

THE FIJI CONNECTION: MIGRANT INVOLVEMENT IN THE ECONOMY OF ROTUMA

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The island of Rotuma is relatively remote, located 465 kilometres north of the northernmost island in the Fiji group, and only slightly closer to Futuna, its nearest neighbour. Rotuma has been politically affiliated with Fiji for more than a century, first as a British colony and since 1970 as part of the independent nation. Rotuma's people are, however, culturally and linguistically distinct, having strong historic relationships with Tonga, Samoa, and other Polynesian islands to the east.

On their home island Rotumans by and large enjoy a comfortable standard of living with plenty of food, adequate housing, and an ever-increasing number of motor vehicles and household appliances. Their lifestyle is supported by a combination of local production, earned income and reciprocal exchange with Rotuman migrants, most of whom live elsewhere in Fiji. In contrast to many of the Pacific Islands economies characterised by the MIRAB model,¹ foreign aid plays only a small part in the economy of Rotuma, as in that of Fiji as a whole.² Questions of the environmental, political, and other costs of accepting aid aside, Rotuma and Fiji thus are not confronted with post-Cold War prospects of drastic economic change such as those facing the Federated States of Micronesia, where funding from the United States is declining under terms of the 1986 Compact of Free Association,³ and French Polynesia with the possibility of permanent cessation of France's nuclear testing programme.⁴

Furthermore, unlike Pacific Islands such as Western Samoa which are strongly reliant on international links for migration and remittances,⁵ balance of trade problems and immigration restrictions are moot for Rotumans, who enjoy freedom of movement and commerce

¹ Bertram and Watters (1985, 1986)

² Ward (1993: 4); see also Baker (1992)

³ Connell (1992)

⁴ Poirine (1992) dubs the French Polynesian version of MIRAB 'ARABE' (Aide, Rente Atomique et Bureaucratie Envahissante); reviewed by Finney in press.

⁵ Shankman (1978, 1993); Macpherson (1992)

with the rest of Fiji. Political affiliation with Fiji has been central in facilitating Rotuma's economic well-being, not only in providing government jobs on the island, but by allowing Rotuman migrants in-country access to opportunities for education and employment, and ease of interaction with those on the home island.

This paper draws upon census and other public records, historical accounts, prior studies of Rotuman culture and migration, and 12 months of field research on Rotuma between 1987 and 1991. Of particular relevance are two studies conducted in 1989: a 13-week daily activity survey of 17 households in one village⁶ concerning household income, expenditure, production and exchange practices; and a survey of 415 of the 489 of the households on the island (85 percent), which included questions about household members on Rotuma and off-island, employment, remittances, and household goods. A similar study of all island households, conducted by Alan Howard in 1960, is used for comparison.

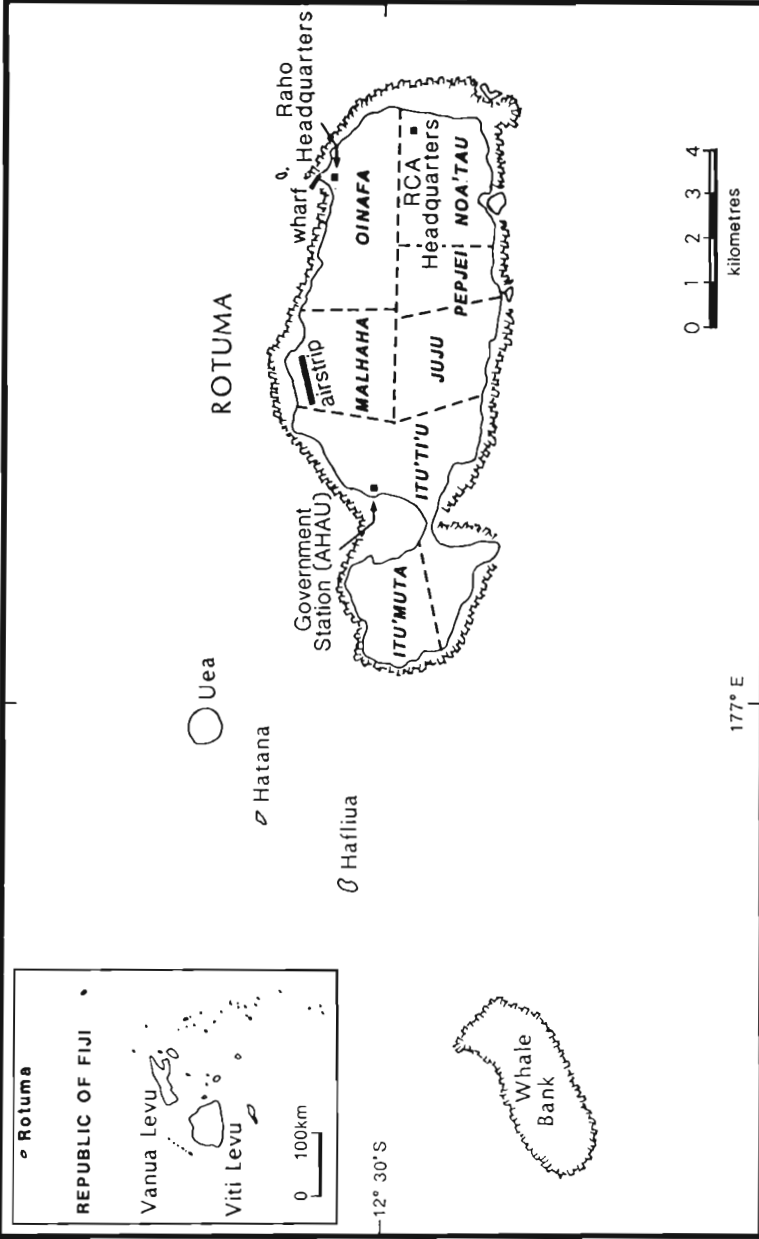
LOCAL PRODUCTION: FOOD AND COPRA

A fertile volcanic island of 43 square kilometres, Rotuma is surrounded by a fringing coral reef of varying width and productivity and a number of small offshore islets (see Figure One). The main, inhabited island is composed of seven districts, which vary in numbers of households from 29 (Pepjei) to 134 (Itu'ti'u). In 1989 household sizes ranged from 1-16 people, averaging 5.3 persons. Rotumans cultivate a range of starchy staple crops including taro, yams, sweet potatoes, cassava, breadfruit, and bananas, as well as coconuts, numerous varieties of fruit and assorted vegetables. Most Rotuman households keep chickens and pigs, and some raise a few goats or cows as well. Meat from these animals, or fish, shellfish and seaweed from the surrounding waters are eaten as accompaniment to the basic starchy foods. Rotuman households are generally self-sufficient, although a cultural value of generosity, especially towards kin (*kainaga*), promotes frequent reciprocal assistance and sharing of food and other resources.

Local food production formed the basis for commerce with European ships in the nineteenth century, when the island was a favourite stopping place for whalers to reprovision. Rotuma also began a brisk trade in coconut oil, which gave way to copra in the 1870s. In addition to trading with passing ships, Rotuman men eagerly seized opportuni-

⁶ The total village, one of three in a district, was composed of 26 households, separated into two geographic areas by a stretch of uninhabited, wooded land. The 1989 study involved all 17 households in one contiguous area.

ONE



Rotuma — with fringing reef and offshore islets

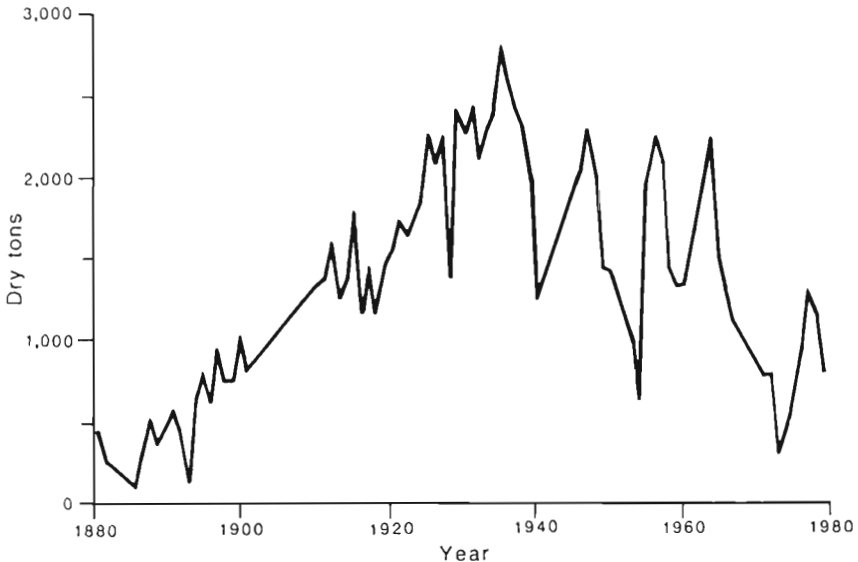
Sketch map only. Not drawn to scale. District boundaries are indicative only.

ties to sign on as crew, or to work in the pearl fisheries in the Torres Straits, diving and managing boats.⁷ They earned both good wages and a reputation for competence and reliability.⁸

After cession to the British Crown in 1881, Rotuma was incorporated into the Colony of Fiji, and was closed as a port of entry. Rotumans continued to seek opportunities for earning and adventure on ships, though they had to go to Fiji to do so. Copra, which became the island's primary cash crop, also had to be shipped through Fiji. Various firms handled the copra and sold imported foods and other goods on Rotuma, the most long-lived being Morris Hedstrom and Burns Philp.

Environmental and local infrastructural factors contributed to dramatic fluctuations in Rotuma's copra production over the past century (Figure Two). Hurricanes, for instance, led to lowered output in 1939, 1948 and 1972. The introduction of motorised transport in 1924 allowed increased output, but a lack of drying and storage facilities and inadequate shipping forced Rotumans to limit production in the 1940s and the late 1960s.⁹ Copra prices had an impact on the amount of copra Rotumans cut, though the result was not always consistent. In 1935

TWO



SOURCE: ROTUMA DISTRICT OFFICE. OUTWARD LETTERS: ANNUAL REPORTS.

Estimated copra exports from Rotuma for selected years 1881-1979

⁷ Rotuma District Office, *Outward Letters* (24 November 1883); Allardyce (1885-6: 132)

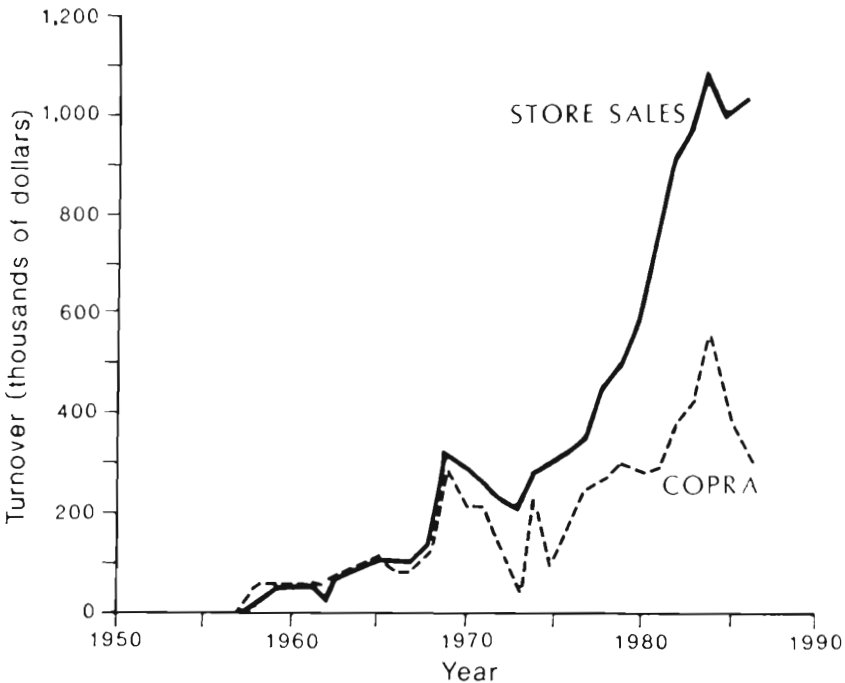
⁸ See e.g. Boddam-Whetham (1876: 272)

⁹ Rotuma District Office, *Outward Letters: Annual Reports* (1939-68)

Rotumans produced a record amount of copra when the price was low. More often they responded to low prices by returning to food gardening. When increased demand for copra led to higher prices, as it did during World War II, Rotumans 'dropped everything and cut copra,' so much so that the Rotuma council had to limit the number of days Rotumans could cut copra in order to ensure they also worked in their gardens.¹⁰

Although world demand affected the overall price for copra, local prices paid on Rotuma reflected additional costs in bagging and shipping it to ports in Fiji such as Suva or Levuka. This price discrepancy, along with the price fluctuations, were of much concern to Rotumans, who suspected the firms handling copra sales of treating them unfairly. In 1926 Rotumans boycotted the firms for about six months, buying nothing from the shops and selling no copra.¹¹ The tension between Rotumans and the firms ultimately led to the forma-

THREE



SOURCE: ROTUMA COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION LIMITED:
COMPARATIVE FIGURES FOR THE YEARS 1957-1986.
Rotuma Cooperative Association turnover, 1957-1986

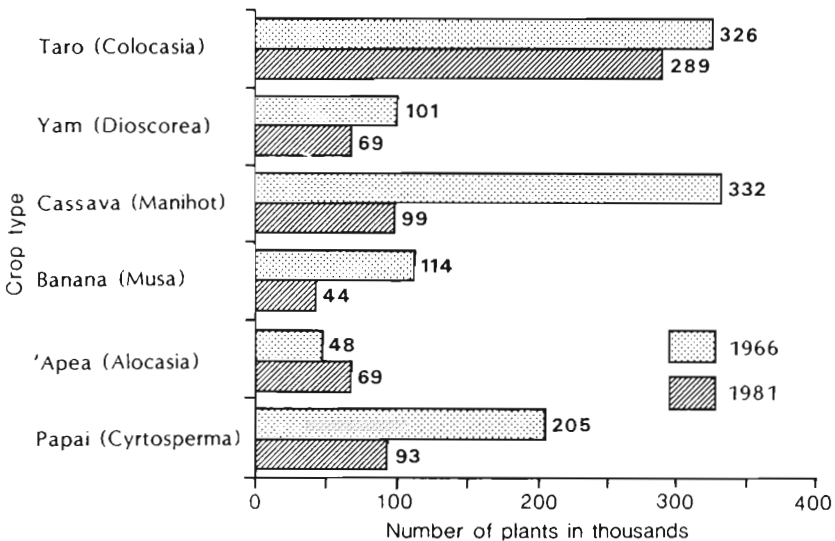
¹⁰ Rotuma District Office, Outward Letters: Minutes of the Rotuma Council (5 March 1942)

¹¹ Rotuma District Office, Outward Letters: Annual Report (1935)

tion of the Rotuma Cooperative Association (RCA), which succeeded in taking over the copra trade and forcing the firms off the island by the late 1960s. RCA has handled virtually all of Rotuma's copra and store sales until recently, when another Rotuman cooperative, called Raho, mounted a successful challenge to RCA's dominance.

RCA turnover figures from 1957 to 1986 clearly display a 'jaws effect' as imports diverge from copra exports (Figure Three).¹² Although store purchases closely paralleled copra earnings in the first decade of RCA's tenure, purchases began outstripping copra in the mid 1970s, and by 1986 the cash value of store sales was three times that of copra sold. Over the same period production of local food crops also fell (Figure Four), and Rotuman diets included growing proportions of imported foods such as rice and noodles, tinned mackerel and corned beef. Houses made from imported cement, wood and corrugated iron all but replaced Rotuman-style thatched dwellings, and western-style furnishings, household appliances and motor vehicles are increasingly common (Table I).¹³ Despite evidence of increasing consumer affluence on the island, no major resource-based industries other than copra have been developed. Sources of income originating outside Rotuma are obviously enhancing the standard of living on the island.

FOUR



SOURCE: RECORDS OF ROTUMA COUNCIL, COMPILED AND REPORTED BY DISTRICT CHIEFS

Crop plant counts in Rotuma, 1966 and 1981

¹² Bertram and Watters (1985: 510)

¹³ See Rensel (1991) for a history of housing change on Rotuma.

I Selected consumer goods on Rotuma by years obtained

ITEMS	no date	pre-1970	1970-74	1975-79	1980-84	1984-89	Total owned
Sewing machines	38	68	55	51	79	59	345
Refrigerators	6	8	8	18	43	38	121
Motorbikes	9	2	9	28	53	75	176
Lawnmowers	4	1	6	9	29	43	92
Bicycles	2	1	5	8	26	38	80
Freezers	3	1	0	5	8	20	37
Generators	1	1	2	1	8	26	39
Cars & trucks	4	0	0	4	5	18	31
Videos	0	0	0	0	4	22	26
Washing machines	0	0	0	0	1	9	10

Source: 1989 survey of 415 households conducted by Jan Rensel and Alan Howard

OVERSEAS AID

Direct overseas aid has not played a large part in Rotuma's economy; rather, aid is funnelled through the Fiji government. It is beyond the scope of this paper to address foreign aid to Fiji other than mentioning that according to figures cited in a recent article by R. Gerard Ward, Fiji's aid per capita in 1988 was among the lowest in the South Pacific, and her domestic exports outstripped aid by a factor of six.¹⁴ To the extent that foreign assistance contributes to the national government, some portion is represented in the government's allotment to Rotuma. After Hurricane Bebe in 1972, for instance, monetary aid from other countries allowed the Fiji government to provide the Rotuma Island council a loan of \$F100,000 for rebuilding homes, most of which had been damaged or destroyed.¹⁵

The Fiji government regularly provides infrastructure and supports personnel on Rotuma for health services, education, public works, communications, etc., perpetuating the priority given to public welfare by the colonial powers.¹⁶ The Rotuma Island Council, comprised of district chiefs and elected representatives and charged with overseeing local affairs, receives a government subvention that has increased substantially in recent years, from \$F52,000 in 1984 to nearly \$F135,000 in 1992.¹⁷ In addition, the Fiji government contributed to the

¹⁴ Ward (1993: 4, Figure 1)

¹⁵ One Fiji dollar is worth approximately \$US0.67

¹⁶ See Bertram and Watters (1985: 508)

¹⁷ Parliamentary Debates (11 December 1984); District Officer Rotuma, personal communication, March, 1992

construction of district meeting halls and continues to support other self-help projects on Rotuma through annual grants; from 1989 to 1992 self-help grants amounted to \$F10,000 each year. Assistance for economic development has been comparatively minor. Rotumans have sought foreign aid for development schemes, though on a small scale, such as \$F6,000 for fishing equipment for the women's groups, and grants of \$F1,500 to \$F7,000 for the Raho Cooperative's copra dryers or fuel dispensing facilities. Success depends largely on personal connections with people who know how to access funding sources.

EMPLOYMENT ON ROTUMA

The exodus of the firms from Rotuma in the late 1960s due to the success of the Rotuman Cooperative Association meant a loss of jobs at a time when wage-earning opportunities on the island were already scarce. In his 1960 study, Howard recorded 16 Rotumans working for Morris Hedstrom and Burns Philp, not only as copra handlers but as clerks, storekeepers, carpenters and other skilled labourers. The government employed 28 Rotumans, including 14 teachers, one nurse and three clerks. Twenty-three Rotumans worked for the nascent RCA as storekeepers, secretaries, skilled workers and other labourers. Three people were employed by private individuals and one, a minister, by the Methodist Church.¹⁸

Although still limited, opportunities for employment on Rotuma have more than doubled in the past 30 years. In 1989, 174 individuals on the island earned wage income, and the numbers have grown since then. The Fiji government continues to be the largest source of jobs on the island. According to 1992 government figures, there are 37 school teachers and 69 other government employees. Retaining its position as the second largest employer, the RCA listed a total of 79 workers in the same year. The Raho Cooperative has grown from two employees in 1989 to more than 30 employees in 1992.

Other than working for the government or one of the cooperatives, wage-earning opportunities on Rotuma remain scarce. A small number of Rotumans work for the various religious denominations on the island, for the local branch of the National Bank of Fiji, or for Fiji Air, which serves the island with weekly flights. In 1989 three people reported owning retail shops, and seven individuals were hiring themselves out as skilled or domestic workers. In addition 15 retired government workers reported pension income. A total of 201 individuals, all between the ages of 16 and 76, were listed as earning income on the 1989 survey. This represents 16 percent of Rotuma residents

¹⁸ Howard field notes (1960)

between those ages, or one in six. Because 28 households included two, three, or even four persons earning income, only 40 percent (167) of the 415 households surveyed included wage, pension, or self-employed earners.

As Connell points out in a recent article on Micronesia, comparing numbers of public and private sector employees reveals only partially the significance of government employment to Pacific Island economies.¹⁹ On Rotuma in 1992, the two cooperatives combined employed slightly more workers (109) than the government (106). But cooperative wages are much lower than government salaries; for instance, the average salary reported by school teachers in the 1989 survey was six times that of the average RCA worker (\$F200 per fortnight compared to \$F35). Types of work also differ. About a third of co-op workers handle copra or drive trucks; another third are shopkeepers; only 33 percent of positions require special skills or training for carpentry, electrical, accounting or administrative positions. In contrast, approximately two-thirds of government jobs on Rotuma require advanced education or training (school teacher, medical staff, agriculture officer, meteorologist, clerk, technician). Thus government employment on Rotuma provides not only significant numbers of jobs, but higher salary levels and greater opportunities for educated Rotumans. A limited number of Rotumans can return to the island and use their advanced education and training to make a living, but most continue to be drawn away by job opportunities in Fiji.

OTHER INCOME SOURCES

There are a variety of additional ways to make money on the island. Opportunities to generate large sums are few; income from most sources is small and sporadic. Some Rotumans seek earnings through casual labour, such as drying copra for one of the cooperatives, handling cargo from the boats which call at the island every few weeks, or working on occasional public works projects. Copra remains Rotuma's dominant crop export, but today copra cutting is pursued primarily by those with limited alternatives, or on occasion to raise cash for special purposes such as church fundraisers. During the 13-week village survey in 1989, only six of 17 households cut any copra, and one man recorded using his copra earnings exclusively for cigarettes.

A few entrepreneurs attempt to export crops such as yams, taro, cocoa, vanilla, or fish, lobster and other seafoods. Such enterprises are plagued with problems of storage, shipping, marketing and manage-

¹⁹ Connell (1992: 179)

ment, and most have met with only small scale, short-term success. More common are attempts to tap the income of those who earn wages or receive cash remittances from relatives off-island. In 1992 there were at least seven small retail shops selling imported food and goods. Recently many roadside stalls have sprung up to sell local produce, especially near the government station. While most of those who buy taro and yams are wage-earners, some are farmers whose own crops are not mature when needed. Rotumans also sell each other pigs, or butcher a cow to raise money. Those who are successful fishing, particularly the few with boats that can venture beyond the reef, find many on the island who are eager to buy their catch.

Rotumans with sufficient income occasionally give others money as gifts for special occasions, and respond to pleas for financial assistance from relatives less well off. Some also give money in thanks for assistance with gardening, cooking or laundry. While in the past Rotumans usually helped each other in reciprocal fashion without cash payments, in two arenas it has become the norm to pay a set daily rate for services rendered. One is house construction, especially when skilled workers do plumbing, electrical wiring and so on. The other is transportation. Increasing numbers of Rotumans who own trucks offer rides to individuals or groups at standard rates. Even relatives accept this practice, acknowledging costs of fuel and maintenance.

Of the various sources of income for households on the island, the most common is money remitted by Rotuman migrants. In 1989, 48 percent (201) of the 415 households surveyed indicated that they received cash remittances. Of these, 64 households (15 percent of all households surveyed) reported both wages and remittances. On the other hand, 111 households (some 27 percent) reportedly make do with neither, drawing instead on varied sources including copra, on-island food sales, sporadic exports and receiving gifts of cash for services to others on the island. In fact, most Rotuman households rely on a combination of strategies. As illustrated below, many income opportunities depend on the involvement of Rotuman migrants in Fiji.

M I G R A T I O N

Fiji census reports over the past several decades document a dramatic shift in the distribution of Rotumans, with an ever-increasing proportion recorded away from their home island (Table II). While the total population of Rotumans in Fiji (including Rotuma) has almost quadrupled over the past 65 years to 8,652 in 1986, the population on Rotuma itself has been declining since 1966, dropping by 16 percent to 2,707, in the decade 1966-76 alone. According to the 1986 census, 70 percent of Rotumans lived elsewhere in Fiji, with 46 percent concen-

trated in the Suva area. Although official counts in other countries do not enumerate Rotumans, data about absentee household members collected from Rotuma residents in 1989 suggest that Rotumans who have migrated internationally number several hundred.²⁰

II Distribution of Rotumans in Rotuma and Fiji, 1921-1986

Year	Number	Rotuma		Number	Fiji		Total Rotumans	
		Percent of total	Percent increase		Percent of total	Percent increase	Number	Percent increase
1921	2112	94%		123	6%		2235	
1936	2543	90%	+20%	273	10%	+122%	2816	+26%
1946	2744	83%	+8%	569	17%	+108%	3313	+18%
1956	2993	68%	+9%	1429	32%	+151%	4422	+33%
1966	3235	56%	+8%	2562	44%	+79%	5797	+31%
1976	2707	37%	-16%	4584	63%	+79%	7291	+26%
1986	2554	30%	-6%	6098	70%	+33%	8652	+19%

Source: Fiji Censuses

Colonial officials and Rotumans alike had worried about eventual depopulation of Rotuma,²¹ but these concerns have not been realised; in 1986 the number of Rotumans on the island was nearly the same as it had been 50 years earlier (2,554 compared to 2,543). As suggested by the MIRAB scenario, the main impact of migration has been to drain off net population increase.²² Early on, young men were the most likely to emigrate, leaving a surplus of females in the 15-40 age group.²³ In recent decades this imbalance has equalised, and in fact shifted slightly in the other direction. From 1956-86, the male/female ratio for ages 15-39 on Rotuma increased steadily from 90/100 in 1956 to 117/100 in 1986.

Meanwhile, the proportion of children under 10 on the island declined with each census, from 34.2 percent (1,024 of 2,993 total population) in 1956 to 27 percent (699 of 2,554) in 1986. Although the percentage of children age 10-14 fluctuated, there has been an overall decrease, such that the total proportion of children under 15 dropped by nearly 10 percent (from 48.4 to 38.8 percent, or 1,449 to 1,004 in absolute numbers) over the 30-year period. This change may be attributed at least in part to changing migration patterns. An examination of dependency ratios over time is instructive.

²⁰ See Howard and Rensel in press

²¹ See Gardiner (1898: 497); also Eason (1951: 88, 122-123)

²² Bertram and Watters (1985: 503)

²³ Rotuma District Office, Outward Letters (1 October 1881)

Bryant points out that according to the 1976 census the dependency ratio for Rotuma was high (118 dependants to 100 adults of 'working age,' that is, ages 15-59).²⁴ Bryant suggests that since fertility on Rotuma is actually declining, the high proportion of dependants on Rotuma can be attributed in part to the tendency of Fiji-based Rotumans to send their young children to Rotuma to be cared for by grandparents and other relatives.²⁵ But by 1986 the dependency ratio for Rotuma had dropped to 96/100. Furthermore, a comparison of the Fiji censuses from 1956-86 shows a steady increase in the dependency ratio for Rotumans in Suva, from 58/100 in 1956 to 67/100 in 1986. Whereas previously the Suva population of Rotumans included a higher proportion of pioneers, without spouses and children, because they now establish families - and keep their children with them - the population profile approaches that for the overall Rotuman population. The dependency ratios for Rotumans on Rotuma and in Suva both appear to be converging toward the overall dependency ratio for Rotumans, which in 1986 was 76 dependants per 100 of working age (Figure Five).

Although the dependency ratio is dropping on Rotuma, the percentage of the population 60 and over has more than doubled, from 4.3 percent (129 persons) in 1956 to 10 percent (258 persons) in 1986. By 1986, 50 percent of Rotumans 60 and older (258 of 519) were on Rotuma, whereas only 30 percent of the total Rotuman population lived there. This may be due in part to the fact that, more so than urban Fiji, Rotuma provides an environment in which older people are valued for their knowledge, wisdom and other contributions to their households and communities.

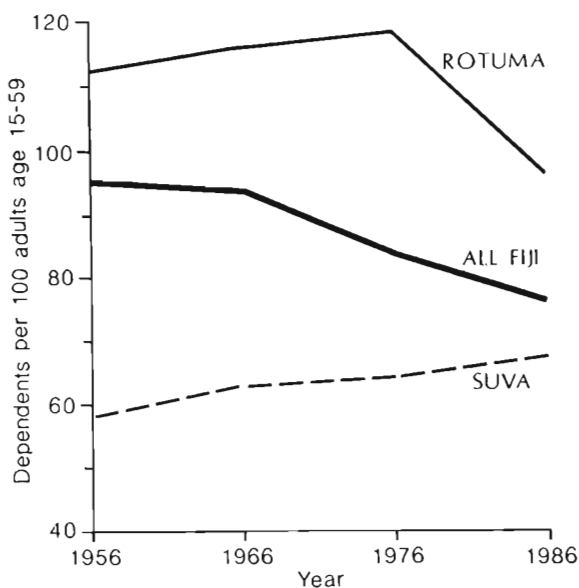
The high rate of emigration for Rotumans of working age is understandable. Fiji's diversified economy provides a broad base of employment. Rotumans in Fiji are employed not only by the government but by private organisations; according to the 1976 Fiji census, 583 Rotumans worked for the government while 1,042 held positions in the private sector. Rotumans are at no disadvantage for employment in Fiji; in contrast to Fijian Indians they are considered indigenous and most also belong to the same church called, significantly, the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma.

After young Rotumans leave the island in search of further education and employment, many opt to stay away, to marry and establish families and residences of their own. Some choose to go back to Rotuma, for shorter or longer periods, to visit, take a job, find a

²⁴ Bryant (1990: 140)

²⁵ Bryant (1990: 141)

FIVE



SOURCE: FIJI CENSUSES

Dependency ratios for Rotumans, 1956-1986

spouse, or resettle.²⁶ Whether or not they return, many Rotuman migrants maintain connections with their home island. Reciprocal visiting and sharing of resources are two important means of reaffirming ties, but there are other ways of equal and growing salience. The remainder of this article examines the shape of migrant connections, and the resulting impacts on the economy of Rotuma.

KINSHIP AND RECIPROCITY

As in many other Pacific Island cultures, reciprocity is central to Rotuman culture. Being *kainaga* 'kin' is a matter of both blood relationship and active demonstration of commitment through contributions of time, labour, and material resources. For geographically extended families, such connections remain important. The visitors, gifts and assistance flowing both ways between Fiji and Rotuma allow *kainaga* to maintain personal ties as well as access to valued resources. While the lifestyles of those on the home island benefit from infusions of cash and imported goods, the lives of migrants are enriched by culturally significant experiences, special foods and island-made handicrafts.

²⁶ See Howard and Rensel in press for a detailed discussion of Rotuman migration

Reciprocal Visiting and Assistance

Rotumans on the island frequently host visiting relatives. Between 31 July and 29 October 1989, 13 of 17 households in the village study hosted company from Fiji for stays of a few days to over a month (see Table III). In addition to short-term visitors, some Rotumans who settle in Fiji still send their children to the island to be brought up by grandparents, often at the latter's request. Children provide a focal point for Rotuman households, and are treasured and indulged.²⁷ Older children help with chores before and after school. During the 1989 village study, 4 of the 17 households included as longterm members children of sons and daughters who lived off-island. Shortly afterwards, three additional village households arranged to bring infant grandchildren to stay with them.

III Visits between 17 households in Rotuma and Fiji,
31 July - 29 October 1989

Village household	Visit Fiji	Host visitor
A	1	4
B		5
C	1	1
D	1	8
E	1	6
F		
G		
H		4
I	1	1
J	1	
K	1	6
L	1	3
M		
N		3
O	1	1
P	1	4
Q	1	3
Total Visits	11	49

Rotumans from the island go to stay with their families in Fiji or overseas, for months or even years at a time, while attending school, seeking employment, working, or simply on holiday. During the 13-week village study in 1989, members of 11 of the 17 households left to visit relatives in Fiji (Table III). According to the island-wide study the

²⁷ Howard (1970: 32-34)

same year, 953 of 999 adults on Rotuma over the age of 20 (over 95 percent of those for whom information was collected) had been away from the island at least once. Fifty-seven (6 percent) reported having travelled away from Rotuma more than ten times. One hundred and sixty-nine (17 percent) had been employed while away, and many of these had married and had children before returning with their families to live on Rotuma.

Lavenia Kaurasi's 1975 study of Rotumans in the Suva area offers a perspective from the migrant household. She found that 56 Rotuman families in the Raiwaqa community had a total of 80 relatives living with them. She interprets this as evidence that 'a Rotuman new to Fiji always has someone related to him who would give him a roof to sleep under until he settles down.'²⁸ Hosting visitors may expand to other kinds of assistance: at least 30 of the 50 employed Rotumans interviewed said that another Rotuman had helped them find their present jobs.²⁹ Meanwhile, visitors to Fiji find ways to help their hosts, especially during life crisis events when their assistance in feast preparation and looking after additional guests is especially valued.

Reciprocal Sharing of Resources

The sharing of material resources is another key means by which Rotumans, separated by distance, continue to demonstrate their commitment to each other. As indicated above, remittances are an important income source for island households. The easiest funds to track on a large scale come by way of telegraphic money order (TMO). In 1976 monthly totals sent to Rotuma by TMO ranged between \$F5,000 and \$F6,000.³⁰ Although prices on Rotuma for some commonly purchased foodstuffs such as tinned corned beef have more than doubled in recent years, the flow of TMO funds has at least been keeping pace; monthly amounts for the years 1982-88 averaged over \$F10,000.^{31,32} In addition, cash and cheques are mailed or brought by visitors, and a branch of the National Bank of Fiji opened on Rotuma in 1987, allowing even more convenient transfer of funds.

Respondents to the 1989 island-wide survey identified a total of 346 individuals living off-island sending cash remittances; some households listed as many as seven people sending financial support. Fifty-nine

²⁸ Kaurasi (1991: 171)

²⁹ Kaurasi (1991: 172)

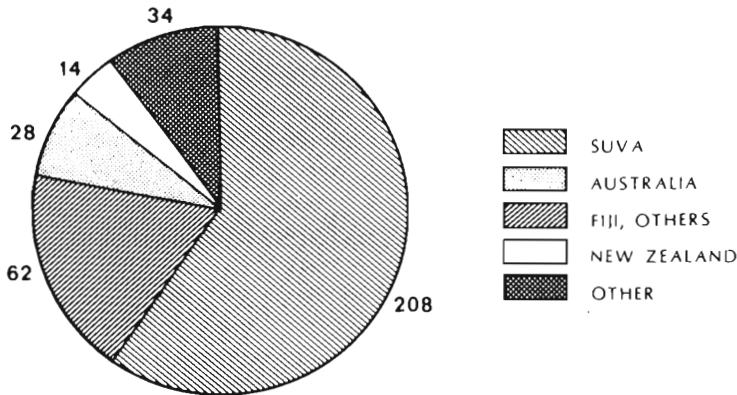
³⁰ Plant (1991: 210)

³¹ A one pound tin of corned beef at the RCA, sold for \$F1.10 in 1986, cost \$F2.38 in 1993.

³² Postmaster Rotuma, pers. comm., November, 1989

percent of those listed as remitters were grown children: sons (31 percent) or daughters (28 percent); the next largest group of remitters were siblings of the household head or spouse (brothers 15 percent, sisters 13 percent). Parents, spouses or affines each accounted for 1 percent or less of the total number of cash remitters, and more distant relations made up the remaining 10 percent. Most remitters were residing in Fiji (78 percent), with 60 percent in Suva alone (Figure Six). The predominance of Fiji, and Suva in particular comes as no surprise, given their proximity, the high population of Rotuman migrants residing there, and the relative ease of in-country money transfers.

SIX



SOURCE: SURVEY OF 415 HOUSEHOLDS ON ROTUMA CONDUCTED BY JAN RENSEL AND ALAN HOWARD.

Location of remitters to Rotuma, 1989

For 303 of the remitters, the amounts sent were reported; these ranged from \$F10 to \$F4,000, with a median amount of \$F100. Cash was sent primarily for general support, that is, to be spent on food and other household needs. In addition, remitters sent money gifts to meet specific needs, such as school fees, or special occasions, including Mother's and Father's Day, Christmas, birthdays and funerals. These amounts tended to be small, though many indicated that remittances for general support were received fortnightly or monthly. Larger amounts were sent (often solicited by those on the island) for church fundraisers, and for house improvement projects.

While money is appreciated, remittances in the form of goods are often preferred. For Rotumans, both on the island and away, material gifts represent time and effort and thus signify caring in tangible form. For migrants, Rotuman handicrafts, especially fine mats needed for ceremonies and the Rotuman pandanus to make them, are hard to come by. Gifts of produce from the island are highly valued in urban areas where garden space is scarce; and prepared Rotuman specialty

foods are relished. Similarly, Rotumans on the island appreciate gifts of purchased goods. A great variety of desirable items are not widely available on the island and must be ordered from Fiji; the process takes time, know-how, and connections. The store-bought foods, household goods, building materials, appliances and vehicles sent by relatives in Fiji concretely represent efforts expended on behalf of those on Rotuma, in terms of ordering and shipping as well as paying for the items. Material gifts flowing to and from Rotuma are thus doubly welcomed as tangible signs of caring.

Fifteen of the 17 households in the village study exchanged gifts of money, food and other goods with people living in Fiji (see Table IV). The intensity of interaction varied, as did the forms of reciprocity. Eleven households reported gifts of money, ranging from a few dollars to several hundreds. Fifteen households received food of various kinds (such as rice, flour, tinned or frozen meat) and eight were sent household goods or clothing.

IV Exchanges between 17 households in Rotuma and Fiji,
31 July - 29 October 1989

Village household	Received money	Gave money	Received food	Gave food	Received goods	Gave goods
A	2		1	1		
B	4		5	4	2	
C	2		1	1		
D	3		3	14	1	1
E		1	1	7		1
F						
G	1		2	2		
H			2			
I	4		1	3	1	1
J						
K			2	12	1	
L	1		3	2	1	1
M			1	1		
N	2		3	1	1	
O	9		1	4	1	2
P	11		4	3	2	1
Q	3		2	2		
Total						
Exchanges	42	1	32	57	10	7

The 1989 data show clearly that gifts also flowed out of Rotuma. Fourteen households shipped food to Fiji, and several did so repeatedly. Typical food gifts were baskets of taro, yams, and coconuts, as well as island fruits such as bananas, oranges, melon, pineapple, and

papaya, or prepared foods. Six households gave Rotuman mats, fans, and a locally made broom. Money gifts were not common³³, but one household gave a departing guest ten dollars.

BEYOND FAMILY TIES: OTHER FORMS OF MIGRANT INVOLVEMENT

Migrant Rotumans have become involved with their home island in significant ways that go beyond kinship reciprocity, notably district-based fundraising and large group visits, and collaboration and support in business affairs. While some interactions have been fraught with conflict and the longterm results are variable, these forms of involvement serve the purpose of allowing migrants to remain connected with their home island, and directly or indirectly affect Rotuma's economic well-being.

Group Visitations and Fundraising

In addition to reciprocal visiting and remittances between family members, Rotumans in Fiji and overseas organise various activities, including fundraisers and visits to the island. Rotuman migrants in Suva have formed groups based on their home districts on Rotuma. These groups hold meetings, dances, bazaars and other events both to interact with each other and to gather money for projects on Rotuma. For instance, the Oinafa district organisation contributed to the purchase of a diesel generator for their district; other groups have joined fund-raising competitions for improving the schools serving their home localities. In this way migrant contributions benefit each district as a whole rather than individual households.

District organisations also arrange group visits to Rotuma for Christmas and other special occasions. Group visits often involve hymn-singing and Rotuman dancing competitions, feasts and other arranged events. Organised trips provide opportunities for Rotumans, especially those who may not have established or maintained close kin ties on the island, to share a short and activity-packed stay with other visitors with whom they are more familiar. The groups also mobilise large contributions of food and money for Rotuma residents. The 1989 celebrations of the 150th anniversary of Methodist missionary arrival on Rotuma brought several hundred visitors to the island, preceded by substantial remittances of cash and goods to allow those in Oinafa

³³ Cash remittances historically flowed from Rotuma to Fiji as well as in the other direction. See e.g. Rotuma District Office, *Outward Letters: Minutes of the Rotuma Council* (8 January 1915), and *Annual Report* (1940)

district who were hosting events to make housing improvements and food preparations. For Christmas 1991, at least three separate Fiji-based Rotuman groups chartered ships to the island. International visits are much less frequent, but the New Zealand Rotuman community, including some 62 families as of 1991, hosted a visiting party of Rotumans in 1990, and promoted a group trip to the island at Christmastime in 1993.³⁴

Promotion of Business

More significant in terms of generating income is the involvement of migrants in collaborative business ventures on the island, especially the formation and management of cooperatives, the availability of bank loans, and attempts to initiate tourism.

(1) Rotuma Cooperatives

After the colonial administration passed an ordinance (No. 11 of 1947) establishing the position of Registrar of Cooperative Societies, several groups on Rotuma decided to form cooperatives, and eventually five 'canteens' emerged around the island. They struggled to survive with little capital, no management or bookkeeping experience, and antagonism from the firms, who often refused to do business with the co-ops or any of their members.

In 1953 a Rotuman migrant named Wilson Inia returned to the island and helped to organise an association of the local co-ops called the Rotuma Cooperative Association (RCA). A school teacher, Inia taught RCA workers bookkeeping, emphasising that accountability and regular audits were essential.³⁵ Under Inia's guidance, RCA flourished at a time when cooperatives in Fiji were foundering. By 1961 the subscribed capital of RCA was approximately four times that of the combined Fijian societies for that year (£23,754 compared to £5,797), although the Rotuman membership (485) was less than half the number of Fijian cooperative members (1,293).³⁶ As mentioned above, RCA's share of the copra trade grew steadily, eventually forcing the firms to close up shop on the island by the end of 1968.

For the next 20 years RCA dominated copra trade and store sales on the island. After the death of Wilson Inia in 1983 the RCA continued to apply his principles of accounting, but the leadership suffered from lack of business acumen and vision. Customers who desired better service and a wider range of products grew dissatisfied with RCA.

³⁴ Joine Langi, personal communication, June, 1991

³⁵ See Howard in press

³⁶ Howard (1970: 153)

Personal conflicts also contributed to attempts over the years to form rival co-ops, such as the Rotuman Planters' Association (1963-67) and the Rotuman Development Corporation (1975-79), but these efforts were short-lived. A Malhaha district group established a cooperative in the 1980s, not to handle copra but to manage the airport which opened in their district in 1981, and to start a fishing enterprise. With the help of Rotuman migrants they purchased a freezer and two boats, but conflicts within the group on Rotuma and between the Rotuma and Fiji contingents led to the demise of this co-op in 1991.

The Raho Cooperative, begun in 1977, originally faltered under financial mismanagement, but was reorganised in 1990 with help from Rotumans in Fiji with business experience, and an American, John Bennett, who is married to a Rotuman. With the aid of several grants and a few bank loans Raho has expanded and improved its infrastructure, including new copra dryers, fuel dispensing facilities and a walk-in freezer for frozen foodstuffs. The new Raho management has made a conscious practice of responding to customer demand for products and of offering a better price for copra than RCA. By 1992 Raho reportedly was handling more copra than RCA and an ever increasing share of store sales.

Raho is having a number of impacts on Rotuman's economy. Besides providing additional waged positions, Raho's copra price policy allows copra cutters to earn more (\$F7 per 100 pounds of copra rather than the \$F6 offered by RCA). Raho has introduced a number of innovations including an experimental solar copra dryer and a computerised accounting system, which they hope to use for job training as well.³⁷ In a change from prior cooperative practice, Raho does not own its own trucks. Rather, two men obtained bank loans to buy their own trucks, and subsequently were paid at a set rate to transport copra for Raho. These two individuals reported the highest incomes in the 1989 village study (see Table V). They were using their earnings for capital investment (making loan payments), and savings (a portion for regular truck maintenance), as well as household consumption and some redistribution (see below).

(2) Bank Loans

Although loans are not income, they are a significant means of access to ready cash, and affect economic behaviour on Rotuma.³⁸ In 1987, a Rotuman migrant was appointed chief manager of the National Bank of Fiji (NBF). Following his directive, the Rotuma branch of the NBF began granting loans to individuals with wages or other demon-

³⁷ John Bennett, personal communication, July, 1992 and July, 1993

³⁸ I am grateful to John Bennett for stressing this point.

V **Reported income for 17 households in one village on Rotuma,
31 July - 29 October 1989**

Income sources	Number of households	Amount earned	Percentage of total income
Government		\$F	
Employees	4	3,706	11.6
Casual labour	2	265	0.8
Retirement	1	1,542	4.8
Rotuma Co-op Assn			
Employees	2	1,052	3.3
Casual labour	3	335	1.0
Raho Cooperative			
Employees	1	540	1.7
Copra Truckers	2	10,077	31.4
Methodist Church			
Catechist	1	378	1.2
Retirement	1	144	0.4
Nat'l Bank of Fiji			
Employees	1	779	2.4
Driver	1	360	1.1
Remittances	13	4,495	14.0
Tourism	12	2,204	6.9
Survey	17	1,020	3.2
Copra	7	439	1.4
Interhousehold transfers			
Gifts	10	1,524	4.8
Services	10	1,559	4.9
Transport	7	956	3.0
Food/other sales	6	687	2.1
Total reported income		32,062	100.0

strable means of repayment. In addition to the two men who obtained truck loans mentioned above, other individuals took out loans to stock a retail shop, supply a bakery, and finance a yam export project. From January 1988 to June 1990 more than 130 individuals were also granted personal loans for housing improvements or to purchase vehicles, household appliances and furnishings including video tape players. According to bank records, most loans were being repaid on schedule. In a few cases relatives in Fiji or abroad had to contribute a significant share toward repayment, in effect as remittances.

(3) Tourism

To date Rotuma's tourism potential remains largely untapped. Divisions on the issue are rife on the island, both as to the potential

benefits and drawbacks to permitting tourism, and with regard to how any income should be distributed if it were allowed. There have been some experiments. Visitors come to the island from time to time, having arranged accommodation with families, and generally reciprocate their hosts with gifts and/or money.

Rotumans in Fiji from Oinafa, where the wharf was built in the 1970s, have assisted their counterparts on Rotuma in initiating limited tourism. After much community dissension, they managed to arrange for a cruise liner to stop at the island and disgorge a thousand or so passengers for one day, in 1986. This practice continued once or twice a year until, by 1989, Rotumans from around the island were taking advantage of the opportunity to sell food, souvenirs, or sightseeing rides in their vehicles. Gradually disagreements mounted over the distribution of landing fees, resulting in the cancellation of two trips scheduled for 1990 and 1991. According to a March 1991 *Fiji Times* article, this resulted in a loss to Rotumans of some \$F20,000 per trip.³⁹

Village Incomes

One indicator of the state of Rotuma's economy is the cash income available to island households. The information on income sources and amounts recorded during the 1989 village survey on Rotuma are summarised in Table V. With a few clarifying comments, these data can be used to make several key points relevant to this discussion.

(1) *Opportunities to earn large amounts were limited.* Immediately salient is the income received by the truckers who hauled copra for the Raho Cooperative, accounting for over 31 percent of total income recorded by the 17 households during the 13-week period.

(2) *Copra production was among the least significant of income sources.* Copra cutters from seven households earned an average of less than \$F63 during the survey. The only source providing less income was participation in the survey, for which each household received a gift of \$F60.

(3) *Income inequalities were mitigated somewhat by interhousehold transfers among several households.* Recirculation of cash in the form of gifts, thank you payments for services or driving, and food sales accounted for some 15 percent of reported income. What does not show in the cash tally are the nearly two thousand in-kind exchanges between households that took place during the survey in the form of

³⁹ See Howard and Rensel (1993), also Howard (1990: 277-279)

shared meals, reciprocal assistance, food gifts and free transportation.⁴⁰

(4) *Migrant involvement contributed directly or indirectly to the income of several households.* Remittances were received by 13 households, and amounted to 14 percent of the total income received by the 17 households studied. Migrant involvement is also key to a number of other income sources in the village. Twelve households benefited financially from the 1989 visit of the tourist ship, from their share of landing fees and giving rides and selling food to the visitors. The success of the two cooperatives continues to depend on the combined efforts of professionals in legal, accounting and government positions in Fiji along with those of capable and hard-working Rotumans on the island. Besides the two villagers who are financing their trucks by hauling copra for Raho, members of five households earned money working for one or the other co-op.

(5) *The Fiji connection is central to employment and retirement income.* All employers other than the cooperatives — the government, the Methodist church, and the national bank — are Fiji-based. A total of nine households drew income from these sources during the survey; one household, with two casual labourers and one fulltime employee, tapped three.

(6) *Villagers made use of a variety of income sources.* Every household drew upon at least three income sources; the average was five to six. The array of possible ways to obtain money, together with the base of local food production, allowed flexibility in choosing among strategies.

CONCLUSION

The myriad forms of interaction between Rotumans on their home island and elsewhere in Fiji have intensified dramatically since 1960 when Howard characterised Rotuma as a 'hinterland.'⁴¹ Two-way flows of information, cash and goods, but most importantly people have increased to the extent that it is now more accurately perceived as part of a single, multilocal community.⁴² Flows are clearly facilitated by relatives, although there is no evidence that family groups make decisions for individuals as suggested by Bertram and Watters' notion of 'transnational corporation of kin.'⁴³ In fact, ties between Rotumans

⁴⁰ I address the implications of cash income for Rotuman practice of reciprocal exchange in Rensel (1994).

⁴¹ Howard (1961)

⁴² See Howard and Rensel in press; also Chapman (1991)

⁴³ Bertram and Watters (1985: 499); see also James (1991), and Hayes this issue

on the island and in Fiji go beyond kinship; migrant involvement on Rotuma not only enhances the standard of living enjoyed by individual households but contributes to the well-being of whole districts. Forms of help transcend remittances and fundraising, actually creating new earning opportunities on the island. Political incorporation with Fiji has thus proven exceptionally beneficial to the economy of Rotuma. Rotumans are able to choose among a variety of income sources, and to respond flexibly to fluctuating circumstances.

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