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7 *Money, Sovereignty and Moral Authority on Rotuma*

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INTRODUCTION

Inspired by Firth's seminal article on 'Extraterritoriality and the Tikopia Chiefs' (Firth, 1969), which documents the response of the Tikopia to a political crisis in 1966, this essay explores changes in leadership and moral authority on the island of Rotuma. Tikopia and Rotuma have much in common, as well as some significant differences. By explicitly comparing Firth's analysis of events on Tikopia with historical changes on Rotuma, I hope to illuminate some of the key factors that have led to the retention or demise of the moral authority of chiefs in Polynesian cultures as they were incorporated into more encompassing political entities.

The political crisis Firth examines in his paper concerns the demand by the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, into which Tikopia had been incorporated, that Tikopia residents in Nukufero pay taxes to the Russell Islands Council. For at least fifteen years before the crisis Tikopia had been going overseas to seek wage employment to earn cash and relieve pressure on local resources. Emigration took place with the express approval of the chiefs. Some of those who left settled in Nukufero, in the Russell Islands, on land granted by Levers Pacific Plantations. Most of the approximately 200 settlers on this land worked on adjacent plantations.

The Tikopia in Nukufero vigorously resisted the demand that taxes be paid to the Russell Islands Council. They argued that the chiefs had forbidden them to pay, and had instructed them to contribute instead to the Tikopia Development Fund. When the Protectorate Government pronounced this alternative unacceptable, the chiefs objected and threatened to recall all Tikopia abroad to return to their home island. As Firth pointed out, the confrontation posed some important questions concerning the adaptation of traditional institutions to modern conditions. It also raised the question

of where lies sovereignty over the Tikopia people, both at home and abroad.

At the center of Firth's analysis is the moral authority of Tikopia chiefs. Despite the ascendance of new authority figures such as school teachers, he writes,

the chiefs were still the acknowledged representatives of the Tikopia people in all internal public affairs and in political relations with external powers. Tikopia chiefs, installed in office by act of the people in general and not just of those of their own clan, had authority which extended over the whole community. (Firth, 1969: 356)

At the time of Firth's 1966 visit the Tikopia still honored the ideology of chiefly taboos, including avoidance of bodily contact and making loud noises in a chief's presence. Although some changes had taken place – chiefs generally had abandoned traditional pandanus and bark-cloth attire in favor of calico kilts, and at times performed work previously considered inappropriate to their status – the *ariki* were objects of special respect and credited with special powers (*mana*). Even Tikopia leaders abroad acknowledged that their authority derived from the chiefs, although for the most part they operated without reference to the chiefs.

Firth attributes such attitudes to the Tikopia idea that chiefs represent the Tikopia community as a whole. They stand for its solidarity and symbolize the values that characterize the Tikopia way of life. In the face of exposure to a dominating European culture, the chiefs remained unified and 'were a rallying point for Tikopia sentiment, encapsulating Tikopia belief in themselves and the values of their culture' (Firth, 1969: 358). This does not mean, Firth is careful to point out, that the chiefs were autocrats whose orders were automatically obeyed. In the last resort, he writes, 'both the chiefs and the people realized that the exercise of the chiefs' authority was a matter of issue, timing and circumstance, based upon an implicit concession by the people of the right of the chiefs to take decisions' (Firth, 1969: 360; see also Firth, 1949). Nevertheless, people rarely challenged a chief's decision, and politically the legitimacy of the chiefs was unquestioned.

The confrontation concerning taxes stemmed from differing views concerning sovereignty. While the Protectorate Government was prepared to accept the sovereignty of the chiefs over all Tikopia in cultural matters, they would not accept their sovereignty in political and fiscal matters. In this instance the Government specifically

challenged the rights of the chiefs to exercise dominion over taxes levied upon overseas Tikopia. It was basing its case, Firth observed, on a conception of sovereignty that gave precedence to geographical as opposed to cultural units. The chiefs, however, argued that they had the right to exercise authority (including the right to taxation) over all Tikopia, wherever they might reside, and looked askance at allowing their people to acknowledge any system of controls based on the recognition of local, territorial ties.

What is striking about the Tikopia case is the degree to which the Tikopia chiefs retained their moral authority, and have continued to retain it despite missionization, commercialization of the economy, and incorporation into a more comprehensive political unit (Feinberg, personal communication). As Firth correctly calls to our attention, this was not characteristic of other Polynesian societies. It certainly was not the case in Rotuma, to which I now turn.

CHIEFTAINSHIP AND MORAL AUTHORITY IN ROTUMA

Rotuma and Tikopia Compared

Rotuma has much in common with Tikopia. Both are small volcanic islands, quite isolated from their neighbors. Both are Polynesian cultures located to the west of Polynesia proper. Both were absorbed into the British colonial system and were administratively subordinated to a larger, culturally distinct, island group: Tikopia to the Solomon Islands, Rotuma to Fiji. Both have experienced extensive outmigration that has led to enclaves within the dominant island group. Both have systems of titled chieftainship based on notions of *mana* derived from ancestral gods on the one hand, and active support of the people on the other. In both cultures chiefs symbolically embody the polity that they represent. However, there are significant differences in geography, history and culture between the two islands that have profoundly influenced their differential responses to Western intrusion.

Although Rotuma is indeed a small island when compared with the larger islands of Fiji or the Solomons, it is ten times as large as Tikopia and supports twice the population.¹ Size and population may be significant factors insofar as they allowed for greater political differentiation. Thus Rotuma is divided into seven districts, Tikopia only two. Perhaps more important, Tikopia chiefs represent patrilineal clans that cross-cut districts, whereas Rotuman chiefs represent

districts. Rotuma thus gives precedence to territoriality in chieftainship, Tikopia to kinship. Furthermore, Rotumans select chiefs from a broad pool of adult contenders within ambilateral kin groups, following the Samoan model, whereas succession to Tikopian titles is more restricted (Firth, 1963 [1936], 1960; for a discussion of the implications of such a contrast see Howard, 1966).

Rotuma was also exposed at a much earlier time, and far more intensely, to European intrusion. During the first half of the nineteenth century, Rotuma was a favored stopping place for whalers to replenish their stores, and was plagued by scores of renegade sailors. Whereas conversion to Christianity did not occur on Tikopia until well into the twentieth century, missionization began in 1839 on Rotuma and was triumphant well before the turn of the century. Commercialization of the Rotuman economy occurred much earlier and was more complete. Traders were well entrenched on Rotuma in the 1870s, exporting coconut oil and copra. The colonial presence has also been much greater in Rotuma. European administrators were resident on the island from 1879 through World War II. Correspondingly, taxes were an issue much earlier on Rotuma than in Tikopia. In addition, Western education has had more time to take hold and has generated a larger base of educated elite. Finally, all of these factors have contributed to a longer and more intense history of outmigration. Approximately three-quarters of the ethnic Rotuman population now live off-island. The proportion of Tikopia off-island is smaller but growing.

The Decline of Chiefly Authority in Rotuma

The moral authority of chiefs in Rotuma was based, as in Tikopia, on *mana* derived from their ancestors and the gods. Rotumans believed that if a chief remained in favor with ancestral spirits and the gods, the land and the people would prosper. If a chief lost his *mana*, the people would suffer. It was therefore important that the chiefs perform proper ceremonies, behave with dignity and keep on good terms with the gods. Their moral authority had a divine basis, and was reinforced by the prosperity of the people. If the people suffered, even though from natural disasters such as hurricanes or droughts, then the moral authority of the chief was diminished. Furthermore, according to legends, when chiefs were perceived as placing excessive burdens on their people, rebellion was justified (Howard, 1986).

Rotuma had a problem uniting as a single polity, however. Each district had its own paramount chief, and the districts operated essentially as autonomous units. Competition between the districts

periodically led to warfare and variable status hierarchies among the chiefs, but not to territorial conquest. The Rotuman solution to the problem of uniting the entire island was to establish the offices of *mua* and *sau*, who were responsible for maintaining the ritual cycle and for propitiating the high god Tagaroa. At the end of each ritual cycle the success or failure of these office-holders in bringing prosperity was assessed, and they were either continued in office or were replaced. The office of *sau*, at least, was rotated among the districts (Howard, 1985).²

The moral authority of chiefs, as well as that of the *sau* and *mua*, came under assault from the English Wesleyan and French Catholic missionaries who came to Rotuma during the mid-nineteenth century. They denied the authenticity of Rotuman gods and relegated ancestral spirits to the status of 'devils'. They ridiculed the positions of *sau* and *mua* and demanded an end to the 'pagan' rituals that accompanied these high offices. When chiefs, along with everyone else, converted to Christianity, they effectively severed their ties with their ancestral spirits and other Rotuman gods, and so lost the traditional basis of their moral authority. As a substitute, the missionaries supported the chiefs as long as they conformed to the Church's teachings, but it soon became clear that it was the missionaries, and *not* the chiefs, who controlled communication with the Christian God. Moral authority now came from this new God, but it came only indirectly through white missionaries.

In some ways the missionaries encouraged the chiefs to take more prerogatives than they were entitled to in earlier times. For example, the missionaries suggested that the chiefs confiscate land from people under certain circumstances; but the chiefs wisely refused, knowing that the people would not tolerate such action. Instead, the missionaries established a system of fines for various offenses against the new religion, including non-attendance at church, and the chiefs were given a percentage of the income. But on the whole, with the acceptance of the missionaries and Christianity, the chiefs found themselves a step removed from the divine source of their authority.

With cession and the institution of colonial administration, the power of the chiefs was further reduced. At first the British commissioners promised to reinforce the authority of the chiefs by passing laws to punish disobedience. They expected Rotuman chiefs to act in the same authoritative manner as Fijian chiefs, and intended to rule Rotuma indirectly through the chiefs. From reading accounts of the time, one gains the impression that the Rotuman chiefs were pleased with this possibility. In fact they may have ceded Rotuma to Great

Britain in part, at least, because they thought the backing of the British Crown would enhance their authority. But they miscalculated. The resident commissioners expected the chiefs to act with authority, but they did not grant them the power to do so. Accounts of the time also suggest that the people were often unhappy with the chiefs, and did not want their power increased (*Outward Letters*, 1881-82).

Throughout the colonial period the resident commissioners and later, district officers, were in firm control.³ A Council composed of the seven district chiefs was set up to advise these government officials, but it had no policy-making or administrative powers of its own. The chiefs were basically powerless. They were reduced to the position of intermediaries between the commissioners or district officers and the people in their districts. In many instances commissioners or district officers removed chiefs who displeased them and appointed men of their own choosing. It is a tribute to many of the chiefs who served during that period that they fulfilled their duties with great skill and dignity despite the difficulties of the role, and are remembered with respect and affection by their people.

The Rise of a New Elite

Schools were established by missionaries and colonial officials, and, while most Rotuman children during the colonial period did not go beyond primary level, some went on to become medical officers, teachers, ministers, officials within the government bureaucracy, and the like. Those who made it through often excelled, giving Rotumans a well-deserved reputation for intelligence and responsibility. A few of these men and women returned to Rotuma for service, and exercised their leadership abilities. One of the early returnees was an assistant medical officer who took the high title of Maraf in the 1930s, but he resigned as chief of his district because the demands of his job were too great. This may have been a problem for others who returned as well, for very few educated men and women have served as chiefs. Perhaps part of the problem was that those who returned usually served in Rotuma for a few years, then left, whereas chiefs are supposed to serve for a lifetime.

Despite the fact that most chiefs in the past lacked formal education, they were generally quite knowledgeable about Rotuman custom, so they were able to perform their ceremonial functions competently. This was an important source of respect.

A few of the educated elite returned to Rotuma to play very significant leadership roles, but not as chiefs. Josefa Rigamoto and Fred Ieli are exemplary. Josefa Rigamoto distinguished himself as a

leader in the army during World War II in the Solomon Islands. After the war, in 1945, he became the first Rotuman to serve as District Officer on the island. He served for more than four years, and was well respected by the European colonial administrators, the Fijian leadership, and the Rotuman people. While his authority was based in the structure of the colonial government, he was known as a fair and honest man. Not everyone liked what he did on each occasion, but few doubted his desire to serve the Rotuman people. Because of Rigamoto's reputation for wise and impartial leadership, he was able to do much for the island.

Fred Ieli was also a strong leader and governed Rotuma as District Officer with a stern hand. He served several terms as District Officer from 1949 to the early 1960s. Ieli was knowledgeable concerning Rotuman custom and insisted that ceremonies and other events be performed correctly. He was District Officer in 1959–60 during my first visit to Rotuma. I got the feeling that people were somewhat afraid of him – he had a strong temper – but they respected him and acknowledged that he did his best to help the Rotuman people. Like Rigamoto, he set an example in the ways he dressed and acted, and thus enhanced the moral basis of his authority.

It is noteworthy that neither of these men, nor a number of other strong Rotuman leaders during this colonial era, held titles or aspired to chieftainship. Many of them were eligible to take titles, but did not. Perhaps they saw chieftainship as too limited a basis for being a modern leader—a leader who could represent the interests of all Rotumans, not just those from one district or another. Perhaps they recognized the lack of esteem in which the chiefs were held by the European-controlled colonial government. Take, for example, William Eason's remarks about leadership on Rotuma in his book *A Short History of Rotuma*, published in 1951.

Although the Rotumans themselves have not made any request for further change in administration since 1945, there is need for internal changes in personnel, if we are to have the drive and the leadership necessary to raise the people up to modern standards. Younger, more active and better educated men are needed to guide and lead the people to-day in their districts, and to represent them in the Council of Chiefs — the only men, according to custom, from whom the selection may be made are very limited not only in number but often in intelligence and education. They are generally elderly, with no elasticity of mind to view innovations in accordance with changing conditions. The Council at present is in

fact little more than a body of 'yes men' to an active and dominating Chairman. (Eason, 1951: 111)

Eason's views were shared by J.W. Sykes, whose report to the Colonial Secretary in 1948 recommended abolishing the Council of Chiefs and replacing it with an elected council (Sykes, 1948). Sykes argued that the chiefs were impeding progress and development, and his recommendations might have been put into effect were it not for the resistance of H.S. Evans, who was District Officer (DO) on Rotuma from 1949 to 1952. Evans preferred to have chiefs who would only advise the DO and 'persuade their people to what is agreed to be good for them' (Evans, 1951).

Thus during the colonial period chieftainship was under considerable stress. There were few advantages to being a chief beyond ceremonial deference on ritual occasions and, in some cases, larger landholdings attached to titles. Economically the burdens placed on chiefs could be severe. This was particularly true in the ceremonial domain, where chiefs were expected to contribute disproportionately to events such as weddings and funerals. In prior times, when gift exchanges were confined to mats and perishable foodstuffs, this presented few problems. Each chief acted as a distributive agent for his group, the prestige of his district being dependent, in part, on his generosity. His standard of living was not affected by such ceremonial exchanges, but, with the intrusion of a market economy, chiefly largesse sometimes required substantial expenditures of money.

In response to such circumstances Rotuman chiefs came to manifest considerable ambivalence with regard to customary protocol. On the one hand they enjoyed the overt respect shown them on ceremonial occasions, on the other they came to resent increased burdens. In many respects they showed less interest in maintaining Rotuman custom than did the educated elite, seeking instead to improve their own economic well-being. For example, chiefs argued for, and eventually won, a concession to substitute cash payments for the tradition of honorific annual food presentations. Ironically the chiefs were opposed in this change by several of the educated elite, who predicted that if such ceremonies were eliminated chiefs would lose the respect of their people. Equally telling, from a symbolic point of view, was the fact that during my first visit to Rotuma (1959-60) chiefs were rather haphazard about their dress, often wearing trousers instead of the traditional lavalava, while many of the more educated men wore well-tailored lavalava. The indifference of Rotuman chiefs to traditional dress at the time is in marked contrast to the concern

of Tikopia chiefs described by Firth during the tax crisis of 1966 (Firth, 1969: 366).

I have argued elsewhere (Howard, 1963) that the non-titled leaders were more conservative than the chiefs, in part because they learned to objectify, and abstractly value, Rotuman culture. Whereas the chiefs' behavior appeared to be guided by practical considerations associated with daily life, many of the emergent elite chose to honor Rotuman customs out of awareness of their systemic implications. In other words, they became true ideologues in relation to Rotuman culture.⁴ But they also had learned from their experience within Western culture that Rotumans had much to gain by selective accommodation. To paraphrase the statements of one such leader:

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

The man who made this statement was Wilson Inia, a school teacher who provided Rotumans with an alternative model of leadership, one based on a syncretic form of moral authority. By taking a close look at Inia's rise to prominence we can gain some additional insights into the demise of chiefly authority on Rotuma.

WILSON INIA AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF LEADERSHIP

Wilson Inia was born on 2 October 1908 in the village of Motusa, shortly after his parents had returned from Papua New Guinea, where they served as Methodist missionaries. Fortunately, Wilson was in Fiji with his parents when a measles epidemic struck Rotuma in 1911, killing nearly a quarter of the population, including most of the young children on the island. At the age of six he was sent to the Jubilee School in Suva, but transferred to a Marist Brothers School while still in the first grade. He stayed in this school until 1920, when he was 12 years old, and had completed the fifth grade.

Inia remembered this as an unhappy time and felt he had not been treated well. Although his father sent him money, it was taken by the family he stayed with, presumably to defray the expenses of keeping

him. He told of having only two shirts and one pair of pants. Fortunately, he joked, the shirts were long enough to wear without pants when his pants were being laundered. In his later years he sometimes scoffed at people who had sufficient clothing and wanted more.

Following completion of his studies at the Marist School he returned to Rotuma and remained with his family for two years. During this time he learned basic subsistence skills, including farming, fishing and cutting copra. He also attended the missionary school at Tia, where Rotuman children learned to read and write in conjunction with Bible studies. He went back to Fiji in 1922 to attend Davuilevu Boys' School, where he learned mathematics and bookkeeping, along with carpentry, plumbing, and agriculture.

After completing the courses at the Boys' School he went on to receive teacher's training at Davuilevu. The program at that time was mostly for missionaries. The principal of the Teachers' Training Institution was the Rev. C. O. Lelean, and he had a profound impact on the young scholar. He presented Wilson with a set of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, complete with wooden case for holding the books. The case and encyclopaedia still exist, occupying a place of honour in the home of Wilson's widow, Elisapeti Inia, in Savlei, Rotuma. The covers of the volumes have been eaten away by insects and the books are falling apart, but it is obvious they were well used.

At the age of 16 Inia completed teacher's training and was assigned to teach at Vuli Levu School, where he taught men much older than himself, many of them married. He passed the Grade III Teacher's Certificate Examinations in methods, arithmetic, vernacular Fijian, geography, history, hygiene, drawing, English, sewing and agriculture, all in his first attempt. The following year he began teaching at Davuilevu Boys' School. Soon after he became involved in the Boy Scouts. In 1927, at the age of 18, he was notified that he possessed all the qualifications required to be a scoutmaster, and so began an active career in that capacity. Some years later he attended a Scout jamboree in New Zealand.

He also began a long career as a lay preacher at the age of 18, and was sent to preach (in English) at Dilkusha, an Indian church-run orphanage. He admitted to being quite nervous about giving his first sermon because Lelean was present, but his mentor told him to forget about his presence and to pray to the Holy Spirit. Whatever inhibitions Inia may have had initially were soon overcome, and he developed into a brilliant orator, a skill which served him well in the Fiji Legislature later in his career.

In 1931 he left Davuilevu Boys' School and accepted the position

of Teacher's Training Tutor at the Institution. The following year he passed the exam for a second level teaching certificate. Inia stayed at Davuilevu Teachers' Training Institution for 15 years, tutoring in English, mathematics and hygiene. During this period he went on a deputation as Methodist preacher to Australia for two years (1938-39), preaching mostly to white Australians in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Tasmania, and attended, as Fiji representative, a World Meeting of the International Missionary Council in Madras, India (1938). He also met his future wife, Elisapeti, who attended Davuilevu Teachers' Training College for two years and emerged as Rotuma's first qualified female teacher. Wilson and Elisapeti, who was 17 years younger than he, were married on 18 March 1947, shortly before he assumed the position of Headmaster at Richmond School on the island of Kadavu. He was the first non-European to serve in that post. In 1947 he was also appointed Justice of the Peace for the Southern District, Colony of Fiji, and a member of the Methodist Synod of Fiji.

Inia did not have many opportunities to visit Rotuma during this period, but in 1942 he took sick leave and returned to his home island, where he assisted in upgrading the schools. Furthermore, he and Elisapeti were married on Rotuma, which reinforced his sentimental ties there.

In 1953 Wilson and Elisapeti went back to Rotuma on furlough. The District Officer, Fred Ieli, and the chiefs wanted to start a high school, and took the opportunity to persuade Inia to take on the job. The chiefs came to Wilson and Elisapeti with a *koua* (sacrificial pig cooked in an earthen oven) and asked them to stay. With mixed feelings they acceded to the chiefs' request, and Inia was appointed Headmaster of the Malhaha School. Elisapeti taught class 7, where she laughingly related she was supposed to 'break' the students, and Wilson taught class 8. From the beginning they began preparing students to take the qualifying examination for more advanced schooling. Shortly thereafter they requested and received permission from the Education Department to start Form III. In 1957 Wilson was made Master First Class and appointed Headmaster of the Malhaha High School, founded the following year.

Wilson and Elisapeti took up residence in the district of Malhaha, where the school and headmaster's house were located, and immediately became involved in both district and island-wide affairs. He took an active role in the church and in 1954 was appointed Chief Circuit Steward of the Rotuma division of the Methodist Church.

Inia also became the guiding light for Rotuma's fledgling

cooperative movement, which began about four years prior to his transfer to the island. Two firms, Morris Hedstrom and Burns Philp, controlled the copra and retail trades in Rotuma at that time, and imposed rules many people felt oppressive. This provided the impetus to start cooperatives. The small groups suffered from a lack of knowledgeable leaders as well as a lack of capital, and struggled for survival against the well-financed firms. Upon his arrival in 1953, Inia advised the cooperatives to seek government aid, and wrote to the Registrar for Cooperatives on their behalf. As a result, a Fijian trainer was sent to Rotuma to teach management skills and bookkeeping.

Inia was convinced that the key to the cooperatives' success was bookkeeping. He expressed the view that if businesses do not keep proper track of money, it tends to disappear, resulting in deficits that lead to collapse. He therefore worked with the Fijian trainer to form a bookkeeping class open to members of the cooperatives and non-members alike. The response was so great that the class had to be divided into two sections, one led by the Fijian trainer, the other by Inia, who taught bookkeeping in the evenings, without compensation, after completing his normal school work as Headmaster. A brief history of the cooperative movement on Rotuma, written by one of Inia's first bookkeeping students, glowingly records his influence on the community:

Mr. Inia's stay in Malhaha proved most fruitful and valuable. He formulated policies and campaigned vigorously to persuade the people to accept his plans and principles. He foresaw the people's needs and worked to change the lives and attitudes of the people of Malhaha, thus making the environment *a paradise*. One of his principles was *to love and care for the poor*. He motivated the acceptance and practice of this principle in the district meetings with the chiefs and their people. Initially, there was strong opposition to the proposals he made to implement the principle of sharing and caring, but later on the people of Malhaha adopted them. He also talked about the principles of self-help and human resources that equalled natural resources. Within a year of conciliation and negotiation, his principles proved fruitful and trustworthy. The people of Malhaha were very much delighted and had come within an ace of mutual understanding. Realizing the value of his advice, they responded by trying their best to develop their own resources.

Mr. Inia saw the vital need for working capital which is the key to the development of the environment and its resources. He

suggested that from the price of every basket of green copra, two shillings be deducted to go towards the district funds. This proposal was discussed in one of the district meetings and everyone unanimously agreed. He also held consultations with the people particularly to ascertain possible ways of carrying out his housing scheme plan. Eventually, the people agreed that the district should remain divided into three groups as usual and that building priority should be given to the less well to do members of the district community. (Vaivao, n.d.)

A natural leader, Inia was elected to the Rotuma Council as Representative from Malhaha⁵ and assumed a major role in formulating policy for the island's development. At Council meetings he championed the cooperative movement, and persuaded the District Officer, Fred Ieli, to lend it his support.

In 1958 Inia won a scholarship, sponsored by the British Council, to study the operation of cooperatives in England and Scotland. On the way back he stopped in India and Sri Lanka to look at how cooperatives were run in those countries. He was away from Fiji for six months and came back with some very definite ideas. What he saw convinced him that a solid capital base was vital for the success of cooperatives, and that careful monitoring of cash flow was necessary. Members must be prepared to sacrifice immediate returns for longer-term goals, and to endure setbacks. A strong central committee was needed to supervise and check on the work performed by cooperative members.

To implement these ideas he recommended that the leadership of the cooperative movement be centralized in an association of local cooperatives. This was counter to the Cooperative Department's administrative guidelines, which advocated decentralization. He also advocated maintaining a high profit margin on sales in order to insure a stable capital base, then giving dividends at the end of the year. From the Registrar of Cooperatives' standpoint this was a violation of the spirit of cooperation, and he accused the Rotuma Cooperative Association (RCA) of operating like company, subject to taxation. The Rotumans, under Inia's leadership, refused to budge. As a result the RCA found itself in a constant struggle with the Division of Cooperatives.

Inia also had conflicts with Fred Ieli, who had taken the initiative to get him to come to Rotuma in 1953. Ieli and Inia were close friends at first. According to the account of Rave Fonmoa, one of the Inia's first bookkeeping trainees and chief assistants, Ieli would often come

to consult with Inia about island affairs. Fonmoa said Ieli would come and explain his latest ideas, asking Inia for comments. Inia would listen patiently, then suggest some reasons why the ideas were flawed. Fonmoa claims Ieli would invariably come around to agreeing with Inia. In part, he attributed the later split between the two men to Ieli's jealousy over Inia's increasing popularity, that Ieli experienced a loss of face, since he was District Officer and people should have been coming to him, rather than to Inia, for advice. But according to Fonmoa, Ieli was so moody he would often chase people away rather than listening to them. A second factor leading to the split, in Fonmoa's view, was that Inia was not reluctant to express criticism of Ieli's handling of affairs to third parties in the course of discussion, and when the criticisms got back to Ieli they made him angry.

Fonmoa contrasted the personalities of the two men: Ieli he characterized as rather self-righteous and expressing his views in unequivocal terms. He had little difficulty playing an authoritarian role and telling people what they should do. He was free and direct in giving advice. Inia, on the other hand, was reluctant to make right/wrong judgments in face-to-face encounters. Fonmoa said that when someone came to Inia asking for support in a dispute, or voicing a complaint, Inia would listen carefully, ask some questions, then tell the person to go think about this or that. He would often ask someone else to find out what was really going on. Fonmoa said that Inia taught him to be suspicious of those who came with nice, neat, articulate stories that might have been rehearsed, that quite often the first version one gets of a dispute is highly flawed (Rave Fonmoa, personal communication).

As the split intensified, people tended to side with one or the other, and the community polarized. Those with the Education Department and Rotuma Cooperative Association (RCA) generally sided with Inia; those who knew Ieli in the Colonial Administration and were loyal to the firms sided with Ieli. A rumor developed in 1960, while I was doing fieldwork on Rotuma, that a move was being made to have Inia transferred away from the island. The prevailing view was that the District Officer was behind it, with backing from the firms whose business had been severely hurt by the growing success of the RCA. Others thought the Registrar of Cooperatives was also a conspirator, since he opposed Inia's restructuring of the RCA in ways that did not meet the Department's guidelines.

Acting on the rumors, the people of Malhaha District and the members of the cooperative societies sent petitions appealing to Government for Inia's retention. The Malhaha petition read:

We, the undersigned natives of Rotuma in the District of Malhaha wish to say that Mr. Wilson F. Inia has helped us so much that we feel we can never offer a better reward than by presenting before your honour, the good works done by him to be added to his credit. In addition to his official duties as teacher and administrator, he freely gave his support in all church activities and above all, he taught us the proper way of handling money matters and now we have seen for ourselves the result of his efforts. Each home in our district has a tank besides other improvements. In spite of the many items listed in our building programme which is under his guidance, there is a general anxiety and fear among us, that if he leaves us sooner than is expected, our great hope for a brighter future will come to nought. However, being in such an uneasy situation, we humbly seek your kind assistance in this matter.

Attached to the petition were 64 signatures.

The petition sent by the cooperatives was directed to Fred Ieli's temporary replacement as District Officer, Lieutenant Paul Manuelli, and read as follows:

Sir,

We have the honour to write and seek the truth and your advice, sir, regarding information received that Government is considering the removal of Mr. Wilson F. Inia from Rotuma.

We knew that he has many powerful enemies from the commercial firms and even in Government, who would do their best to have him removed. If they succeeded, it will *be a gain to them* and *a loss to us* poor Rotumans.

He has continued, from time to time, to render help that we need on all branches of social life. But the most outstanding is the Co-operative Movement in Rotuma. It is through his self-sacrifice and teachings that the present attainment and progress in this movement has been achieved.

This movement is still in the toddling stage, and we do need his freely given help and advice to bring it up to a sound and better footing.

We are proud to be under the British flag, for the British Government stands for 'Freedom and Justice'

If Government decides to carry out the removal of Mr. W.F. Inia, we submit copies with signatures from the members of the various Societies, as a petition against his removal.

I have seen no documents that would substantiate the rumor, so the petitions may have been unnecessary. In any case, Inia retained

his position as Headmaster of Malhaha High School until his retirement in 1969. He continued to receive honors. In 1960 he was again appointed Justice of the Peace, this time for the Eastern Division of the Colony of Fiji, in which Rotuma was included. In 1965 he received a Certificate of Honour from Queen Elizabeth II for public service to education.

Inia's teaching abilities were clearly extraordinary. During my 1959-60 research I took life histories from a number of successful individuals, and was struck by the role that he had played in almost all their lives. He is remembered by ex-students as having had a profound influence on them, and many single him out as the best teacher they ever had. But he was much more than a teacher; he was also mentor, primary model and surrogate father to several generations of Rotuman students. While he was teaching at Davuilevu, for example, he organized for the Rotuman students a separate hostel, which functioned like a large family. Inia took personal responsibility for all of them. He laid down rules, taught them to manage their money, and saw to it that they studied diligently. The importance of his presence can be seen in the fact that during one prolonged period when Inia was absent, hostel organization broke down and most of the Rotuman students left (Howard, 1970: 135-6).

Following mandatory retirement, at 60 years of age, Wilson and Elisapeti moved to her home village of Savlei in the district of Itu'ti'u. They build a home there, designed by Wilson. According to Elisapeti, he felt it was important to build a modest house, one that would not be ostentatious or excite jealousy. He said it would be better to start small at first, then add on later as need be, and that is what they did. He was openly critical of the first two-storey home in Rotuma (and would no doubt be horrified by some of the elaborate houses being constructed today (Rensel, 1991). Elisapeti also said that she wanted to get an automobile when they first settled in Rotuma in 1953, but that Wilson said no, that it was not right for them to have a car before any of the chiefs did. Eventually they bought a vehicle, but only after one of the chiefs had acquired one first (Elisapeti Inia, personal communication).

But Inia was too active a man to retire. Taking advantage of the government policy, arising from a shortage of teachers, that retired teachers be re-employed as assistant teachers if their services were needed, he asked for and was assigned such status at Motusa School, not far from his new home. But his commitment to the goal that Rotumans learn to manage money was so great that he also visited

the High School on a regular basis and gave classes in bookkeeping, for which he was reprimanded by the District Education Officer.

On 14 June 1969 Wilson Inia was made a Member of the British Empire (MBE), and the following year he was chosen to attend the Conference on Fiji's Independence in London, representing Rotuma's interests. Following this he was elected Senator, as Rotuma's sole representative in the Parliament of the newly independent nation of Fiji. For the next thirteen years, until his death at age 74 in 1983, he spent most of his time in Suva, establishing a reputation as a distinguished legislator and statesman. During this period he remained active in the Methodist church, as a Member (1971-73, 1976-78) and Vice-President (1977-78) of the Methodist Conference in Fiji.

Messages and Style

In addition to being a man of great energy and dedication, Wilson Inia was a compelling orator. He spoke English, Fijian and Rotuman with equal fluency and shifted from one to the other with ease, as the occasion demanded. He also had a great wit and loved a good joke. The pulpit was one of two main platforms he had for communicating the values he held with deep conviction; his position in the Senate was the other. Fortunately he was a meticulous man and kept a notebook outlining his sermons (written in English), and while most of his papers were destroyed in Hurricane Bebe, which devastated Rotuma in 1972, this record of his thoughts and values survived. The published records of Parliamentary Debates provides an account of his speeches to the Senate. I will draw from these two sources to provide a sense of Inia's populist messages, and the flair with which he delivered them.

From the pulpit

Among the themes Inia focused on in his preaching were the virtues of civility and humility. In a sermon based on the story of Stephen (Acts 6: 1-8, 7: 59-60), he raised the question of who shall be chosen, and told the story of a candidate selected as a clerk out of 50 who applied. When the gentleman making the selection was asked why he chose this particular individual, who brought no testimonials or recommendations, his reply was that the candidate had many qualifications that were not on paper. He pointed out that the candidate (a) wiped his feet and (b) closed the door, to show his tidiness and orderliness; (c) picked up a book on the floor, whereas others stepped over it; (d) gave his seat to an old man while waiting, showing his manners; (e) his clothes were well brushed; (f) when he signed his

name the gentleman saw that the candidate's fingernails were clean; and (g) the candidate had waited quietly for his turn without pushing. These, the gentleman said, are the better recommendations.

One of Inia's Christmas sermons was in praise of humility, which he considered to be unpopular among his people.

We feel that if we are humble, no one will take notice of us, and that we shall be unimportant, or that people will look down on us. But if we are going to be good Christians, we cannot do so unless we are *humble*, for humility is the most important of Christian virtues.⁶

He went on to talk about Christ's humility—his birth in a stable and his parents' poverty, his homeless wanderings, his need to borrow necessities from others—and concluded that Christ

could have been born into a priestly family like John the Baptist or into a King's palace, but he chose this way of humility to show us that even the poorest and lowliest of us could be a good Christian without being wealthy or highly born.

'Why does God want us to be humble?' he asked.

'God wants us to be humble for our sake, not for His', he answered, and went on to say that 'we can show our humility by our SERVICE TO ONE ANOTHER.' His notes on this topic include two anecdotes, one involving Ben Franklin, the other George Washington. In the latter story, the President of the United States was on a tour of inspection and saw a group of soldiers trying to pull a field gun which had its wheels stuck in the mud. A corporal was telling the soldiers what to do. The President stopped and helped the soldiers to get the gun free, then asked the corporal why he wasn't helping the soldiers. The man answered, 'I am a corporal,' to which Washington responded, 'All right! The next time you want help, send for the President.'

This, Inia observed, is the true humility of service. He wrote a brief note in the margins of his notebook: 'Ed[ucation] is a great danger.' In another sermon on the same topic he noted:

It is wonderful how much people can do in this world as long as they do not mind who gets the praise. A great deal of our world is spoilt because we look for praise and *are hurt if we do not get it*.

A theme of unostentatious goodness supplements the importance he placed on humility. In a sermon on 'What a Good Man Is', he asserted that true goodness is easily seen when the self is suppressed.

Using the Biblical story of Barnabas, whose goodness Inia characterized as of the 'weak and gracious' sort, he commented that very often this is classified by the world as being of poor quality. But, he told the congregation, it takes an educated eye to see the harmony of the sober coloring of some great painters: a child or vulgar person will prefer *showy* colors like red and blue heaped together in strong contrasts. The gentler virtues, he advised – patience and meekness, long suffering, sympathy and readiness to put away self for the sake of God and man – are the truly Christian ones.

This gives us COMMON PLACE MEN SOME SATISFACTION KNOWING THAT ALTHOUGH WE ARE NOT TALENTED MEN, AND CANNOT BE CLASSIFIED AS GREAT, yet we can have the beauty of GOODNESS AS IS SHOWN IN CHRIST, he concluded.

His sermons were peppered with anecdotes. Some were from his extensive readings, others from his own family life (his daughters complained that he often exposed their personal foibles from the pulpit); still others were humorous little stories or jokes he had picked up. For example, in a sermon focusing on the importance of decisiveness and commitment he mentioned the saying that 'the road to hell is paved with good intentions', then went on to tell the story of a fisherman who returned home and was asked by his wife if he caught anything. 'No,' he tells her, 'but I influenced a good number.'

Good influences are fine, he suggests, but without decisiveness they are of very little value in deciding a man's future.

One of his special concerns was alcohol abuse, and he maintained a staunch anti-drinking stance throughout his life. He opposed smoking as well, and often framed his arguments in terms of fitness. The aim of one of his sermons he defined as 'To help Christians to realize that, as members of the Kingdom of God, they are responsible for using aids to physical fitness and *avoiding the habits and actions which damage fitness*.' Fitness is important not only for our own sake, he preached, but for the sake of others: our illnesses make the lives of others unhappy by placing burdens upon them. To neglect one's health is therefore a form of selfishness.

Selfishness was a vice he attacked in other ways as well. He deplored the tendency of people to wait for others to get things done, and preached self-reliance in a variety of forms. He told the following story as exemplary:

Once a king wanted to do his best to make his people happier [by doing things for them]. He asked his chief minister what [more] he

could do to make his people happier still. The minister smiled and said that he was doing it the wrong way. He must stop doing more things for them. If you do everything [for them] they will not be happy but it will increase their complaints and unhappiness. All parents who do this for their children will have the same trouble.

To prove his case the minister took a bag of gold and placed it under a stone he rolled into the centre of the road. A farmer came by and complained about the stone interfering with his cart of produce, but he steered his cart safely by. A soldier passed by and cursed the P[ublic]W[orks]D[epartment] for not doing their job. A merchant cursed the government for not using tax money properly. After a month's time the king and his minister came back and found that the stone was still there. Everyone thought it was not their business, but somebody else's.

The king called all his people to come to this place. He told them that he, the king, was going to push away the stone for them. He showed them the bag underneath, and put the gold in his pocket. The farmer, soldier and merchant all lamented, 'If only I had known.'

From that day onwards, his people were prepared to help each other in all their problems.

Governments and parents must learn this good lesson, Inia preached, to make their people and children happier. 'Teach them to help themselves, not to expect to be spoon fed.'

From the floor of the Senate

Inia championed a number of causes during his career as a senator, including education, religious freedom, the cooperative movement, racial tolerance, a fair deal for workers, fiscal responsibility and self-reliance. Rather than draw from his many speeches over the 13 years he served as senator, I have chosen to present excerpts from only one, since it effectively illustrates both his oratory style and the values for which he stood. The speech was made over a two-day period, on 18-19 November 1975, in response to an address to Parliament by the Governor-General.

I think that the basic purpose of life is happiness and that is why you and I are here to try and do our very best to make life in this country of ours a happy one. When there is no happiness, discord, no harmony, no tolerance, no love, then the country becomes a bad one, in that happiness very quickly disappears and it is bad for those of us who are living in the country, bad for those

who are outside – these people would not like to come and see or live here or invest in here. Therefore, it is our bounden duty to see that happiness prevails in this country of ours. And if there is anything that strives to disrupt it, ways and means must be found in order to stop it and the sooner it is introduced, the better it is for all of us.

I feel, Mr. President, Sir, that in order to accomplish and maintain true harmony in this country of ours, this education that we have been emphasizing on all along for over 100 years now, is very important. However, there is a right education and a wrong one. The right one, simply put, would be one that brings about plenty of harmony, love, tolerance; the wrong one brings about covetousness, strife, exploitation, things that would destroy harmony in this country. It is also said that with true education a person is gentle, is not rude, there is a polite or a courteous way to disagree with somebody who does not think like you. True education tends to do just what several males used to do in our buses here in Fiji, that when an old lady comes in, the man will stand up and step aside for the old lady to sit down. Only true education could do that. With wrong education the man would sit there stubbornly and refuse to budge an inch for this old lady.

Similarly anyone who is properly educated [uses simple English and avoids] the long, long words where one seems to have to look up the dictionary every time one rises to speak. They seem to think that the more long words they use, the more highly they would be regarded and perhaps their education would be looked upon in the bright light. Anyone who speaks that way is badly educated. Therefore, Mr. President, I regard this thing on which we have spent millions of dollars, to bring about right education for our people, it should be along the lines that I have emphasized today. This is the true type of education, the education that will bring about true harmony.

[I refer to] the ability to say 'yes, this is a matter of opinion, I think this way, you think that way. Perhaps you are right, perhaps you are wrong.' Only a truly educated man could say perhaps I may be wrong and you are right. It is along this type of education that we could bring about harmony in this country of ours. I hope those who look after the education of today would watch this and see that the type of pupils who turn out from our schools are of the right type, the type that brings about plenty of harmony in our country.

Secondly Mr. President, I would like to say that to bring about

harmony in our country is more than education. You have to back and support religions in this country of ours. I am quite sure that the more you love your God, the more you will love your fellowmen. You cannot love your fellowmen without loving God. If you should love your fellowmen and not love God, I would say that the person who practises that does not really love his fellowmen. He is helping his fellowman in order to get something from him.

Now, true religion is love and give rather than take, and I feel that if you want true harmony in this country of ours, this Government of ours must place very high on its development all the different religions that we have in our country, and I am very very pleased to know today that the Government has been good enough to recognize the Hindu religion in order to make a public holiday. I regard and interpret the recognition of the Hindu and the Mohammedan religions in Fiji as a move in the right direction, in that the people would serve, would love their God so strongly that I am quite sure there is a part inside them to make them love their fellowmen. They would be very happy to love the Fijians and the Rotumans. A country that fails to recognize this will have no harmony. In spite of all the millions of policemen you will bring, you cannot force harmony on people. This is something that must be created inside man. It has got to grow inside. It does not take one day to do it. It takes years, and I am very very pleased to know that the recognition of religion is a very very strong point in the Government of ours.

Thirdly, Mr. President, we come to the most important thing of this day and that is money wealth. If the distribution of wealth is not fair, is very different, some with millions, some with only a few dollars, some who could eat a meal, just one meal of one thousand dollars and some with only a 20 cent one, if we have too much of this thing, it would be totally wrong. You will never have true harmony in any country where the wealth is so widely distributed. After all, there is nothing wrong with money. Without money we cannot exist. The only fault with money is the greed for money, when it becomes one's God and you want it so much that you see only yourself, you must have everything and none for your friend, none for your fellowmen. This is where the trouble starts. He will be inclined to do it above the table when he can, and if he cannot do it above the table and can only do it under the table, he will do it, as long as he gets the whole thing. I hope that this great Government of ours will see that a fair distribution of wealth is

carried out in our country, because without this, it would be very difficult to bring about true harmony. I would humbly suggest for Government to look into way[s] of sharing. I know that the Government has several ways of doing it. One way is increased tax on . . . rich people. That may be up against all sorts of tricks with manpower. [Another way is] getting the have-nots to have a share in the haves' business. I would like to humbly suggest that where the people who are down below have a share in [an] industry, [this] brings about quite a lot of harmony in that particular industry, but where the employees do not have a share in the business, you are up against every bit of front.

Finally on this important subject, Mr. President, if we allow the good people to share the riches of a country and the pay packet brought home by the labourers happens to be a bigger one, but if he has very little love for his fellowmen, very little love for his family, and he still has this strong belief that he comes first and other things come last, and enters the pub, that would be the end of all the riches that you have given to the big fool.

So, I would like to say that a very strong factor is behind all this and that is the love for one's fellowmen and particularly the ones closest to you at home, your wife, and your children. These must be looked after first. How can you bring about that maturity of thinking? I humbly present that there is no better way than the religious way of thinking about it—the Christian way of thinking about it, and that is that all the talents are not yours but gifts from God, and must be used for the furtherance of Christian teaching. The greatest of them all is not only to love God but to love one's fellowmen, use these riches to help the 'have-nots', the poor family at home.

[Some people think] that the big and wonderful talents that we receive are not from God but achieved by one's own self, maybe through education, maybe through muscles, maybe through heredity. If we were to think along these lines, that this is something which is your own, then selfishness will come in very strongly. One should interpret that it is a gift from God to be used particularly for the have-nots down the line, the non-talented people. If the talented ones would use their talents to help the country as a whole then the ones not so talented would never be forgotten. I think the true interpretation is not for the talented ones to work separately, but to work together as a team. Unless it is worked along this line, this wonderful harmonious policy that our great country wants to introduce would be very very difficult. In

particular, the 'haves' should think very seriously along the lines I have suggested today.

The next point is that this Government will actively forward co-operatives. I congratulate the Government for making this a very important policy in running this country. . . I thank the Government for all the help given to the small co-operatives. Very often we speak of self-help projects. This is a self-help project. I humbly beg the Government to have a look at the financial situation of the co-operatives. If you can give several thousands to save the tourist industry what about saving the co-operative associations.

Now touching on Education, there is a portion that says 'to gear the education system of our country to equip people with the skills that we need.' This is something that I am very pleased with.

My interpretation . . . is to make the children suitable for the environment. The present setup fits the urban society so that immediately after somebody leaves school he finishes up in urban areas. Who is going to plant the dalo and cut the copra? Who is going to plant the sugar cane? This is why I congratulate the Government for trying to put right the education system of our country. I know that it will take years to achieve that, but I think we are headed in the right direction. There are too many going for the 'white collar' jobs: we want some to stay back in the rural areas. This is an agricultural country, and you cannot find jobs for the thousands here in Suva. It is almost impossible. How about cultivating some of our virgin lands? How about opening up some virgin country? Another portion in the education side mentions increase in the intake in the University of the South Pacific, to get about 120 doing the Diploma of Education course to solve the problem of teachers in secondary schools, particularly of rural secondary schools. . . I think there are problems in all secondary schools, but I think urban ones have very little trouble as far as good staffing is concerned, but it is not very easy to get good staffing out in rural secondary schools, and I think this is a good move in the right direction. This is the only way to solve it. The idea of letting the Peace Corps people help us out is not a very good one. It is all right only at the beginning, but it should get less and less and less and then we take over our true responsibility, and I wish to congratulate the Government for the right move.

In agriculture . . . with the great world food shortage today, I am very pleased that Government will devote much of its energy to provide food for local consumption so as to buy less from

outside, and if we can maintain this, it will help to balance the payment side as well. . .

I notice Government's policy is to help the outer islands that have difficulty in bringing their produce grown over there. As I come from outer islands I wish to thank Government for this policy. . .

Lastly . . . I want to say something on the Housing Authority. I think it would be wrong if I left this out. I wish to congratulate Government for wishing to extend its programme in the urban areas and maintain its search for new methods of providing more houses for low income earners. As I have already pointed out, something went wrong in the planning of education and all those who happen to have good education finish up in urban areas. I feel very sorry for the Housing Authority. They have a great problem of finding houses for the thousands who come in here. However, after food and water, housing is the third thing man thinks of, and I wish to thank Government for helping the low income people who come to our great towns and city. It would be impossible for them to own a house and the way it has worked out today is something that is very very pleasing to the low income people, particularly those of us who come from very very far away, like the Rotumans

As for those of us who come from rural areas, mention has been made in the policy of helping us out. I think that it would be almost impossible to help the far ways ones if you cannot cope with the nearby ones. We have only one hope . . . to pray for another hurricane. We notice that once a hurricane comes along and smashes the houses, we get a new house tomorrow, and I wish to thank Government, particularly the Prime Minister's Hurricane Relief Committee. If this Committee was not working well those of us in far away places would find it very very difficult to have a good roof over our heads. Somebody who visited Rotuma lately came back and said he did not notice a Rotuman house, but all modern ones, corrugated roofs and concrete walls; he didn't see a Rotuman house. I think the only Rotuman house he could see, Mr. President, was a kitchen [cookhouse], and he was very sorry for us. I think if you ask all the Rotumans, nobody was sorry to change over from those leaky thatched roof houses, which had to be repaired year after year, to corrugated roof buildings with concrete walls that can go on for several years after you have passed away, for your children to take over. I wish to thank Government, particularly the Hurricane Relief Committee, for making it

possible for us in rural areas to have a good roof over our heads so that we can stay there and not come and borrow and cause a lot of trouble to the Housing Authority here in urban areas.

With these few remarks, Mr. President, I thank His Excellency, the Governor-General very much for his speech. (Parliamentary Debates, 18-19 November 1975)

Legacy of Leadership

Wilson Inia died on 25 August 1983 at Tamavua Hospital in Suva of carcinoma of the spine, after an illness that lasted for approximately six months. During that time he received a constant stream of well-wishers, many of whom brought gifts of food and money. They included persons from every walk of life and each of Fiji's major ethnic groups. Eulogies also came from varied sources. One of the more poignant ones comes at the conclusion of Rupeti Vaivao's history of the Rotuman Cooperative Association:

Generally speaking, I would say that the Co-operatives and Mr. Inia have played a major part in the life of the Rotumans by bringing together the people of Rotuma in a civilized way. Co-operatives and Inia have developed not only the economy of the Rotumans but also the social life of the community as a whole. Today, through Co-operatives, the Rotumans may be said to have been able to match in some measure the progress made by other communities in Fiji

Nature had given the Rotumans a man with a sense of responsibility, vigorous and comprehensive, which in his riper years, he had cultivated with care and industry. His general knowledge was extensive and various; in that of his own profession he was unequalled.

He had a clear judgement, a strong masculine sense and the most determined resolution; with a genius peculiarly turned to enterprise in 1953, he had pursued his object with unshaken perseverance, vigilant and active in an eminent degree.

Mr. Inia was cool and intrepid among dangers; patient and firm under difficulties and distress; fertile in expedients; great and original in all his designs; active and resolved in carrying out his duties, more particularly to the poorer.

In every situation he stood unrivaled and alone; on him the Rotumans looked with hope.

He was our leading 'Star' of this century. With his departure, it was as if our faith and hope had gone, but the example of his life

and dedication to Rotuma remains with us, and that will surely give us the confidence to continue his work. (Vaivao, n.d.)

Among the tributes he received from his fellow senators was a speech by his successor from Rotuma, A. Petero, who commented that 'the late Senator Wilson Inia was a man that held strong to his principles of love for his countrymen and to pursue the goal of upgrading the living standards of his countrymen.' A Fijian senator called Inia 'a man of dignity who was always proud of being a Rotuman.'

'To me,' this legislator remarked, 'Senator Inia is Rotuma and Rotuma is Senator Inia. To define the race in Rotuma, you look at Senator Inia and his is the best and glowing definition of Rotuma and his people' (Parliamentary Debates, 29 August 1983).

Wilson Inia provided Rotuma with an unprecedented form of leadership—a form of leadership, pan-Rotuman in scope and grounded in personal moral authority. No other Rotuman in recorded history has been able to successfully carve out such a role. Josefa Rigamoto and Fred Ieli both had, as District Officers, the authority of the colonial government behind them. They were able to form policies and implement them almost at will, without regard for the people's wishes. To their credit, both made efforts to consult with people before taking action, but they often found themselves in a position of making decisions against a background of sharply divided opinion. None of the other professionals who returned to Rotuma has been able to develop the leadership abilities of Wilson Inia, although some have tried. The ministers have sometimes taken strong political stands on the pulpit, but they have rarely provided the practical assistance in solving problems that was the hallmark of Inia's career. Other teachers and medical officers have sometimes gotten involved in policy making, but more often than not their leadership has been localized and short-lived. Although their expertise has usually been appreciated, their special interests or personal foibles have more often than not aroused suspicions and diminished their influence. What distinguished Wilson Inia's leadership is that it was based on the moral foundation of his Christian teachings, and backed up by unselfish service to the community, humility and an exemplary personal life. He combined the knowledge and wisdom required to be successful in both European and Rotuman cultures.

The power of Inia's moral authority was effectively communicated to me by a young school teacher. He said that he was far more fearful of being chastised by Inia than he was of offending his chief, or anyone

else on the island. He told of an incident in which he and two other teachers broke a regulation by riding three on a motorcycle past Inia's home in Savlei, and how he prayed they would not be seen. He then recalled how shamed and embarrassed he had been when Inia preached about the failure of some professional people to set a proper example to the community. No names were mentioned, but he got the message, and said he has been careful to avoid breaking any such laws since.

Inia was not without enemies, and despite the fierce loyalty he inspired in the majority of the Rotuman people, there are those who do not cherish his memory. Some are individuals who had been expelled from the co-operatives for mismanaging funds or violating RCA rules. Wilson would only forgive so much; he was not afraid to impose strong sanctions when he believed they were deserved. When he thought people were being intentionally dishonest he could be very severe.

Retrospectively he is sometimes criticized for failing to groom a well-trained successor to take over leadership of the RCA, implying that he jealously guarded his control, and some conservatives argue that he ruined Rotuma by placing too much emphasis on the importance of money – that this acted to undermine fundamental values of sharing and community. There are also a number of Rotumans who resented the ways in which he used his power and influence. They felt bullied by him, claiming that despite his democratic ideals, he sometimes pushed so hard to get his way that he ran roughshod over others, including the chiefs. Some feel that he used his education as a weapon of intimidation. There is no doubt that he firmly believed he knew what was best for Rotuma and was willing to step on toes in the pursuit of his vision.

CHIEFS, SOVEREIGNTY AND LEADERSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY ROTUMA

When Fiji gained independence in 1970, and the colonial regime ended, the relative positions of the Rotuma Council and District Officer were reversed. Whereas previously the District Officer held strong executive authority, with the Council advisory, the Council now was given primary policy-making powers with the District Officer its advisor. One result of this change is that Rotuma has become a much more political community than it was in the past. During the colonial period people rarely discussed political issues, and were reluctant to express viewpoints concerning the directions future

change should take. Dissatisfaction with the District Officer's policies were usually expressed by grumbling and passive resistance. Now many people seem to have a definite point of view and are prepared to speak out openly, to debate issues and to criticize those in authority directly.

Rotumans today are also far more committed to progress and development than they were in the past; they evaluate leaders more by what they accomplish (or do not accomplish) than by what they say or how they act. People want well-constructed modern houses, refrigerators, modern appliances, cars and stereos. One does not hear very much about Rotuman custom nowadays, even from the chiefs, unless it is in the context of a political dispute.

While progress has been slow on the island, Rotumans abroad have continued to make their mark, not only in Fiji but in New Zealand, Australia, the United States and Europe. Rotumans have risen to new heights of leadership in government, the military, and private industry. They have not only demonstrated an ability to lead, they have accumulated political power far beyond that in the hands of the chiefs. They also enjoy a standard of living to which people on the home island only aspire.

These circumstances have created a difficult dilemma for the chiefs on Rotuma. They are expected to formulate policy for development, to take fiscal responsibility for managing the budget, and to administer programs. But they are neither educated nor trained for these tasks of modern government and, from the people's standpoint, continue to botch the job. Furthermore, they are finding that the real power to do good for Rotuma lies not with them, but with Rotumans who have powerful positions in Fiji and abroad. In order to get things done they have to maneuver through bureaucratic channels they do not understand, and they get short-tempered with Rotumans in Fiji who try to educate them about the realities of modern government and industry. They express resentment when their kinsmen in Fiji do not bow to their authority and respond to their beck-and-call. This has led to some rather strained relationships between the chiefs and Rotuman leaders in Fiji.

In some important respects the sovereignty issue for Rotumans nearly reverses the Tikopia case. No one currently presumes that chiefs from the home island can exercise authority over Rotumans in Fiji or elsewhere. In fact, the chiefs formally abrogated that possibility in 1946, when they refused a request from Rotumans in Fiji that the Council of Chiefs appoint someone to be their 'headman'. The Fiji Rotumans at that time expressed the view that someone appointed

by the Council of Chiefs would be more respected, but the chiefs opted out and suggested that the people choose their own headman (*Minutes of the Rotuma Council*, 10 Oct. 1946). As the financial and political power of Rotumans in Fiji has grown, they have exercised increasing influence on their home island, a circumstance that arouses apprehension among the chiefs and some others who express concern that control of the island's destiny is passing, or has passed, outside the local community. The chiefs seem to feel, with good reason, that they are losing sovereignty over Rotuma itself.

The chiefs' moral authority has also been undermined in the eyes of their people at home as a result of their handling of money. They are accused of being greedy and using the limited monies available to the Council for their own personal benefits, such as trips to Fiji with high per diem allowances. Some chiefs have been accused of skimming off funds from development projects in their districts, from ships' landing fees, and from cooperative and church accounts. As a result people are often reluctant to support local projects, and refuse to give either money or labor to cooperative efforts managed by a chief.

That the chiefs should be tempted to use public monies for their own self-aggrandizement should not be surprising. In the past, chiefs were expected to live in a manner befitting their status, and to represent the dignity of their district. A chief's house was used for receiving guests to the district, and was expected to be imposing. It is for that reason that Wilson Inia thought it improper for his house to be grandiose, or for him to have an automobile before any chief did. But now chiefs see people around them without titles, and from ordinary families, building expensive, elaborate residences, buying cars and videos, and enjoying a standard of living they cannot match. Furthermore, this comes at a time when people are less willing to provide support in labor and materials to maintain chiefly prerogatives. One can hardly blame the chiefs for feeling insecure, for feeling that they are entitled to use the community's monies for buying dignity.

Leadership on Rotuma today is therefore in a state of crisis. Wilson Inia's death left a void that has not been filled, and there are no Rotumans who can speak with authority for the entire island. The chiefs are at a great disadvantage. As members of the Rotuman Council they are supposed to formulate policies and guide the development of the island, but they are ill equipped to do so. They lack the education and experience required to manage an expanding economy and to make informed choices concerning development

opportunities. They do not know how to exercise influence with bureaucrats who control resources. Internally, they are perceived by most Rotumans as self-interested and ineffective, lacking in moral authority.

In an important sense Wilson Inia established a new model for leadership on Rotuma, based on bicultural competence and a universal ethic of selfless service. The traditional model, rooted in chiefly authority backed by aristocratic heritage, has been shown, by contrast, to be unsuitable for meeting the current aspirations of the Rotuman people. Whether someone will come along soon to fill the void left by Inia's death is problematic, but he gave the Rotuman people a glimpse of what a universal leader is like, and, in so doing, changed the measure by which aspiring leaders are judged (for a full biography of Wilson Inia see Howard 1994).

CONCLUSION

In his paper on extraterritoriality, Firth (1969) notes that one might have expected Tikopia chiefs to lose their mystic quality (the basis of their moral authority) with the abandonment of the traditional pagan religion. That they did not he attributes, in part, to the island's remoteness and the timing and intensity of its contact with the outside world. He suggests:

If Tikopia contacts with the outside world had been more massive at an earlier period they might well have let slip their peculiar institutions, including an effectively operational chieftainship, as did many of their Polynesian congeners. But their recent fairly sudden massive exposure to Western technology and industry came at a time when there was much more public consciousness of the values of contrasted cultures, when the Tikopia could look at their own institutions as something worthy of pride without having this claim derided, and could retreat into their own way of life when pressed too hard by the demands of modernism. (Firth, 1969: 358)

The Rotuma case certainly bears out this observation. Rotuman institutions, including chieftainship, came under fire from European intrusion early and strongly by comparison. Perhaps of particular significance is the fact that Rotuma was saddled with resident European colonial administrators from 1881 through World War II. They were in direct competition with the chiefs in a struggle for authority over the populace, but it was a greatly unbalanced contest. Chiefs and commoners alike were redundantly informed, through a variety

of channels, that, morally based or not, it was the European administrators who held authority.

The lack of exploitable resources on Tikopia, other than labor, is another conservative factor Firth mentions. Had the island been suitable for plantations, or been rich in minerals that could be extracted, conditions might have been imposed that would have weakened the position of the chiefs. With regard to exploitable resources, Rotuma is somewhat better endowed than Tikopia, and became heavily involved in the copra trade before the turn of the century. But it hosted no foreign-controlled plantations, and commerce *per se* does not appear to have undermined chiefly authority. In fact, when European trading firms were in control of commerce, prior to the ascendance of the Rotuman Cooperative Association, the separation of chiefs from commerce may have insulated them from accusations of immorality. It was only *after* Rotumans gained control of their economy, through the successes of the RCA and the ascendance of the Rotuma Council following Fiji's Independence, that chiefs became targets of severe criticism from the Rotuman people. In Rotuma's case, the chiefs' heavy involvement in money matters is now seen as being at odds with the aspirations of their people, thus undermining their position as leaders.

The core of Firth's argument, however, is that Tikopia was far more politically unified at the critical time than other Polynesian societies. The chiefs provided a rallying point for common sentiment, 'encapsulating Tikopia belief in themselves and the values of their culture' (Firth, 1969: 358). In this I believe he is on target, and here the contrast with Rotuma is most pronounced. Chieftainship on Rotuma was never unified in the way it was on Tikopia. Rotuman chiefs represented, and still represent, territorially defined districts. They have always been positioned to pursue parochial as opposed to unifying interests – a fact which is as true today as it was when they engaged in warfare with one another for status supremacy. The question now is whether Rotuman chiefs can regain the underpinnings of moral authority or are doomed to rapid obsolescence. Wilson Inia demonstrated that it is possible to re-establish such authority in modern contexts by emphasizing values that have joint currency in Rotuman and European cultures: humility, selflessness, civility and service to the community. The Rotuman people, educated and uneducated alike, recognize the centrality of chiefs to Rotuman custom and do not want to see the institution terminated. But they now have a new vision of leadership, one based on the model Inia projected, and they will not be satisfied with less. Whether hereditary chiefs will

be able to fill the breach, or will be relegated to quaint but unauthoritative roles of ceremonial figureheads, remains to be seen.

NOTES

- 1 Rotuma is 43 square kilometers in land area (Woodhall, 1987: 1), while Tikopia is 4.6 square kilometers (Kirch and Yen, 1982: 11); the population of Rotuma has ranged between 2,000 and 3,000 during the twentieth century, while that of Tikopia has fluctuated between approximately 1,000 and 1,750 (Kirch and Yen, 1982: 59).
- 2 While early informants described the *sau*'s position as rotational, an investigation of the locations from which *sau* came shows a distinct skewing toward certain districts, particularly prior to 1820. Ladefoged (1992) theorizes that this skewing reflects the political dominance of those districts, based on success in warfare. He gives greater weight than I do to the material benefits gained by conquest. Evidence concerning the *mua* is likewise ambiguous. Thus Allardyce reports that the districts had the honour of *mua* 'in a kind of turn' (Allardyce, 1885-6: 142), while Hocart's informants told him they were chosen from only one district (Hocart, n.d.).
- 3 Following an administrative reorganization in the Colony of Fiji during the 1930s the title of the appointed official in charge of Rotuma was changed from Resident Commissioner to District Officer.
- 4 When I first made this argument, in 1963, the concepts of 'culture' and 'kastom' had not yet been politicized. Currently in the Pacific Islands these terms are common political currency, having been thoroughly objectified, and even commoditized, in many places.
- 5 In 1958 the Rotuma Council was reorganized to consist of an elected representative from each district in addition to the seven head chiefs. In addition to the district officer and the senior medical officer, the headmaster of the Rotuma High School was also entitled to attend, so Inia attended in two capacities.
- 6 Citations are from Inia's handwritten notebook containing notes for sermons. In some instances the notes are fragmentary, and I have taken the liberty of putting them into complete sentences for the sake of clarity.

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