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La restitution du patrimoine
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Returning Indigenous Knowledge through Publications Written for Pacific Island Communities

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A series of sessions about repatriation of ethnographic information was organized by Sjoerd Jaarsma over the course of three annual meetings of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (1998-2000). The ideas generated and explored during the sessions were ultimately published in a book, *Handle with Care: Ownership and Control of Ethnographic Materials*, the twentieth volume in the ASAO Monograph Series (Jaarsma 2002). Most of the contributor-participants focused on repatriating written information rather than material objects; and most addressed issues related to preserving, archiving, and accessing field notes and other “raw” research data, including photos and video or audiotapes. Three of the chapters, however (by David A. and Dorothy R. Counts, Keith S. and Anne Chambers, and Alan Howard), discuss writing and publishing materials for the communities who originally provided the information, which is the focus of my talk today. Some of the questions about publishing for host communities are similar to those about repatriating archived materials. Decisions must be made, preferably in collaboration with community members, about what material to repatriate/publish, and how, about what information is personal or confidential, or linked politically or socially to particular individuals, families, or groups, and therefore should be restricted, and what is appropriately and usefully made public, and about when and in what forms information should be made available.

Writing and publishing for the host communities involves additional concerns, starting with the necessity of being selective in deciding what and how much to include. Whereas a generalized, singular account used to be the norm for published ethnographies, multiple voices and inconsistent versions more accurately reflect lived experience. But, as we have found, publishers prefer shorter manuscripts for reasons of production cost and saleability – so whose voices will be left out? In an anecdote many of us may find familiar, Dorothy Counts reported being scolded by Kandoka (Papua New Guinea) villagers who read her published collection of their oral history, legends, and folktales, because she had not collected and published stories from other kin groups, or other “more authentic” versions of the ones she did (Counts and Counts 2002: 19). Similarly, residents of Nanumea Atoll (Tuvalu) in one breath thanked Keith and Anne Chambers for their publications and in the next asked why they had used one person’s version rather than another’s. The Chambers acknowledged the impossibility of including in their publications the full range of implicit political meanings of the accounts given to them by different Nanumea elders, or “the depth of cross-referencing, community memories, political ambitions, and influence seeking involved in the transmission of materials of this sort” (Chambers and Chambers 2002: 158-159). Despite such limitations, the Chambers discovered that a 1975 report they had written for the Tuvalu government had unintentionally resulted in systematizing some cultural practices (or “freezing traditions”) for Nanumeans, who were consulting their work as authoritative some twenty years later while trying to describe their practices regarding chief selection and installation, for instance (2002: 161 and 163). Lack of other published materials may increase the likelihood that a publication, even a bound set of kinship diagrams, will be considered “official,” and be used in unintended ways, for instance, as evidence in community disputes (Chamber and Chambers 2002: 159-160, 165). That said all these authors felt it not only worthwhile and important but also an obligation to write and publish materials for the people who gave them the information in the first place.

Access to information is inextricably bound up with choices about language. Writing in local or indigenous languages has implications for which and how many people will be able to read it, and in turn, how many copies should be printed. If it is appropriate to write in a language such as French or English, academics also need to consider their audience when deciding whether to use a specialist language

(jargon) and, if so, how to use such concepts to make something more understandable and interesting rather than less (Counts and Counts 2002: 22-23). Financial cost is also a factor in access to published material, and I will speak a bit more about these access issues later when discussing choices my husband, Alan Howard, and I have made in our recent publications for Rotumans.

Alan and I have been doing research and writing about the people of Rotuma since 1959 and 1987, respectively. Rotuma is a small island some 450 kilometres north of Fiji. Although culturally and linguistically distinct, Rotuma has been politically affiliated with Fiji since 1881, first as a British colony, and since 1970 as part of an independent nation. The population of Rotuma is about 2,500, with approximately 7,500 Rotumans living in the main Fiji islands, primarily in urban areas such as Suva and Nadi. We estimate that perhaps another 2,000 Rotumans live elsewhere, especially in New Zealand, Australia, Hawai'i, and the West Coast of North America, with a few families in central Canada and in Europe.

Anthropologists are commonly required to provide copies of publications arising from their research to government institutions of the countries that host their fieldwork. Between the two of us Alan and I have now authored or coauthored some thirty-seven articles about Rotuma. In 1970 Alan published a book called *Learning to Be Rotuman*, which he was gratified to learn has been used as a text in teacher education in Fiji. Over the years we have dutifully sent copies of our publications to the government of Fiji; copies of most of them are available in the library of the University of the South Pacific in Suva. In about 1990 we also photocopied and bound all the individual articles Alan had published to that time, and hand-delivered copies to the Rotuma Council of Chiefs, Rotuma high school teachers, and various Rotuman friends on the island, in Fiji, and in diaspora communities elsewhere. As English is the language of instruction in schools on Rotuma, most Rotumans there as well as in Fiji are literate in English. Although individuals expressed appreciation for the article copies, and a few told us they actually used data from them, we suspect that much of that material went unread.

It was in the early 1990s that we began to write and publish specifically for Rotuman audiences. Working with Elizabeth Inia, a Rotuman cultural expert who was the island's first woman schoolteacher, Alan composed a biography of her

husband, Wilson Inia, who had been Rotuma's first senator in the Fiji Parliament (Howard 1994). Wilson had been key in establishing the Rotuma Cooperative Association as well as the Rotuma High School, and his life story and writings (through his speeches in Parliament as well as his Methodist lay-preacher's sermons) reflected on much of Rotuma's twentieth-century history. The book, published by the Institute of Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, was greeted with much excitement on Rotuma, where Alan was honoured with a feast and tearful speeches expressing heartfelt gratitude. The copies we delivered to the island and to communities in Australia and New Zealand were quickly snapped up, circulated widely, discussed, and debated by Rotumans.

Continuing the collaboration with Elizabeth, we then helped her to publish two other books, drawing on materials she had compiled and written over the years concerning Rotuman sayings and ceremonies (Inia 1998, 2001), as well as an updated Rotuman dictionary and English-Rotuman wordlist, with the help of two other Rotuman language experts (Inia et al. 1998). All three books were published by the Institute of Pacific Studies, and include both Rotuman and English. For Elizabeth's two volumes, Alan and I prepared camera-ready copy using a special font Alan had created to represent the somewhat complex set of diacritics used in the written Rotuman language (for Wilson Inia's biography, some of the diacritics had to be penned in by hand; by the time the dictionary had been published, a wider range of diacritical symbols was available to the printer). This approach – while labour-intensive on our side – kept production costs down and helped make the books affordable for local audiences.

The process of producing Elizabeth's books was so enjoyable and the reception of the books by Rotumans so rewarding that we determined to pull together and publish a history of the Rotuman people, drawing not only on our own research but also on archival sources. For nearly fifty years Alan – and later, I – have been compiling published and unpublished materials about Rotuma in our home office. In the early 1990s we also tried to help establish a physical archive on Rotuma for all published and unpublished writings about Rotuma, but our efforts were fruitless as the grant proposal we helped the Rotuma District Officer draft never cleared the Fiji government bureaucracy. Since 1996 we have used the Rotuma Web site to make available numerous historical documents and photos that

would otherwise be difficult if not impossible for most Rotumans to locate (Alan will discuss the Web site this afternoon; see also Howard 2002). We have also posted all the academic articles we have written about Rotuma. Because such a large proportion of the worldwide Rotuman community lives in urban areas, the Internet works well for providing access to many such materials. Although the island of Rotuma is now wired for the Internet, the cost of access is prohibitive, so we periodically make CD copies of the Rotuma Web site for high schools, hospitals, and so on. Also, Rotumans who can go online print materials from the Web site to mail to their relatives on the island and elsewhere.

Still, most of our articles as well as the other archived materials had been written for academics, and were framed in the disciplinary debates and conventions of the time. We were determined to write a Rotuman history for Rotumans, in a way that they would find interesting and meaningful. This involved several choices, including some that academic publishers we consulted discouraged us from making:

1. We quoted as many sources as possible, Rotuman voices as well as colonial officials, missionaries, and researchers, including our own interpretations while acknowledging them as such. As an example, we considered Rotuma's religious conflicts of the late nineteenth century from the perspectives of the English Methodists and the French Catholics as recorded in their letters and diaries, and of a Rotuman chief, Albert, as recorded by J.S. Gardiner in an 1898 publication. Multiple versions make for a longer book, but better reflect the complexity of reality.
2. We chose visual richness, by including more than one hundred photographs, drawings, and maps. Because the images not only illustrate but also amplify the information, we devoted a lot of time, effort, and money to obtaining images from archives around the world.
3. Although we drew on our earlier publications for some sections of the book, we avoided discussions of other anthropological literature and the use of disciplinary jargon. We did, however, include some interpretation informed by anthropological perspectives, for instance, in analyzing the metaphoric content

of a legend about Tongan invaders as giants to show its resonances with other, more straightforward historical accounts.

4. We organized the history by topics and by a general rather than strict chronology (e.g., a history of the economy, of population and health, of the missionaries and religious strife), to enable the use of the book as a reference work by Rotumans with interests in one area or another.

5. We noted one underlying theme – Rotumans’ preference for autonomy at all levels, from personal to island – but did not consciously use it to structure the book (something one academic reviewer criticized us for).

For several reasons, most especially cost and ease of distribution, we ultimately decided to make the Rotuman history available through one of the world’s largest print-on-demand publishers, Trafford Publishing. Using the skills we had developed while preparing Elizabeth Inia’s books, we laid out camera-ready copy of the text, again with correct Rotuman diacritics. Generous colleagues drew the maps and prepared the cover and inside illustrations, without charge. The paperback version of *Island Legacy: A History of the Rotuman People* is now available worldwide from Trafford’s Web site for US\$33 (or \$36 for hardcover), or even less from some of the major online booksellers (Amazon.com has the hardcover for \$29 US) – compared to the \$50 or \$60 US estimated cost quoted to us by an academic press. In addition, Trafford insists on paying royalties (something we are not used to receiving as academics), which we are donating entirely to a scholarship fund we established in 2006 for students from Rotuma High School, to underwrite the costs of attending Form 7 (the year between high school and university) at a school in Suva. We also purchased more than a hundred copies at the author’s discount and mailed them to Rotumans who have supported our research over the decades and to everyone who helped with the preparation of the book.

While some established anthropologists do return materials in various forms to their host communities, such efforts generally earn no academic acknowledgment and sometimes involve significant costs in time and money. Junior scholars therefore often find it difficult to make such projects a priority as

they are under pressure to publish for academic audiences. In 1999, Dorothy and David Counts called on the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania to support the publication of research materials for Pacific Island communities. After exploring various alternatives for how best to do this, the ASAON Board asked Dorothy, David, Alan, and me to organize special sessions in 2005 and 2006 to come up with concrete plans. The sessions resulted in the establishment of a new ASAON program, the Grant to Return Indigenous Knowledge to Pacific Islander Communities (GRIKPIC). Open to ASAON members, with priority to junior scholars, GRIKPIC provides financial support for such publication projects in amounts up to \$1,000 US per year, paid for out of member dues and contributions. The first GRIKPIC grant was awarded in 2007 to Haidy Geismar, to help underwrite the publication of a Bislama-language publication, *John Layard Long Malakula 1914-1915*. With the help of ASAON and several other organizations, one thousand copies of the book have been printed and will be made available to schools and other educational organizations in Vanuatu.

Applications for GRIKPIC 2008 are now being accepted. The guidelines stress issues such as those raised in this short paper, including making sure the publications are appropriate to and useful for the community (see ASAON 2007). It is hoped that ASAON's official acknowledgment and support will help raise the profile of and validate this practice in academia.

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MOTS-CLÉS

Restitution – patrimoine immatériel – retour des données
– ethnographie – Rotuma – îles Fidji – partenariat –
publication