiding principles that are understood by everyone. Most important of these is reciprocity. In Rotuma this requires that individuals exchange goods and favors as an expression of mutual concern. The balance of exchange should never fall too heavily on one side or the other, but it should also never be equalized, for to pay off all obligations would be to eliminate the social fabric that binds a relationship together. Here again is a point of frequent misunderstanding between Westerners and people from cultures not thoroughly dominated by a market economy. For us, reciprocity implies equal payment for a gift or service. Thus we are apt to respond to a gift by quickly giving one of equivalent value; to give one of lesser value is to risk being accused of stinginess, to give one of greater value is to risk embarrassing the recipient. I believe the reason we feel most comfortable when our balance of obligations is equal is because this allows us to disengage at will. For us, reciprocity is a means to non-commitment; for Rotumans, in contrast, it is the very essence of commitment. That is why Rotumans are actually *offended* at times by Europeans who insist on responding to a gift by giving one immediately in return. It is perceived as a sign that the relationship is being rejected; the return gift changes what might have been a commitment to friendship into a contractual bargain. If one waits a while, however, tries to determine the other's needs and desires, and gives a gift or provides a service without reference to the initial overture, he is perceived as affirming the relationship.

There is a difference in the link between goods and people here that is subtle but quite profound. I would maintain that for middle-class Western-

ers human relationships outside the immediate family are subordinated to a concern for obtaining and accumulating goods (including money), whereas for Rotumans goods are primarily in the service of maintaining relationships between people. This difference is reflected in attitudes toward wedding gifts. We evaluate wedding gifts in terms of their utility for the betrothed couple; the Rotumans give presents in order to affirm relationships. An even more subtle example is embedded in contrasting forms of hospitality. In America it is regarded as appropriate for a host to ask his guest if he would like something to drink or eat, and we expect an "honest" reply. If the person refuses, we assume that he is neither thirsty nor hungry. In Rotuma, however, such an overture by a host would almost certainly be refused, no matter how hungry or thirsty the person might be. If the host really wants to supply his guests he simply gives food and drink without asking. This contrast in custom is consistent with the difference in values. Our asking a guest implies that if we were to provide food and drink and he did not want it, then something valuable would be wasted. The Rotuman host is communicating, "Let us not worry about the food and drink, it is my relationship to you that is important. I give to you freely; if you want it, fine, if you do not, it doesn't make any difference." This, then, is the essence of Rotuman generosity. It is not giving for the sake of living up to an inner belief or to nurture a particular self-image; rather, it is a social phenomenon that is intended to establish and affirm interpersonal relationships.

More generally, the cultural approach Rotumans take toward interpersonal relations can be characterized as one of pragmatic immediacy. This contrasts with the approach of Westerners, particularly middle-class Americans, who tend to give a great deal of weight to an individual's intentions. It is as if to middle-class Americans the primary question at issue when behaving toward others is, "How do I have to act in order to be true to myself (i.e., my beliefs, my conception of correct behavior, etc.)?" The concern is one of living up to a self-imposed standard. It is true that we act contrary to our beliefs and feelings from time to time, particularly if there is a high payoff, but we have been trained to feel guilty about doing so and admire men who refuse to deviate from their ideals regardless of the social cost. The behavior of an honorable person should be consistent through time, in different places and with different people. The term "integrity," which denotes what is perhaps the most highly valued personal attribute for Americans and Europeans, implies just such consistency. Rotumans, however, tend to focus upon overt behavior, particularly upon the immediate social consequences of an act. For them the primary question might be phrased "How do I have to act in order to get along harmoniously with others?" When this is a focus of concern, an individual is best guided by being sensitive to others rather than by following internal dicta.

I should like to make it clear that I regard this distinction between middle-class American and Rotuman culture as one of emphasis rather than

kind. To be sure, Americans are concerned with maintaining social harmony, just as Rotumans cannot easily be persuaded to do things they really believe to be wrong. Still, the contrast in emphasis is sufficiently pronounced to give a noticeably different flavor to human relations.

For Europeans, encounters with such people as the Rotumans are often disconcerting. They find an individual expressing one opinion at one time and the opposite opinion a short while afterward. They are offended when a Rotuman agrees to do something in what appears to be perfectly good faith, then does not do it. From our cultural viewpoint such behavior is easily interpreted as willful deceit or dishonesty, but such judgments are almost always unjustified. They merely highlight our preoccupation with internal consistency at the expense of external harmony. The apparent contradictions in Rotuman behavior dissolve as soon as one understands the situational ethic that provides the guidelines. The things it is suitable to do and say in one social circumstance may not be suitable in another, and a promise or commitment is always contingent upon subsequent events. For example, a man may agree to lend someone a horse on a certain day, but the district chief might subsequently ask for the use of the animal in order to carry foodstuff from the bush in preparation for an upcoming feast. The prospective borrower arrives only to find the horse gone. The explanation that a district chief enjoys priority, and that his request was unforeseen, is sufficient to justify the broken agreement. Furthermore, the requirement of avoiding overt conflict also makes it difficult for Rotumans to deny a request, even when they have no intention of complying with it. If one understands that it is a lesser offense to fail to abide by a promise than to reject the validity of a request, this kind of behavior makes sense. After all, to reject an overture for assistance is to deny flatly the significance of a relationship, whereas the failure to comply can generally be attributed to external conditions.

The Concept of Time

This lack of emphasis on keeping appointments and compulsiveness in adhering to verbal commitments has led some observers to suggest that Rotumans "have no sense of time," that they are only concerned with the present. Here again are the roots of a misunderstanding. We are so used to thinking of time as being divided up into units of hours, minutes, and seconds that we think of it as natural, and we organize our lives accordingly. Since these units are as applicable to the future as they are to the past, we have come to think of time blocks as precise periods that can be reserved. When we make an appointment to meet someone on Friday at ten o'clock for an hour, we are promising to set aside a particular segment. Other commitments are then allocated to the remaining segments. We also treat time as a commodity—"Time is money"—and workers are paid more by the time they put in than by any other consideration. To fail to appear busy

during "work time" is to risk being accused of laziness, even if it means making work when there is none.

Rotumans think of time somewhat differently. For them time is the interval between events—for the most part, human events. The past is marked by a sequence of weddings, funerals, births, visits from relatives, etc., and the future anticipated in terms of similar events. But future events can be delayed, moved up, or even cancelled. Whereas for us future time is rigidly segmented, for Rotumans it is quite flexible. Future time can only be reserved provisionally, since unanticipated intervening events may infringe on the time period that had been set. Inherent in any Rotuman's promise to do something tomorrow is the qualification that what happens between now and then may negate the agreement. When everyone understands this there are likely to be few difficulties; only when a European administrator or businessman takes someone's word to be sacred do serious conflicts arise. The idea that time can be sold or purchased is foreign to the Rotuman viewpoint. When there is a job to do one works. That work should be scheduled by anything other than pragmatic considerations, such as the heat of the day, the tide, availability of labor, etc., makes no sense to them. From a European viewpoint Rotumans sometimes appear lazy because they do not "keep busy" when there is no compelling work to be done; to the Rotumans, Europeans appear irrational because they set aside time to work quite irrespective of the amount of work or the suitability of conditions.

One should not construe from this that Rotumans do not plan for the future. They do look ahead and lay plans. They encourage their children to get a good education so that someday they will have good jobs, and they are willing to make sacrifices toward that end. They also save money in order to make future purchases and effectively plan such events as marriage ceremonies well ahead of time. The difference is that they see the future as fluid and beyond individual control; it is therefore somewhat foolish to plan things too precisely, and wiser to wait until events unfold before committing one's energy and efforts.

Man and his Environment. Related to this orientation toward time is a view of man's relationship to his environment. We tend to see ourselves separately from our environment. For us nature presents a challenge, its forces to be controlled and harnessed to our advantage. Man's goal is to conquer nature, even if it means climbing mountains just "because they are there." Rotumans, on the other hand, see themselves as being part of their island environment. Man's goal is not to conquer nature, but to live in harmony with it. We prefer that nature react to us in accordance with our whims. The Rotumans are quite willing to be the reactors and to grant to nature her vicissitudes.

Social Behavior. Another aspect of the Rotuman world view related to their orientation toward time is the priority they give to an individual's *current* social behavior in judging him. In part this follows from the empha-

sis on interpersonal behavior and the situational ethic that accompanies it, just as our holding a person responsible for his cumulative behavior follows from our focus on individual motivational and belief systems. For us any offense, even if it is against another person, is basically an ethical or moral offense. A person who has committed a serious misdeed is forever suspect, for his very nature as a social being is called into question. Everything a person has done in the past is seen as useful for diagnosing his "true" motives; hence the more we know about his past the better we are able to judge him and the safer we feel about anticipating his future behavior. A "bad" person is one whose accumulated unacceptable behavior is not sufficiently balanced by proper behavior.

For the Rotumans, an act of behavior is reprehensible only if it violates the terms of a relationship. All offenses, even those that are conceived as being against God or other supernatural beings, are ultimately interpersonal offenses. Even the Rotumans' commitment to Christianity, and it is very strong, is much less an adherence to a code of morality than a personal commitment to God and his church representatives. But God, too, is bound by the Rotuman ethic of reciprocity. If he fails to live up to his part of the relationship by not tangibly rewarding individuals for their ritual investments and adherence to church rules, then deviation is justified. When the relationship is working properly, God rewards "moral" behavior with good fortune, just as Rotuman parents reward compliance with material indulgence. When a relationship has soured, for whatever reason, steps ought to be taken to restore harmony, with the burden of initiative placed on the shoulders of the offender. The restoration of harmony is served by the custom of *faksoro*, which is a form of ritual apology. No matter how egregious an offense a person may have committed against another, it is always possible to balance the slate by offering recompense and going *faksoro*. Thus the "bad" person in Rotuma is one who is too proud to apologize and make up for his offenses; when he does so the stigma is removed.

CHILD REARING—A SECOND LOOK

Let us now [examine] Rotuman child-rearing practices in the light of this world view. There are two points to keep in mind. One is that the behavior of Rotuman parents toward their children is affected by the dominant concern for minimizing social conflict; it is therefore regulated by the situational ethic that accompanies that concern. The other is that parents want their children to be good citizens of Rotuman society and educate them accordingly. The extensive indulgence, for example, with its physical displays of affection and emphasis on material giving, can now be understood as the culturally-approved strategy for establishing and affirming a relationship. One of the consequences of parental indulgence is that a child incurs an enormous social debt that his parents can use for control and influence

purposes. A constant theme in Rotuman life history accounts is the report of parents who were so kind and generous that the person felt a profound obligation to comply with their wishes, even to the extent of marrying someone he did not want because his parents desired it. The power of this parental tactic was dramatized to me recently when I asked a Rotuman girl attending the University of Hawaii about the forms of punishment her parents used with her. After thinking for a few moments she declared that she could not remember being punished at all. When I inquired how her parents got her to comply with their wishes, she replied: "They were always so wonderful to me—they never denied me anything they could give. How can I do anything *but* comply with their wishes!"

One reason she could not remember being punished is probably because the main control technique, shaming by ridicule, is a somewhat disguised form of punishment. When a child does something of which his parents disapprove, they are likely to make very pointed remarks, but usually under a cloak of humor. They are therefore able to communicate to the child that his behavior is offensive without disrupting the relationship. It is significant, too, that parents are not the only ones who use shaming to control a child's actions; virtually everyone does. The child's behavior is thus shaped by an expanded social universe as contrasted with the far more focused parental shaping that is characteristic of the American middle class.

Another important characteristic of the Rotuman socialization pattern is that children are punished for the consequences of their actions rather than for committing the acts themselves. This follows from the interpersonal emphasis described above; it is not what the child *intends* that counts, but how his behavior affects others. One never hears a Rotuman parent ask a child, "Why did you do that?" The question is irrelevant, and the answer would not alter the situation. Accidental offenses are just as likely to be punished as intentional ones. Likewise, an attempt to cause harm that fails is likely to be ignored or laughed at rather than punished.

Related to this emphasis on social consequences is the timing of punishment. Rotuman children are usually punished only after the interpersonal effects of their misdeeds become apparent. They are rarely punished for an act at the point of initiation, the pattern favored by American parents. Thus we communicate to a child that certain acts, such as sexual play and the destruction of property, are inherently wrong, and punish them whenever they occur, in public or private, at their very inception. In contrast, by waiting until the social consequences of an act are realized before inaugurating punishment, the Rotuman parent communicates to his child that right and wrong are a matter of how one's behavior affects others. Since the child's behavior may be offensive only to particular categories of people and in particular circumstances, the same behavior may be punished on one occasion and ignored on the next. The net effect of these contrastive patterns is that American children, when properly socialized, learn generally

to inhibit certain classes of behavior, whereas Rotuman children learn that certain acts must be inhibited in certain situations and with certain people, but that it is quite all right to exhibit the same behavior with other people in other situations.

The entire socialization pattern in Rotuma is geared toward producing a child who is sensitive to models; it should therefore not be surprising that personal demonstration is the preferred educational technique. Since children are so frequently in the company of adults while the latter are working, they have a great many opportunities to observe how essential tasks are performed. Children's efforts at imitation are encouraged with subtle praise or non-verbal expressions of approval, unless, of course, they start to "show off." If a child experiences difficulty in performing an action, an adult might physically manipulate the child's body in order to correct an error or refine a movement, but explicit verbal instruction is rarely offered and children rarely ask for it. If they do, they are likely to be told to watch a skillful adult in action.

We might reflect for a moment on the way in which this approach to education contrasts with ours. For most middle-class Americans, education is virtually synonymous with verbal instruction. This is true not only with regard to formal education, but within the confines of the household as well. As soon as a child learns to speak and understand, by far the predominant technique for teaching him is through the use of language. I have heard middle-class parents frequently express the viewpoint that you really cannot teach a child anything important until after he learns to speak. Furthermore, our emphasis is heavily upon the denotative aspects of language, i.e., the literal meaning of the words used. Thus we urge a child who relies upon expressive cues to verbalize his message, even if it is otherwise perfectly clear. As soon as the child is able, reading becomes a major source of knowledge. Reading permits the child to educate himself, and this perhaps is the ultimate educational goal in our society. At the same time, reading depersonalizes the educational process, and places an even more pronounced emphasis on the denotative aspects of language.

This difference in educational strategies is clearly related to the different functional requirements of Rotuman and American society. In Rotuma, the essential tasks a person must learn are not technically complicated, and once learned need not be continually altered. They are tasks that can be learned *in situ*, directly from a competent performer, and the skills involved can be practiced and perfected long before they are needed. For this kind of learning, demonstration by a competent model is an optimal tactic. In our technologically complex society, on the other hand, learning occupational tasks often requires a great deal of foreknowledge. Job functions frequently involve a series of operations disconnected in time and place, and efficient planning and record-keeping are required to run the large-scale organizations involved. Change rather than continuity is the rule, requiring individu-

als skilled in the manipulation of verbal and other symbols, so that innovative plans can be formed and evaluated without resorting to costly trial-and-error procedures. For transmitting this kind of knowledge, teaching by personal demonstration is less adequate; reliance on a highly elaborated denotative code is a virtual necessity.

A PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEW OF ROTUMAN CHARACTER

The socialization practices that prevail in Rotuma produce individuals who share a number of psychological traits, which can be considered the basic attributes of Rotuman "character." The premise underlying this statement is that individuals who share similar social learning histories are likely to be predisposed to respond similarly to the same social stimuli. Other social scientists have employed such constructs as "basic personality structure" and "modal personality" to summarize such commonalities, with each concept embedded in a well-defined theoretical and methodological framework. Even under the best conditions, however, descriptions of the psychological attributes of a group of people can come perilously close to the stereotypes and glib generalizations carried home by the casual traveler. To do a truly adequate job, an investigator would have to conduct extensive observation of many individuals, carefully select for examination a wide array of variables, both individual and situational, and devise reliable operational measurements. It was outside the scope of my interests to do this in Rotuma. The best I can do, therefore, is to present my subjective interpretation of what Rotumans are like as people. The strongest defense I am able to make is that by the time I left the island, the way in which they did things seemed logical and orderly to me, and I was able to anticipate with a high degree of certainty how they would respond in various situations. In short, I felt as though I understood them. Undoubtedly other observers would arrive at somewhat different characterizations. If I am biased, it is in the direction of evaluating the Rotumans favorably, for I derived so much pleasure from being with them that I have been unable to shed my devotion to the island and its inhabitants in favor of scientific objectivity.

Perhaps the trait that is most central to Rotuman character might be called "acute social sensitivity." On the one hand this sensitivity is expressed in a careful reading of other people's feelings and a constant adjustment of one's own behavior to promote interpersonal harmony; on the other hand it is reflected in personal touchiness and susceptibility to being hurt. As a consequence, Rotumans are motivated to be cautious in any interpersonal encounter with persons they do not know well. Unlike some other South Sea islanders, the Rotumans do not greet strangers with broad smiles and overwhelming cordiality. Quite the contrary—they have been described by many visitors as having a sullen disposition. I think a more correct interpretation would be that they are highly restrained until they get

to know something about a person and his attitudes. By quietly observing someone for a while it is possible to get a feeling for what he is like; also by restricting one's own actions it is possible to avoid saying or doing something that might prove offensive. A sensitive person is vulnerable, hence he is unwise to lower his guard before he is sure that a person with whom he interacts is kindly disposed.

In encounters with strangers or persons of unknown disposition, Rotumans focus much more upon the expressive aspects of communication than do Europeans. Being primarily interested in whether a person is safe or not, they have learned that the best information upon which to make such a judgment is not the denotative content of messages, but upon such cues as tone of voice, facial expressions, subtle body movements, and the like. This is often confusing to the European administrator, who is focused upon what is being said rather than how it is said. He thinks a message has been understood for what he intended and is distraught when the response appears inconsistent or bizarre. He often fails to recognize the cues by which Rotumans communicate their dismay, anger, or hurt because he is only "tuned in" to the manifest content of their speech, which is limited to respectful prescriptions when one is talking to a person of higher rank. The European teachers on the island are confronted with the same problem when trying to communicate to Rotuman children within the classroom, unless they have learned to identify the system of expressive cues.

This is not to suggest that Rotumans are motivated to avoid interpersonal involvements; whereas we generally rely on internalized defense mechanisms to cope with interpersonal conflict, however, the Rotumans learn to rely on avoidance. For them the establishment of an enduring relationship depends upon continual assurances that each party will respect the other's integrity. When assurances are continually given, a relationship may develop into a profound commitment, but it still may be brittle; a single breach by one of the parties may void the previous assurances and shatter the relationship. Even marriages that have endured for many years without conflict often buckle under the weight of a single, apparently trivial, incident. My initial temptation when confronted with this evidence was to interpret it as an indication of repressed or suppressed hostility, bursting to the surface when an opportunity to express it occurs, but as I came to know the culture better I changed my mind. It is just that the cultural significance of a hostile confrontation, even a single one, is so great that it can alter the entire substance of a relationship. Once hurt, a person is reluctant to expose himself again, although if the offender formally apologizes, admitting his error and humbly asking forgiveness, the relationship may be re-established.

Given this background, it should not be surprising that the most powerfully expressed emotion is jealousy. It has its roots in the continual reassurance that is required to maintain a relationship; when a person who has been trusted appears to be favoring a commitment to someone else, not clearly

entitled to preferential treatment, Rotumans feel highly threatened. Violent outbursts are quite rare among these people, but when they do occur it is usually the result of jealousy.

One effect of this acute sensitivity is to limit explorations into new behaviors. Take, for example, learning a new language. If a person makes a mistake of pronunciation while speaking English or Fijian in front of others who can speak the language, they may latch onto the error and turn it into a riproaring joke. To illustrate: If a person mispronounces a word like "calendar," by saying something like "culundah," the group may begin to call him "culundah" in mockery. Even this form of ridicule is sufficiently painful to cause most Rotumans to say things in the new language only if they are sure of themselves. The use of mockery is sufficiently institutionalized to constitute a custom, called *sapa*. A mistake or absurdity may even become classical and be transmitted through generations, being applied to the descendants of the person who made the spectacular error. The people of one district are still called "biscuit planters" in reference to a woman who, shortly after the island was discovered by the Europeans, planted some biscuits obtained in trade in order to grow her own supply.

Paradoxically, the strong sense of social awareness that characterizes Rotumans also lies behind the almost unbelievable capacity of the islanders to adapt to new social environments. I can still recall the utter amazement I experienced in seeing people I had known on Rotuma behaving in urban contexts in Fiji. They seemed like social chameleons. Within a very short period of time they had learned a whole new code of conduct and appeared to be entirely different kinds of persons. This was not only true of Rotumans coming to Fiji, but also of the majority of educated Rotumans, who were equally adept at switching when they returned to their home island.

Thus the general sensitivity of the people acts on the one hand as a force for conservatism, and on the other as a force for culture change. Any effort by a person to act in a Europeanized fashion in the company of other Rotumans is apt to be interpreted as a form of showing off and becomes the object of ridicule. I was told by some informants that there was quite a bit of resistance to the introduction of tooth brushes into Rotuma because it was felt that people using such instruments were doing so in imitation of the Europeans. The same attribute, however, leads Rotumans to be very concerned with the way in which outsiders, including Europeans, view them. They do not want to be looked upon as primitive or backward and are therefore motivated as a group to make changes that will tangibly enhance their status in the eyes of others. The vigor with which they have engaged in the Government-sponsored co-operative movement is an outstanding example of such group change. Conservatism therefore is most closely exercised over individualized changes, or changes that might affect differential status between persons, whereas cultural change is encouraged in areas that affect all of Rotuma or a substantial group within it.

The resistance to status differentiation does not mean that Rotumans are not competitive with each other. [C]hildren and adolescents are highly competitive, and this motive carries on into maturity. Men strive to produce larger taro, yams, and other foodstuffs than their fellows, and women strive to make finer and more beautiful mats. What they do not do is brag about their achievements or demand recognition. Instead, to the extent that a person *is* outstanding, he is required to belittle his achievements. The excellent farmer suggests that his large crops are the result of unusually fertile soil and the excellent mat-maker asserts that her skill is no more than a gift from her teachers. Indeed, the consequence of conspicuously drawing attention to one's accomplishments would be to lose all the prestige gained by the achievement. In most areas of behavior the goal is to present oneself as competent but not outstanding. At social affairs, for instance, Rotuman women try to dress prettily, but scrupulously avoid gaudiness; a family may furnish their home comfortably, but never lavishly.

Rotuman character can therefore be characterized as being essentially "other-directed." They look for guidance from the people around them rather than from an internalized code or belief system. In the words of some theorists, they are shame-oriented rather than guilt-oriented. Indeed, the Rotumans appear to suffer very little from the pangs of conscience that make Westerners psychologically uncomfortable after having performed a socially disapproved act. This was most tangibly demonstrated to me on those Sundays when I attended the Catholic Church at Upu. On every occasion nearly the entire congregation took Communion, which presumably requires a clear conscience. This contrasts markedly with my observations in the United States, where only a small proportion of the congregation goes to the rail. In further confirmation, one of the priests, whose former parish was in New Zealand, remarked that Rotumans confessed less often than his New Zealand parishioners. They also confess to very few "trivial" sins. "When they do confess they're generally dealing with pretty big things," he remarked.

This is not to say that Rotumans exhibit no anxiety after having done something wrong. They sometimes do, but it appears that a fear of discovery lies behind it. The practical consequence of this kind of anxiety is to motivate violators to avoid blame, whereas the guilt-oriented person may feel compelled to "turn himself in" in order to alleviate the pangs of conscience. Also consistent with this distinction is a lack of motivation to inflict self-punishment to ease one's conscience, whereas guilt-oriented persons are frequently driven to do so. If a Rotuman does confess to a misdeed it is likely to be because he feels that discovery is imminent, or because he is having such bad "luck" that he feels the consequences have already been realized. Under either circumstance confession is a prelude to a request for forgiveness, which is the major technique for mitigating undesirable pragmatic consequences of an act.

The roots of this external control orientation can be traced to the way in which Rotuman parents respond to the social transgressions of their children. Since the parents themselves are not primarily concerned with "good" or "bad" acts in an abstract moral sense, but with the consequences of their children's behavior, punishment, as previously noted, is ordinarily inflicted well after the offense has been committed. The children therefore learn to associate punishment more with the punishing agent than with the act itself, and come to feel more anxiety about avoiding potentially punishing agents than about prohibited acts. Consistent with this is the lack of anxiety Rotumans express with regard to impulse control. For them the practical problem is seeking an appropriate situation in which to express their impulses rather than striving to suppress them.

For the sake of contrast, let us reflect on the treatment of auto-erotic stimulation among middle-class Americans and Rotumans. Unless I am mistaken, the American pattern is for parents to scold or punish a child as soon as they discover a child masturbating. They make such comments as, "Don't do that, it's bad (or disgusting, or sinful)," and demand of the child explicit expressions of regret. As a result the child is conditioned to be anxious and feel guilty in response to his own sexual arousals. The socialization goal implicit in this pattern is the establishment of an internally cued, generalized inhibition. The problems that arise from this type of training have to do with over-bearing guilt over unexpressed impulses, the difficulty of un-learning inhibitions at the proper time (i.e., when one marries), and the socially indiscriminate expression of impulses when controls fail. Rotuman parents, true to the situational ethic, are permissive of their children's auto-erotic activity as long as it remains out of public view. If a child should continue in the presence of visitors, however, he is likely to be reprimanded with such comments as, "Shame on you, doing that in front of everyone." With this training the child does not come to feel anxious about sexual arousal *per se*, but only about the potential consequences of sexual behavior. Thus unmarried adolescent girls fear pregnancy for its social consequences, and are reluctant to become engaged in affairs they feel may become public knowledge, but they do not appear to experience guilt over sexual involvement once these matters are settled. The main problem inherent in this socialization approach is that when external sources of control are removed (e.g., as when a girl is left alone with a seductive male), internal restraints are insufficient to suppress an act that one or both parties would rationally prefer to avoid.

The Rotumans also rely upon shame controls to restrain physical aggression within the community. The large majority of Rotumans will do almost anything to avoid a fight, although a few of the young men are known to be "hot headed" and are easily provoked. Jealousy and frustration during competitive events were the chief motivations behind the few incidents that occurred during my stay on the island, but most of them were quickly

stopped by mediators. On a few occasions liquor was involved, but even under the influence of alcohol most Rotumans are strikingly unaggressive. The low tone of physical aggressiveness can be traced to the social cohesiveness of the community on the one hand and to the child-rearing pattern on the other. Parents use very little corporal punishment and are rarely severe when using it. Children are encouraged to avoid physical confrontations and are punished for fighting, particularly with neighbors, as this would create strain on inter-familial relations. From a social learning point of view, therefore, Rotuman children are presented with very few aggressive models and are not reinforced when they act aggressively.

In contrast, verbal aggression, particularly in the form of gossip, is prevalent. The acid tongues of the old women are legendary, and it is said (usually by men) that most of the trouble on Rotuma "starts over the weaving of mats," when the women get together. That people in such a community are quick to criticize one another's shortcomings should not be very surprising. Since an individual cannot enhance his own status by the display of achievement, it is tempting to find fault with others as a way of improving one's own status relative to theirs. Gossip is nevertheless an important form of social control, and because Rotumans are so sensitive it is indeed very effective in limiting deviation.

Although many Rotumans revealed what I felt to be a remarkable insight into their own individual personalities, they did not appear to be preoccupied with the processes of self-analysis and thoughtful contemplation. Until I returned to America I was unaware of just how much time and energy we devote to the analysis of our own and other people's psyche, and more generally, to a consideration of ideological concerns. It is as if we each walk around with a highly developed computer program in our heads to process the incredibly complex messages we are continually being bombarded with; in order to keep the machine running efficiently the "program" must be under constant scrutiny and continual readjustment. Our great reliance on verbalization during the socialization process provides the technical means for developing the elaborate programs we build into our children. In Rotuma there is less need for such elaborate programming. The mastery that most of the islanders come to exercise over their somewhat limited and benign environment does not require a great deal of analytical thought, or complicated and innovative planning. Life in Rotuma is not without hardship, but the customary techniques of problem solving are both universally available and efficient. This is not to imply that every act is a matter of habit or dictated by custom, or that behavior is mechanical. Rather, I am suggesting that since the complexity of problems faced by the people in Rotuma is less great, and their solvability more assured than the problems faced by urbanized peoples, complex analytical thinking is only rarely strategically required. I also do not mean to imply that Rotumans are incapable of abstract or contemplative thought—only that it is not a require-

ment for success within their cultural system nor is it selectively reinforced for any other reason.

The Rotuman attitude toward religion is indicative of this difference in style. Although many islanders have learned the dogma of their respective churches, they rarely become embroiled in genuine ideological discussions or arguments. Their commitment to a particular church, which may indeed be very strong in the sense that ritual is scrupulously followed, is not primarily a matter of ideological conviction. It is in the nature of an interpersonal commitment to the leaders of the church, particularly to the priests and ministers, and is subject to the same principles as any other human relationship. If church leaders are overly harsh or otherwise do things that members of the congregation construe as a breach, they may cease to practice their religion. Likewise, if other interpersonal commitments taking priority require a person to change his religion, he will readily do so. It is common practice for one partner in a mixed marriage to change to the religion of the other, with the change dependent upon whose home or village they decide to reside in. I was startled at first to find that a person who had been a model Catholic throughout his youth, upon marriage converted and became a model Wesleyan within a remarkably short time.

One of the interesting ramifications of the Rotuman socialization process is that many of the psychological conflicts engendered by our middle-class pattern are eliminated. Thus we are continually confronted with the problem of reconciling our motives and beliefs with the demands of social life. We value honesty, but how honest can one be and still get along adequately? Many young children insist that it is wrong even to tell a "white lie"—one calculated to avoid an insult or injury—but they soon learn that absolute honesty is incongruent with viable social relations. A sense of guilt, however, tends to persist. The Rotumans do not have this problem. The question of "lying" is irrelevant; it is right and proper to say appropriate things irrespective of the "truth" of the statement. Since we focus on intent, we hold a person responsible for his words as well as his deeds, and if as children we learn our cultural lesson well, we come to hold ourselves responsible for our thoughts, too. At the ultimate extreme, we even assume responsibility for our emotions! We experience guilt and anxiety when we *feel* hostile or sexually aroused, or when we fail to *feel* love for our children, grief for a deceased relative, or compassion for someone who is suffering. We surely stretch the logical extremes of rationality with such dicta as, "A mother *should* love her child." Even within our own cultural framework this is an absurdity *par excellence*. Emotions are responses; they cannot be turned on and off like a water tap. They cannot be controlled by intent. One does not always feel love for anyone. In any interpersonal relationship emotions constantly shift. Sometimes we may feel love, at other times anger or disgust, jealousy or resentment, and much of the time, no emotion at all. The notion that feelings can be made subservient to intent is as irrational

as the most bizarre primitive customs recorded in the anthropological literature. It is logical only from the standpoint that it is consistent with our cultural focus. We endeavor to control our emotions as we try to control everything else. If one wants to confirm for oneself the problems this creates, all one has to do is reflect upon the response of Americans to funerals. Even if the deceased meant nothing to us we do our best to act sad because that's the way we're *supposed* to feel. For Rotumans this quandary is nonexistent. Feelings belong to the private world of the individual. A person is held no more responsible for his emotions than he is for his biochemical processes (which, of course, lie behind emotion). It is how one *acts* that counts. When a Rotuman mother acknowledges that she should love (*hanisi*) her child she is referring to affectionate, indulgent *behavior*. You can dislike someone and still have *hanisi* for him.

The behavior of Rotumans at funerals fascinated me at first. I saw people on their way to a house where the body was lying in state, and they appeared as casual and unconcerned as if going to a wedding. They were joking and engaging in light banter. Then, upon entering the house and being confronted with the corpse surrounded by his immediate bereaving family, they would burst into a fit of unrestrained crying, or even wailing, that seemed to come from the depths of their inner beings. After engaging in this display of emotional behavior for a half an hour or so, they would emerge and within a few minutes be back with their friends, again joking and otherwise showing no evidence of sadness. My first response was like that of many other Occidentals—the emotion can't be real; they have got to be putting it on. People aren't happy one moment and agonizingly sad the next, then just as happy a few moments later. But the more I thought about it the more I came to see our emotional style as strange. There is no reason why emotions should persist when the stimuli that trigger them are removed. Again, our great concern for internal consistency leads us to think it natural that such emotions as grief should persist for some time. Upon reflection, however, the Rotuman response began to appear more "natural." Their emotions were congruent with the social circumstances in which they were behaving; ours often are not. I think what happens is that these people do not feel compelled to assume an emotional state, but that they genuinely respond to the sight of the deceased and the bereaved with grief, which they freely express. When removed from this stimulus, they begin to feel such other emotions as the pleasure of being with friends, which they also freely express. When finally I was able to shed the compulsion to feel things, I experienced an enormous sense of relief and freedom—freedom from "the tyranny of the should."

Thus Rotumans did not appear to experience all those inner conflicts we associate with neurosis, but this does not mean they are free from emotional pain. It is just that the locus of torment is different. For a people as sensitive as they are, to be shamed is agonizing, and even the threat of shame can

make an individual feel extremely uncomfortable. Furthermore, the Rotuman cultural option provides little insulation from external hurt, for shaming depends on what others do, whereas we are skilled at developing defenses against the outside world; instead, we are our own most ardent tormentors.

The sense of mastery that most Rotumans display within their familiar environment is reflected in an absence of a sense of impending danger. For me, at least, watching a three-year-old child playing with a razor-sharp machete is an anxiety-producing experience. Yet it is a common sight in Rotuman villages and adults usually do not interfere if the child appears to be handling the instrument satisfactorily. Eight- and nine-year-old children are permitted to climb forty-foot coconut trees, which they do with ease; they also scale precipitous cliffs like mountain goats and swim in the deep sea like fishes, all without parental disapproval. Accidents do occur, of course, but they are far less frequent than one would suspect. It seems that lack of punishment for experimental behavior leads to the development of a sense of mastery and self-confidence. I came to the conclusion that American children would probably injure themselves more frequently doing these same things precisely because we communicate our own anxiety to the child and weaken his confidence in his own physical dexterity. Whereas the Rotuman parent is apt to respond to a near accident with a joke, an American parent is likely to call the child's attention to the terrible consequences that would have resulted had an accident actually occurred, thereby increasing his anxiety the next time he attempts to perform the same or a similar feat.

In marked contrast to the self-confidence displayed by Rotumans in familiar circumstances, however, is the apprehension they show when confronted with an unfamiliar challenge. In school, each new task tends to provoke anxiety, and if it is not readily mastered, children quickly stop trying. This reaction to frustration is indicative of a strong passivity streak, a characteristic that some European administrators have interpreted as either laziness or willful stubbornness. Such criticisms have usually followed attempts to pressure the people to do things in an unaccustomed way, but both interpretations are misleading. Rotumans are neither lazy nor stubborn when confronting problems in a familiar context, or in new circumstances in which they have a reasonable expectation of success. Indeed, they delight in displaying their competence in tasks they can perform well. When preparing a feast they work extremely diligently, and at a pace most Europeans would find exhausting. Under such circumstances they may put in extremely long hours, working around the clock. On the other hand, Rotumans do not feel *compelled* to work in order to validate their feelings of self-worth.

I think this contrast with American middle-class character can be neatly related to the difference in socialization techniques. Thus, middle-class

American parents tend to offer rewards to their children on a contingent basis—the more a child performs to his parents' satisfaction the more likely he is to be rewarded. If he fails to perform, or is inactive, rewards are diminished. He may even be punished. This tends to produce individuals who are unhappy unless they are active. Not only do we come to feel it important to work to reassure ourselves of our worth, we also feel compelled to fill our leisure time with activity in order to avoid depression. Rotuman parents, in contrast, reward children on a non-contingent basis. A child does not have to perform to be indulged, and the amount of increased reward for an outstanding performance is usually not very much. Furthermore, by being passive he reduces the possibility of offending others. Rotuman parents therefore often directly encourage their children to be passive, just as middle-class American parents do what they can to stimulate their children to action—almost any kind of action.

This contrast is clearly reflected in our respective theories of illness. Rotuman parents blame over-activity as the cause of many childhood diseases and have strongly opposed their children's participation in such vigorous sports as rugby and soccer, claiming it increases their chances of contracting tuberculosis. They also try to keep children from engaging in hard physical work for the same reason. When an individual becomes ill, he is encouraged to rest as long as possible. We reverse this prescription. Vigorous exercise is seen as the path to health, and we encourage a sick person to resume his normal activities as soon as possible.

For Rotumans, therefore, work and achievement are valued, but not because of the satisfactions provided by living up to a self-imposed standard of excellence (as is inherent in the concept of *achievement motive*). They are valued as paths to public approval. The payoff is praise or recognition, rather than a feeling of self-satisfaction. In other words, it would seem that Rotumans are motivated to optimal performance by a need for approval rather than a need for achievement. As a motivating force, the need for approval is somewhat offset, however, by a fear of disapproval, which acts as an inhibiting force in uncertain situations. This would appear to explain why Rotuman children stop trying when they encounter problems in schoolwork that they cannot readily master. From their point of view it is better not to try, and hence not to become vulnerable, than it is to try and fail. It also explains why adults prefer a passive strategy when confronted with a new situation. Rather than try out random forms of behavior by trial-and-error to discover which are acceptable and which are not, thereby risking disapproval, they prefer to wait and watch until they feel they have caught on to the game. They then proceed cautiously, encouraged by signs of acceptance and approval, discouraged and motivated to disengage by criticism or disapproval. Thus, although industriousness has its rewards, work is regarded as a necessary evil to the Rotumans—something one must do to survive. It is also a source of approval, but not a good in and of itself.

As far as values are concerned, inactivity is considered a more desirable condition than activity. A favorite way of spending leisure time is to "rest," a pastime very much in evidence on ceremonial occasions. (And remember, this is a pre-television society!) The majority of people at a wedding, for example, spend the entire day sitting in one place. They eat, talk with friends, eat some more, talk some more, and so on throughout the day. There is no felt need to organize activities or to find ways to keep the guests busy. To feed one's guests to satiation without their having to work is a satisfactory formula for a successful party.

The ability to remain inactive and unagitated is an important ingredient of a related attribute—patience. This is best illustrated by an example. One of my first encounters with Rotumans was in a back yard in Suva. The family I was visiting lived in a duplex apartment, and their neighbors owned a large dog. Several young men and women had gathered together and were playing guitars and singing Rotuman songs that I was recording, much to their pleasure. In the middle of a tune the dog began to bark. The musicians stopped playing and I was asked to shut off the recorder. The dog continued to bark for nearly ten minutes without anyone getting angry or even showing much annoyance. A few jokes were made, but that was all. No one made any effort either to pacify the animal or to threaten him. When he finally stopped of his own accord, the musicians began playing again and the recording session resumed.

To the educated Occidental, life on Rotuma might seem monotonous and dull, and there is no question that it lacks variety in comparison with an American or European city. Nevertheless, when one is involved in such a culture as this, life can be rich and fulfilling. People have time to enjoy fully the pleasures that are available; they come to care, often quite ardently, about the events that do take place—the feasts, the marriages, a visit from a relative in Fiji, or even a sojourn to the other side of the island. Leisure time is plentiful and is spent in the company of comrades and relatives. The payoff for a successful life is the sense of contentment that comes from being a member of a community in which one enjoys full acceptance.

SUMMARY

Rotumans are a pragmatic people whose major concern is the maintenance of harmonious social relations. They are extremely sensitive to social approval and disapproval, and their behavior can best be understood as an attempt to maximize the former and minimize the latter. In those circumstances in which mastery is within reach and approval is expected, they display a remarkable competence; in other circumstances, in which success is doubtful and disapproval expected, they tend to disengage themselves.