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SEVEN

Youth in Rotuma, Then and Now

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INTRODUCTION

The island of Rotuma is located at 12° south latitude and 177° east longitude, some three hundred miles north of the Fiji group, with which it has been politically affiliated since 1881. It is a similar distance to the south of Tuvalu, while Futuna, its nearest neighbor to the east, lies 240 miles distant. The closest islands to the west are in Vanuatu, approximately 500 miles away. Rotuma is therefore somewhat isolated, a factor that helps to account for its unique characteristics. The Rotuman language, for example, has peculiarities that distinguish it from others in this part of the Pacific. Although it shows heavy borrowing from both Tongan and Samoan, linguists do not regard Rotuman as a Polynesian language, and its classification has been a matter of debate (Biggs 1965; Churchward 1940; Grace 1959; Pawley 1979). Physically Rotumans show a considerable amount of variation, but in general they resemble the Polynesians to the east rather than their Fijian countrymates. The culture of the island also has a distinctly Polynesian cast to it.

When I first arrived in Rotuma to begin dissertation research in December 1959, I was not much beyond adolescence myself. I found it relatively easy to make friends with the young men in my village. They were as curious about young people in America as I was about what interested them and how they spent their time. When my younger brother arrived to assist in my research—he was only nineteen years old at the time, and unmarried—it made investigating the subculture of youths all the easier. He quickly became part of the young men's group and accompanied them on their various adventures. They instructed him and gossiped in his presence. Much of what I have written about courtship and other aspects of adolescence on Rotuma is based on his experiences and what his Rotuman friends told him.¹

I did not return to Rotuma until 1987, when I was in my mid-fifties. Much

had changed.² Whereas Rotuma had previously been governed as part of the British Colony of Fiji, it is now part of an independent Fiji. A wharf had been built in the 1970s and an airstrip was opened in 1981, lessening the island's isolation. In 1960 two-thirds of the Rotuman population were resident on the island, with the remainder in Fiji. In the early 1990s only a quarter of all Rotumans lived on Rotuma. The rest were mostly in Fiji, although substantial numbers now reside in Australia, New Zealand, Europe, and North America. The economy of the island, once almost entirely dependent upon copra exports, now is buoyed by remittances from relatives employed abroad. Money is more plentiful and the material standard of living has improved considerably. Concrete houses have supplanted thatch structures. Refrigerators, motorbikes, pickup trucks, indoor toilets, power lawn mowers, and other appliances are now commonplace.³

The subculture of youth has changed as well, in more ways than I am able to relate. Researching adolescence was much more difficult for me in the late 1980s than it was in 1960, for Rotuman teenagers were less interested in talking to a middle-aged man about their activities than they were to a twenty-five year old. As a result I had to rely on information provided by their parents (many of whom were teenagers during my first visit). Nevertheless, some changes are rather obvious, and I will focus on them in this chapter.

Life Cycle Categories

Rotumans divide the life cycle prior to adulthood into three stages corresponding to infancy, childhood, and youth. Nursing infants are called *lāriri' susu* (milk children); *lā' riri'* (without the modifier *susu* [milk]) is applied to children past weaning until they finish school, or reach the age of about sixteen if they remain in school. Those who have left school, or are past the age of sixteen, are referred to as *haharagi* (youths). The term *haharagi* means fat, stout, or plump; in good physical condition; youthful; and unmarried, in addition to adolescent (Churchward 1940:212). In all its meanings it has a distinctly positive connotation.

These categories specify social roles and expectations rather than physical stages. Since children begin school at age five or six and may continue into their late teens, and since the term *haharagi* is applied to unmarried men and women well into their twenties and beyond, there is no direct correspondence with the English category of "adolescence."⁴ My focus in this chapter is on the period of youth, as defined by Rotumans, rather than on a period defined by age or physiological development.

I begin by describing the subculture of youth in 1960. This is followed by an account of continuities and changes as I experienced them during my recent visits.

THE SUBCULTURE OF YOUTH IN 1960

In 1960 Rotuma was governed by a district officer appointed by the British governor of Fiji and advised by a council of chiefs and elected representatives. The district officer was very much in charge and ruled over the island with a firm hand. His orders had the force of law behind them, and although Rotumans are masters of passive resistance, on the whole they followed his orders. The district officer saw to it that roads were maintained and villages kept clean and sanitary. This meant organizing labor, much of it done by young men. Communal labor was also used to repair thatched houses, in the preparation of feasts, and for various church-related projects. Again, the young men provided the core of labor in most communities. Though not formally organized, they worked as teams, usually under the direction of a district chief, or subchief.⁵

The economy of the island was based on typical Polynesian subsistence crops, including taro, yams, breadfruit, cassava, bananas, and various tropical fruits. Pigs and chickens supplemented fish as main sources of protein. For those not employed by the government or one of the trading companies operating on the island, copra was virtually the sole source of income. When copra prices were high, money was relatively easy to come by; when prices dropped, it took long, arduous hours of work to earn only a few shillings. Copra cutting and drying was a prime occupation of young men.

Of the seven schools on Rotuma in 1960, three (two primary and one secondary) were Catholic and four (three primary and one secondary) were under government control. All the schools, with the exception of the Catholic secondary school for boys only, were coeducational. The secondary schools went up to Form 4 (grade 10), after which students desiring further education had to emigrate to Fiji. Approximately two-thirds of Rotuman children had left school after completing eight years or less, and slipped into the role of *haharagi*. The period of "youth" thus began for most at about age thirteen or fourteen.⁶

While in school, children were generally excused from doing serious work such as gardening, fishing, mat making, and food preparation. They might take on light chores around the house, but spent most of their time out of school playing with friends or studying. Youths, however, composed the mainstay of community labor. During this period they learned proficiency in performing adult tasks—the boys to plant and fish, to build houses and make canoes, to prepare food for feasts; the girls to weave mats, to keep house, to fish, and to prepare everyday meals. Since employment was scarce on the island, youths spent most of their time engaged in subsistence activities and copra cutting.

Historically young men on Rotuma have taken every opportunity to travel. In the eighteenth century, for example, Rotuman men eagerly sought employment aboard European vessels and sailed to all parts of the globe (Allardyce

1885-1886:132-33; Bennett 1831:77, 480; L. Forbes 1875:226; see also Howard 1995). In 1960 the main destinations for Rotuman youths were urban centers in Fiji, where they could obtain employment and experience city life. Many left Rotuma, some for brief excursions, some for several years, some permanently. On Rotuma itself, however, motorized transportation was limited to only a few trucks, two automobiles, and a handful of motorbikes, limiting mobility. For the most part, pedal bikes (difficult to negotiate on roads that vary from sandy to rocky), horses, and walking had to suffice. Youths were therefore largely confined to their home communities most of the time.

Social Relations

The most important relationships for youths in 1960 were with members of their own age group. Boys in particular did not spend much time with their families. As soon as a lad left school he began to associate with the older boys in his village, initially in a somewhat marginal way. During this socialization period no one pressured him to participate in events; the degree to which he got involved was mostly up to him. He might form a close alliance with another boy his age, or perhaps several other boys, thereby establishing a separate subgroup within the larger group of youths in the community. By the time a boy was seventeen or eighteen, however, he and his age mates were usually absorbed into the core of the local contingent. By then they had learned expected behavior by listening to the older boys, by helping them perform various tasks, and by imitating their actions.

During this stage males ordinarily slept away from their parental homes, although each customarily continued to eat with his own family. This was not a formal arrangement. For sleeping houses young men often commandeered structures in temporary disuse, or they would go to the home of an agreeable bachelor or widower. In only a few villages did the boys build their own structures, none of which projected an image of permanence. Likewise, groups were not formally organized, nor were hazing or initiation rituals prerequisite to participation. Membership was unspecified, so it was difficult to determine their composition. Relationships within the groups were generally egalitarian, although older boys frequently asked younger ones to do things for them and the latter ordinarily complied.

Restrictions were much greater on adolescent girls, who did not form peer groups of the same intensity. They slept at home and contributed to household activities more regularly than did males of the same age. Nevertheless, girls formed close friendships with peers and, provided their parents were not too strict, spent some time in mixed groups. They spent most of their time at home with their mothers, grandmothers, and aunts, however.

Modesty in demeanor and dress was required of young women. They were

obliged to be fully covered when appearing in public. Wearing shorts, or a bathing suit, was unthinkable. When bathing in the sea, or spending time away from home, they donned a *ha' fali* (one-piece cloth wrap-around). At special events they wore neat, clean dresses, *ha' fali*, or skirts and blouses, but avoided wearing anything that would draw special attention. They wore little or no jewelry, used no lipstick or cosmetics. The object was to look respectable but not to stand out.

Same-sex siblings generally acted warmly and affectionately with one another, and if close in age participated in many of the same activities. When performing serious work older siblings had the right to give instructions and direct activities, and their juniors generally complied. Between siblings of the opposite sex a mild avoidance taboo was the rule. Brothers and sisters rarely would go to the same dances or other youth-oriented social functions. They said they would feel overly shy in one another's company and would not have a good time. At home they were restrained and respectful to one another, and did not participate in the raucous joking that characterized interaction between same sex siblings and friends.

Activities

Although young men formed the nucleus of communal labor they did not regard the obligation as an imposition, since most communal events involved feasting and fun as well as work. They relished the opportunity of working together with friends, even under trying conditions. For example, while discussing the preparations in progress following a hurricane warning, a young man of twenty exclaimed, "We [the young men] are really hoping there will be a storm. Then we'll all get together and go from house to house, tying things down, fixing roofs and doing whatever needs to be done. It's lots of fun." His elders, who stood to lose much in the way of copra (and hence money), crops, and property if the storm were severe, did not share his attitude.

Despite their importance as workers, young men were granted a great deal of license by their elders, who often turned a blind eye to youthful pranks and evasions. Young men were generally absolved from regularly contributing to their households unless there were no married adult males to carry the burden. In general, Rotumans saw youth as a time for fun and recreation, and for courtship—something of a golden age. The real burdens of responsibility came after marriage, when couples started families of their own.

Nevertheless, young men farmed and fished, and contributed, albeit irregularly, to their parental households. Often they maintained plantations that they farmed together, on ground requisitioned from one of the larger landholders in their locality. Typically, each boy developed a plot of his own and disposed of the produce as he saw fit. Some food was contributed to the household in which he lived, some was cooked and eaten on special occasions, and some donated

toward community feasts. In the latter case the boys sometimes presented food as a group, rather than as individuals.

Sports—primarily soccer, rugby, cricket, and the indigenous sports of *hula* (wrestling) and *tika* (dart-throwing)—also preoccupied the unmarried men. For competitive events they trained in earnest, giving up smoking and holding team practices several times a week. During a “season,” a soccer, rugby, or cricket team practiced for two or three hours every afternoon except Sunday, sometimes under the supervision of a teacher who had learned the finer points of the sport in Fiji or New Zealand. Most practice sessions consisted of playing an intrasquad game; little time was devoted to learning specific techniques, and strategy was rarely discussed. As a result, athletes tended to reach peak performance quickly, but did not improve beyond their gross abilities.

Sports clubs—ephemeral groups organized to play games of European origin—formed when a particular sport generated sufficient interest. A specific sport's season was usually initiated by a group, or groups, of young men who casually took it up. During 1960, for example, a number of groups formed for the purpose of playing table tennis and soccer. It all began when workers at the government station set up a ping-pong table. At first only a few government employees and their friends played in their spare time, but before long regulars began holding informal competitions. The idea caught on and tables were built elsewhere on the island—one at the Rotuma Cooperative Association headquarters in the district of Noa'tau, one at the Catholic Mission Station in Juju, and one in the main village of Motusa. These places became headquarters for sports clubs, which soon included most of the young men on the island (including many who were married). At irregular intervals the clubs issued challenges to one another, initiating interclub competitions. Interest in table tennis waxed strong for a while, and within a remarkably short time many young men who had never seen the game played before became excellent competitors. Equipment used met European tournament specifications and international rules governed the matches.

About six months after the table tennis craze began, an interest in soccer developed. Each club purchased uniforms and equipment and began regular practice sessions. Eventually cricket replaced soccer. Ultimately, interest in organized sports would wane to the point that the clubs would cease functioning. Girls' clubs, organized for the purpose of playing basketball and field hockey, emerged and dissolved in the same way.

The requirement for hosting feasts at interclub competitions contributed to the disintegration of sports clubs. At the very least clubs were expected to provide refreshments to visiting teams; initially this might include only beverages and cakes, but eventually one of the groups would invite others to share a meal as well. A multiclub competition that consumed the better part of a day, requir-

ing a meal in between, might stimulate the escalation. Visiting clubs felt obliged to reciprocate, indeed, not simply to reciprocate, but to prepare a more elaborate repast. Each club escalated in turn until the demands became excessive, and members started dropping out because they could no longer afford to participate.

At the height of interest, club organization became quite complex. The Ahau club, to which I belonged, was perhaps the most elaborate. We elected officers, including a chairman, secretary, and treasurer, and meetings followed parliamentary procedure. The chairman assigned a committee to frame a constitution. When the club needed money to purchase equipment, we initiated three methods of raising it: (1) levying a subscription fee on each member, (2) holding European-style dances and retaining proceeds from admissions and refreshments sold, and (3) fining members for tardiness or missing practice sessions and meetings. Eventually our meetings took on a businesslike flavor, with a major portion of the time spent discussing finances. This contributed to making participation less enjoyable for most of the members, and to diminished interest.

Dart throwing (*tika*) and wrestling (*hula*), two traditional sports still played in 1960, were differently organized. Spontaneous interest initiated competitions in both sports, but instead of forming clubs, formal matches were organized between the two sides of the island, the "sunrise" and "sunset" sides.⁷

A few youngsters in one of the villages would initiate *tika* competitions among themselves. The darts were made of straight reeds about three feet long, with hardwood tips; the object was to throw them as far as possible along a sandy stretch of road. Distances were calculated from the point at which the darts were thrown to their final resting place, a good proportion of the throw being a slide along the ground.⁸ As interest mounted, more and more young men participated, and villages challenged one another to informal matches. Whole districts got involved, and eventually the men from one side of the island agreed among themselves to issue a challenge to the other side. They made their desire known to the chiefs of their districts, and if agreed, the chiefs negotiated a time and place to hold a formal competition.

A significant portion of the island's population attended formal *tika* matches, which involved a good deal of ceremony. The host side (the one accepting the challenge) prepared a feast to which each family contributed. All the chiefs attended and were afforded traditional courtesies. They in turn made speeches of thanks, appreciation, and apology.

Wrestling (*hula*) was also initiated by the casual play of young men and was similarly organized. As the seriousness of play increased, intradistrict and intrasectional competitions were held, and the best man selected. Then, as in the case of *tika*, the young men requested their chiefs to challenge chiefs from

the other side of the island who, if agreed, organized matches to select their champion. The ultimate competition consisted of a number of individual matches, resulting from spontaneous challenges, but only that between the champions from each side counted in determining which side won. The mode of wrestling was similar to sumo wrestling in Japan; the first man thrown to the ground lost.

Sports competitions were taken seriously, especially between rival villages or districts, driven by an unmistakable will to win. Young men often responded badly to the frustrations of losing, and fights sometimes broke out toward the end of a hard-fought game. As a rule, the more important the game, the more frequent the flare-ups.

Although the nature of their tasks differed, the activities of unmarried women paralleled those of unmarried men in many respects. Just as young men formed the nucleus of male communal labor in their communities, young women provided the core of female communal labor. On any occasion when a village or district hosted visitors, the young men prepared and cooked most of the food, and the young women did most of the serving and cleaning up. The spirit of comradeship that pervaded boys' work gangs also characterized those of girls.

Young women were as enthusiastic about sports as their male age mates and were equally keen competitors, and equally temperamental losers. Major sports for women were netball (a version of basketball) and field hockey, both of which were taught in school as part of physical education (as were cricket and rugby for the boys). As with males, females sporadically held competitions between groups from different localities. Both males and females participated in track-and-field events as part of physical education at school, and once a year, on the day celebrating Rotuma's cession to Great Britain (May 13), they represented their districts in an islandwide competition held at the government station.

In their households young women assisted with cooking, washing clothes, cleaning the house, and fishing on the reef. They were also given much of the responsibility for taking care of infants and young children. This they did enthusiastically, providing as much indulgence as did parents and grandparents. Young women also learned to weave mats, a primary occupation for women at that time. Mats are critical items in Rotuman ceremonial exchanges, and fine white mats in particular (*apei*) are highly valued. Fine mats are a major form of wealth for Rotuman families and are produced exclusively by women. One of the main ways in which a young woman could enhance her reputation in 1960 was to become a skillful weaver of mats.

Church provided another venue for activities. The Methodist Youth Fellowship (MYF) periodically held special events and met regularly in most parishes. In the district of Noa'tau, for example, members held prayer meetings every

Tuesday, and on Thursday evenings they met to play table tennis, cards, and checkers. No age limit was imposed, and many individuals in their late twenties participated. This is but one indication of the flexibility of the category *haharagi* at the time. The Catholic Church had comparable religious and recreational programs for their youths.⁹

When young men and women got together informally in groups they frequently played guitars, ukeleles, and sang Rotuman songs—songs they often composed themselves. They also adapted tunes from other Pacific islands or translated popular English songs. In order to overcome their shyness, young men sometimes had an alcoholic drink or two, but rarely got drunk. Since spirits and beer were expensive and not readily available, home-brewed orange wine was their main indulgence.

During the Christmas season opposite-sex youths had special opportunities to get together, in large measure because young women were allowed opportunities to stay out late. This period is called *av mane'a* (time to play); it is the hot season on Rotuma, when little serious work gets done. The period lasts for approximately six weeks, from the beginning of December until mid-January. A main activity of youths during this time is "going *fara*" (to ask or to beg), which involves mixed groups of young men and women going from village to village at night, entertaining selected households with song and dance in exchange for food and drink. Younger children are allowed to tag along in the early evening, but the youths and adults who join them often stay out until early morning.

Fara groups usually form spontaneously. Someone will suggest to his or her friends that they go *fara* one evening, and word is passed around the village. Groups vary in size from half a dozen to thirty or so participants. Anyone who wants to can join a group, which has no formal organization. During the course of an evening individuals, including some from other villages, might join while others drop out.

Typically, a group quietly approaches a house and sits down in a convenient place. Properly done, the first piece is instrumental only, played on guitars and ukeleles. Then the rest of the group joins in with a song. Anyone might introduce a song by starting to sing; the rest of the group joins in, and those with guitars and ukeleles provide accompaniment. Usually, however, participants discuss which song they will sing next after completing the last one. People make suggestions, one is agreed upon, someone commences singing it, and the rest join in. Most songs are accompanied by dancing, and one by one the merrymakers get up and choose a partner, dancing in Rarotongan style.¹⁰ Everyone, except those playing instruments, normally dances at least once at each location.

After a short period of time, people inside the house make an appearance, often after aroused from sleep, and bring lanterns to light the scene. They douse

the performers with sweet-smelling powders, perfume, and pomade in a show of appreciation. Host families sometimes bring out tins of biscuits, watermelon, pineapples, or other food and drink to reward the performers. They sometimes participate in the dancing, and youths from the household may join the group for the remainder of their excursion.

For boys and girls who are romantically interested in each other, *fara* presents opportunities to pair off prior to the conclusion of a night's activities and to spend some time alone together. A favorite pastime following *fara* is trying to figure out who has gone off with whom.

Another traditional form of entertainment during the Christmas season, more prevalent in times past but still existent in 1960, was *manea' hune'ele* (beach games). As the name suggests, they were played on the beach, away from a village. One game, *kau mo'mo'o* (to lie in wait or ambush), was a version of hide-and-seek, in which first the girls, then the boys, would take turns hiding. If a boy found a girl with whom he shared a romantic interest, or visa versa, they might linger a while before rejoining the group. Another game, *hil lea 'ou vārvāreag* (choose your favorite) was a version of spin-the-bottle, except without a bottle. Girls and boys would sit in rows, about ten feet apart, facing each other. The girls would begin by tying a kerchief over the eyes of one of their members, twirl her around several times, then face her toward the line of boys. The first boy she touched must kiss her, or the boys lose. Then it was the boys' turn, and so on until they tired of it and switched to a different game. Another game involving a blindfold was *he' tāe sāmuaq he* (call out the nickname). In this instance the boys and girls formed a circle, with the blindfolded individual in the center. The circle moved around the one in the middle until he or she managed to touch someone. The circle then stopped and the blindfolded person tried to identify the person whom he or she had touched. If the one in the middle gave the correct answer the person touched became "it" and took his or her turn in the center. The fun of the game came from the fact that everyone's family has a humorous story (*tāe sāmuaq*) associated with them. These are generally known, but if not, participants were obliged to tell something funny about themselves or their families before the game began. A word or two referring to the story became people's nicknames, which were chanted by the people in the circle. For example, one man's great-grandmother had reputedly rejected some gold coins as buttons without holes. When he was in the center the group would chant "buttons" over and over again.

Quite often the last game played was 'a *papai* (to eat *papai*). In this game the boys and girls sit one behind one another in a line. The boy who sits at the front of the line is called the "king." The others, who are behind him, are called *papai* (large edible tubers, *Cyrtosperma* spp.). One person, usually a boy, is designated owner of the "plantation." He walks around his plantation carrying a

stick. Another boy, sitting some ten or so meters away, is designated king of another land. He has a servant with him, usually one of the strongest boys. During the course of the game, the owner of the plantation tells the king at the head of his *papai* that he is going away, and asks the king to look after his garden. When the owner leaves, this is a signal for the foreign king to send his servant to the king of the plantation to beg him for a *papai* he might feed upon. The plantation king tells the foreign king's servant to pick any one of the *papai* he wants to take back to his master. Then the servant goes over to the girl selected by the foreign king, attempts to pick her up bodily, and carry her away. The boy immediately behind the girl in line is her "root," and holds her around the waist in an effort to keep her from being carried off.

If the servant is successful the foreign king gets to hug the girl (symbolically eating the *papai*). When the owner of the plantation returns, he counts his *papai* and, when noticing one missing, scolds the king at the head of the line. He then punishes him, usually by having him stretch out his hands and hitting them with the stick he is carrying. Different boys in turn are chosen to be the alien king, and if each one keeps his *papai*, the game ends with paired-off couples.

The Christmas season was especially important in 1960 since it offered Rotuman youths opportunities for courtship denied them during the rest of the year, when girls were far more restricted. *Fara* and beach games provided culturally structured frames for courtship which relaxed the prohibitions that ordinarily applied to romantic escapades. The message communicated was that courtship cannot be trusted to individual whims, which might result in a couple's defying the cultural order. By providing an approved, culturally ordered framework for courtship, Rotumans reinforced the sense of obligation courting couples owe to their kinsmen and their communities.

Courtship

In 1960 parents strove to groom their daughters as desirable spouses. Although this required that they learn to perform all the requisite housewifely chores, it also required, more importantly perhaps, learning the decorum of a proper Rotuman lady. This included modesty with a touch of shyness, consideration for others, and respectfulness. A subtle sense of humor and unobtrusive coquettishness were also assets, but should not be salient. Olfactory sensations were particularly stressed, and youths of both sexes made use of sweet-smelling flowers, oils, and pomades to enhance their attractiveness. Female socialization aimed at producing desirable wives because it was virtually the only role open to women who remained on the island. Success meant attracting a man who would be a considerate husband, a warm and loving father, and, most important of all, a good provider. The ways in which a girl learned the essential aspects of self-presentation and strategies for getting a desirable husband were varied

and complex; some were overtly taught by parents, but much was learned by unconscious imitation of culturally approved models.

With regard to premarital sex, Rotumans maintained a double standard. Boys were expected to pursue sexual gratification whereas girls were discouraged and, in most cases, closely guarded. Restrictions on unmarried girls date back to premissionary days, when brides were required to undergo virginity tests at marriage. Control of premarital sex was more social than moral, however, and although missionary teachings have reinforced the moral dimension, social aspects of control remained salient. In traditional times virgins were more desirable as wives because they had demonstrated their submission to the cultural order and so were expected to conform to the rules governing proper wifely behavior. Virginity thus enhanced a girl's desirability and increased her chances of making a suitable match. Since the dominant residence pattern following marriage was uxorilocal (the husband coming to reside with his wife's family), this usually benefited her entire kin group, in some cases yielding economic, political, and military benefits.

Rotuman attitudes toward premarital sex in 1960 were rooted in a conception of sexual intercourse that involved a male taking license with a female. Whether or not she consented was not the issue. Sexual license was considered justified only when a young man accepted corresponding responsibilities, which meant, in effect, that he support her economically. To state this arrangement in terms of social economics, sexual license over women was a valued "commodity," and for a man to take it without paying the appropriate price (accepting responsibility for her economic support) was equivalent to stealing. As a result, social controls over sexual behavior were strong.

In precolonial times a girl's sexuality was "owned" by her local kinship group, and all its members benefited from a favorable marital transaction. Correspondingly, members of a girl's local kinship group took an interest in controlling her behavior; by taking sexual liberty with an unmarried girl, a boy was committing an offense against the entire group. Despite the fact that localized kin groups no longer operated as effective social units in 1960, and no other clearly circumscribed group stood to gain in a comparable way by a "good" marriage, premarital chastity was still valued for girls. Sexual transgressions were regarded as offenses against a girl's family and her close kinsmen. They implored her to remain virtuous and not to shame them, and attempted to control her movements so that she did not have the opportunity to do so. Brothers, in particular, monitored their sisters' behavior, for they were most likely to bear the brunt of ridicule if their sisters acquired a reputation for promiscuity.

This is not to imply that girls were merely passive players in the game of courtship. They certainly were not, and in fact sometimes took initiative and exercised control over budding relationships. But they were encouraged to dis-

play a submissive demeanor and were generally thought of as potential victims rather than as persons with strong volitional controls.

In order to understand the nature of Rotuman courtship behavior I found it necessary to relate it to the pattern of childhood socialization. Three child-rearing practices in particular appeared to play an important role: a high degree of bodily contact and physical demonstrations of affection, the association of affection with material indulgence, and discipline by ridicule (Howard 1970).

As an apparent consequence of gratifying physical contact in childhood, youths seemed motivated to express affection physically, frequently walking hand-in-hand with friends of the same sex. At first I found it rather strange to see husky young men walking holding hands, but the implication of homosexuality that might be inferred in San Francisco or London did not apply. I came across, in fact, no evidence of exclusive homosexuality at all.¹⁴ It simply seemed that when Rotumans got to like each other, they expressed their fondness physically, regardless of sex. As far as courtship was concerned, this meant that romances were assumed to become quickly sexualized. Any hint of a romantic attachment therefore had sexual overtones.

The association of emotional commitment with material indulgence carried over into courtship with two important ramifications. First, giving became instrumental for the gratification of emotional needs. Thus young men, in order to express affection to their girlfriends, periodically gave presents bought with money earned from cutting copra. Girls were in a more difficult position. For a balanced relationship, each person was expected to give and receive gifts of roughly equivalent value. Girls, however, having less access to cash, had less to give; the main gifts they had to offer in reciprocation were sexual favors. They therefore experienced considerable pressure to sexually engage a boyfriend who regularly provided store-bought presents. Only disreputable girls had sex without regard for reciprocation, the implication being they wantonly enjoyed sex for its own sake instead of granting favors as a gift of love; such girls were regarded as fair game. Second, women with no economically productive males in their households sometimes sought to alleviate material deprivation by forming sexual alliances with men of means. This cannot be interpreted as prostitution, for the element of kindness was fundamental. A man who impersonally offered money or gifts in exchange for sexual intercourse would likely have been harshly refused. Sex, in other words, was clearly construed as the product of an intimate interpersonal relationship rather than as an appetite-satisfying indulgence.

Discipline by ridicule also shaped courtship patterns. As a result of relentless teasing for breaches of social rules, Rotumans learned to avoid situations that might expose them to ridicule, and since courtship behavior is a prime target for teasing and banter, they scrupulously avoided its public display. Affectionate behavior was particularly inhibited in public, since it was regarded as a

form of showing off. As one young man put it, "If a boy and girl are affectionate in front of others, it would be just like they were saying they are the only people in the world in love." In effect, they would invite ridicule by tacitly suggesting that they cared so much for each other they were impervious to the taunts of their fellows. Few Rotumans are so insensitive. Even married couples took care not to express affection overtly, and often went separately to church or other community functions.

For these reasons courtship in 1960 was surreptitious, and lovers carefully concealed their alliances. Unrelated boys and girls avoided being seen talking privately to one another. If they were seen together, others might infer they were lovers, or in the process of becoming lovers. This would result in social pressure from their families, urging that the presumed affair either be legitimized through marriage or terminated. Indicative of such caution was the pattern of social intercourse at European-style dances.

The dances were usually held in a meetinghouse or a house temporarily unoccupied. Generally only unmarried man and women attended, but sometimes young married couples would participate. Guitars and ukeleles provided music, with a persistent Polynesian rhythm accompanying every song, although many tunes were recognizable adaptations of American pop hits. The girls sat around on chairs, and at the beginning of each dance boys trickled over and asked them to dance with a tap on the knee, usually while looking away. During the dance couples did not talk to each other. Their faces were fixed and rigid, with somewhat vacant stares. After each dance the boys escorted their partners back to their chairs, without at most a polite word of thanks. Between dances the boys went outside where they joked with their friends, discussed various girls, and gossiped. If some of the guys had brought a container of home brew, beer, or a bottle of liquor they kept it outside and passed it around. They said they drank because they were nervous and needed to gain courage to ask girls to dance. A boy rarely danced with the same girl more than two or three times in an evening, for fear others would begin to tease him.

Fear of ridicule did not suppress courtship behavior, of course; in fact, it sometimes had a reverse effect. A boy and girl might be seen talking innocently together, but when the gossip and joking started they might decide to go ahead and become lovers since people were talking about them anyway. Rather than suppressing courtship, social pressures led to an elaboration of the process, bringing into play all the ingenuity that youths could muster. A game of intrigue was continually afoot, with notes passed through trusted friends and clandestine meetings arranged on the spur of the moment. Boys usually made the first approach, although they were generally reluctant until they had some indication that their advances would not be rebuked. Often time was short, involving only a few seconds in which to make intentions known. In these precious mo-

ments a boy would profess his love and attempt to arrange a meeting, but if the girl was willing, if she had been waiting for his approach, a great deal could be decided very quickly. Meetings usually took place in a secluded spot to minimize chances of detection. Girls sometimes sneaked out of their houses at night for a rendezvous under the pretense of going to the toilet. More rarely, since it involved a greater risk of discovery, a boy would sneak into his girlfriend's house under cover of darkness with the expectation of leaving before her parents or brothers awoke. Other opportunities sometimes presented themselves when throngs of people returned from evening church services or other communal events. Partners would inconspicuously drop away from the group, then go to a prearranged meeting place where they would have a brief encounter before returning home.

This is not to suggest that most girls readily took partners in clandestine affairs. Even if a girl liked a boy who approached her, concern for family motivated her to avoid casual involvements. A good deal of seduction, coupled with convincing reassurances, was usually required to persuade a girl to grant sexual favors. Typically a suitor would proclaim the intensity of his love and promise marriage. The girl might respond to his overtures with the tactical assertion that he was not really sincere—that he only wanted to have his way with her and would then leave, making a fool of her. He would attempt to allay her anxieties by giving her presents to demonstrate his sincerity, and unless something intervened, negotiations would continue until the girl had extracted a sufficient demonstration of commitment to justify, in her own mind at least, her submission.

Sweethearts rarely joked in each other's company and on the whole acted exceptionally respectfully to one another. If a boy engaged in banter with his girlfriend, others (including the girl) might interpret it as an indication that he took the relationship lightly, that his promises were insincere. Getting involved in a romantic affair made a girl vulnerable to devastating ridicule, and her boyfriend needed to reassure her by demonstrating that he took her seriously. Only a disreputable girl permitted her lovers to joke without taking offense. If a girl and boy joked freely with one another, therefore, people assumed they had no romantic interest in each other. Correspondingly, a youth with a romantic interest in another likely reacted to certain types of joking—especially banter with sexual or romantic overtones—with embarrassment rather than reciprocation. Thus an embarrassed response to joking sometimes signaled romantic interest, and a girl wishing to rebuff a boy might purposely banter with him to indicate her lack of interest. A boy making an unwanted overture exposed himself to possible ridicule if the girl chose to treat it as a joke and make it public.

For these reasons courtship took on the quality of an intricate game based on subtle signals and attempts to interpret barely perceptible cues. Since restraint characterized relationships between unrelated boys and girls under any circum-

stances, one could not easily identify lovers, although in their anxiety to avoid suspicion they might appear *too* shy with each other in public.

Young men learned about sex and courtship predominantly from their peers, since parents rarely discussed such topics with their children. By listening to the older boys talk about their experiences, real and fantasized, they learned most of what they needed to know about the game of courtship. Young men generally confined their discussions to sexual encounters with disreputable girls. They generally kept secret affairs with a respectable girl, either because they had feelings for her and had honorable intentions, or because they considered it strategic to do so. At most they would inform close friends, whose assistance they might solicit in winning her over. Informing friends of an interest in a particular girl had the effect of declaring her off-limits. On the other hand, by indiscriminately publicizing an affair with a respectable girl, a boy risked public censure. He could expect adults in the community to demand that he either propose marriage or terminate the relationship.

Young men often experienced first coitus with an older woman, usually a widow or divorcée with prior sexual experience, or alternatively with a disreputable girl around his own age. An older woman would sometimes take the initiative in teaching the young novice the finer points of lovemaking. In return, her lover would provide regular supplies of food and other necessities. In some instances a young man might become sufficiently attached to an older woman to marry her.

When their initial experience was with a disreputable girl, older peers generally offered instruction and encouragement. Girls known for promiscuity, and there were not many, usually lived in households devoid of a dominant male; indeed, the absence of a father or older brother appeared instrumental in the development of promiscuity, for it was they who exercised the strongest controls over a girl's behavior. Households lacking a dominant male sometimes became hangouts for young men, where they often ended up spending the night. In exchange for sexual favors they helped to support the family by bringing food and doing masculine chores.

Young girls often had no knowledge of sexual physiology; in some cases they were reputedly so ignorant that they could be induced to sexual intercourse without realizing it. Feigned ignorance could also be an excuse for a girl, allowing her to skirt responsibility for her submission.

Since none but a few of the most educated persons practiced contraception, sexual liaisons involved a high risk of pregnancy, but an extensive analysis of demographic data indicates that only about 20 percent of the young women became pregnant before marriage (that is, gave birth to a child when single or in less than eight months after a wedding). Considering the commonly held stereotype of Polynesian sexual practices, this figure is strikingly low. Four out of

five unmarried girls were not sexually active enough to get pregnant. Adolescent sterility might have been a factor, but effective social controls more likely accounted for this relatively low rate of premarital pregnancy.

When an unmarried woman learned that she was pregnant she would commonly confront her lover and remind him of his promises. If sincere and willing to marry, he would take appropriate steps, but otherwise would terminate the relationship. People then regarded the girl as tricked, provided she had not been promiscuous or previously gotten into trouble. Her family held the boy responsible in contempt, but would not otherwise harass him. If he formally apologized to the girl's parents, and accepted economic responsibility for the child's support, he could minimize antagonisms, but a young man who gained a reputation as a chronic philanderer became an object of scorn rather than a hero, even to his own kinsmen.

MARRIAGE

The golden years of youth abruptly ended at marriage. Even before the ceremony, people impressed on young couples the solemnity of the step they were taking, or in some cases, that was taken for them.

Three principal types of marital arrangement existed on Rotuma in 1960. Most prestigious was *sok fāeag* (to join through talk), characterized by formal negotiations between the boy's and girl's families. The young man, or members of his family desiring the match, initiated negotiations by sending a representative to the girl's family to speak on his behalf. A suitor often sent his father or an eloquent uncle, but if he wanted to add weight to the proposal, he would recruit a man of rank—a subchief, or even the district chief—to present the overture. According to custom the girl's parents could make the decision without consulting her, although that was rarely the case, but some marriages were in fact arranged between individuals who barely knew one another and had not courted.¹² An accepted offer initiated a series of gift exchanges, culminating in an elaborate wedding ceremony. Properly arranged marriages brought honor to the families involved for several reasons: they were premised on the presumption that the girl was virginal and hence untainted; they followed prescribed custom, therefore reinforcing it; and they involved feeding large segments of the community at a series of feasts. Following a *sok fāeag* wedding, custom called for the couple to stay with the wife's family, at least for an initial period.

A second type of marital arrangement was called *fu'u* (to stay). This took place when a boy went to stay at his girlfriend's house, amounting to a declaration of intention. In 1960, *fu'u* marriages commonly occurred between couples who had been lovers. When revealed, the girl's family usually accepted the boy's proposal, and he remained in their household until a legal marriage was ar-

ranged. Going *fu'u* could also be a strategic move, especially when the match was opposed by either family. In other instances boys were encouraged to go *fu'u* as a means of avoiding the expense of a *sok fāeag* wedding. This was more likely if the couple's sexual liaison were common knowledge, since under such circumstances the most important aspect of a *sok fāeag* wedding—the implication of virginity—would be absent.

The third type of marital arrangement, *taupiri* (to follow), involved the girl going to live in the boy's home. A rare occurrence in 1960, it was the most shameful, especially for the girl. If indeed a legal wedding ensued, people referred to it in disparaging terms, using the phrase *fita'ma a'ma'ma'akia iria* (just to make them clean). Such unions only resulted when a girl's family completely rejected her suitor, or when they had arranged a match in spite of her attachment to another boy. Going *taupiri* was therefore an act of outright defiance, for which a girl had to formally apologize in order to regain her family's good graces (Malo 1973:13).

Integration into the Community

On the whole, youths integrated well into their communities in 1960. Young women made significant contributions to their households by taking on important tasks like cooking, cleaning, and tending children. Their mat-making activities added both to their family's and community's status by providing prestigious items for exchange. They were valued for their potential to marry well and to bring home a husband who would enhance their family's and community's work force. Though young men were granted considerably more license they formed the core of communal labor and acted responsibly vis-à-vis their families and neighbors. They often contributed significant amounts of food for feasts as well. Though by no means submissive, their actions rarely caused their elders consternation. Occasionally they drank too much and slept too late, or stole someone's chicken to have a midnight snack, or failed to show proper respect to a chief, but these antics were considered typical of young men and were readily forgiven.

THE SUBCULTURE OF YOUTH IN THE 1990S

Following the termination of British colonial rule in 1970, when Fiji gained its independence, responsibility for governing Rotuma shifted to the Rotuma Council. District officers are still appointed to the island, but their powers are substantially reduced. Council politics has therefore replaced executive rule (see Howard 1989; 1991). No one is now in a position to give orders and command compliance. As a result, communal labor is strictly voluntary. Young men and women still supply the labor core for communal events, but only when it suits

them. For weddings, funerals, and feasts they generally can be relied upon, but for repairing roads and cleaning up villages their participation is more problematic.

The economy of the island now depends more on remittances from relatives abroad than on copra sales. Although more paying jobs are available than in 1960, few are open to adolescents just out of school. From time to time, various business enterprises require help but the pay is low, and occasionally a major project, such as laying telephone lines, offers temporary employment, but for the most part cutting and drying copra remains the major source of income for young men. They may supplement this by raising pigs, goats, or cows which they can sell, sometimes to their own relatives, for feasts. They spend money on *kava* (a drink made from the root of the *piper myhisticum* plant) and beer, on music tapes, on transportation (especially if they own a motorbike), on clothes, and on various church activities. Young women have more difficulty obtaining money since there are fewer jobs calling for their services. They may sell *fekei* (native puddings) or baked goods and may hold fund-raising events for specific purposes, but otherwise remain financially dependent on their families.

The school system on Rotuma has not substantially altered, although the Catholic secondary school has closed; postprimary Catholic children now attend the government high school, which now goes up to Form 5 (grade 11). Today children remain in school longer, delaying their entry into the youth subculture. Approximately half of the children on the island between the ages of fifteen and nineteen, surveyed in 1989, had gone beyond grade 8.¹³ As in 1960, school children are excused from contributing labor to the community.

On the whole, demands on youthful labor have lessened, with the preparation of feast foods the main exception. The shift from thatch to cement dwellings has resulted in less need for routine repairs—a task at which young men excelled. Nowadays house building requires more skilled (adult) labor, which is often paid for (Rensel 1991). Young women are much less confined to their houses, although they continue to assist with childcare and routine chores. In general, the youth of today are far more mobile. Many have motorbikes, some drive cars or trucks for their families, and all have access to public or quasipublic transportation. Whereas in 1960 going to another district was a major event, today it is routine. This means that youths have a much wider network of acquaintances than previously, spread over the entire island.

Social Relations

Despite increased mobility, youths still spend much of their time in the company of their village age mates. It is still commonplace, for example, for young men to sleep together in an empty house or other available accommodation. But I have the impression that peer group solidarity is not as pronounced as in 1960. Individual young men are more likely now to go off on their own,

visiting friends or relatives elsewhere on the island. They also sleep at home more often, perhaps because recent house construction includes internal partitions that afford more privacy, making it easier for adolescent siblings of the opposite sex to stay at home together without embarrassment. Same-sex solidarity may also have lessened as a result of fewer restrictions on young women, leading to a greater degree of casual social mixing between the sexes. In addition, peers have become less important as sources of knowledge, since education (in the broadest sense) has become more publicly accessible.

Modesty still is required of young women, but the code has relaxed considerably. It is now acceptable for women to wear shorts around the village and to wear costume jewelry. Parents and brothers now exercise much less control over their daughters and sisters than before. The avoidance taboo that characterized brother-sister relations in the past is less evident, and cross-sex siblings more often co-participate in group activities. They appear relaxed in one another's company and joke more freely. In short, the rather noticeable division between the sexes that was so prominent in 1960 has given way to a much greater degree of gender integration.

Activities

Youths of both sexes still enjoy working together, especially during feasts. Characteristically, their interactions involve a good deal of light-hearted banter, singing, and horseplay. Young men still go on escapades together and often fish and garden in groups; as in the past, they make sporadic contributions to their families' food supplies.

Sports remains a major preoccupation for most youths, although the traditional sports of wrestling and dart throwing have all but disappeared.¹⁴ Rugby and cricket have been the main interests of the young men in recent years. Rotuma now regularly sends a rugby team to participate in the annual pan-Fiji competition, and the young men look forward to the opportunity this affords them to spend time in Fiji, experiencing urban life and visiting relatives. The organization of these sports is now along district lines, with teams from one district challenging another on an irregular basis. In cricket, a championship team is recognized and when challenged must defend. If beaten, it gives up the "title" to the challenger, which must then defend when called upon. Table tennis experienced a resurgence in 1989, with a few tables scattered around the island, but formal competitions were not held. Track-and-field events are included in physical education programs in the schools, with formal meets held on special occasions.

A major change in young men's activities stems from the development of *kava* drinking groups in most villages. In 1960 *kava* was drunk almost exclusively at ceremonies. But with increased exposure to Fijian culture, in which social *kava* drinking is central, Rotumans have adopted the custom with gusto. Groups of

men, ranging from youths to senior citizens, commonly get together in the afternoon, drink *kava*, and talk for hours, sometimes until the wee hours of the morning. Individuals may join a session at anytime and leave at anytime, but the hard core remains for hours on end. Youths often join these groups in an apprentice capacity, learning to pound *kava*, to prepare and serve drinks to their elders. They begin their involvement by sitting on the margins, listening to the conversation and banter. As time goes on they participate more and more, until considered regulars.

For many Rotumans the *kava* groups are anathema. Methodist ministers often rail against *kava* drinking in their sermons; they cite it as a primary cause for the neglect of Christian and familial responsibilities. Many people make comparisons with the past. In the old (pre-*kava* drinking) days, they say, men used to go to their plantations at sunrise and remain all day, working hard. They were extremely productive. Now they only go for a couple of hours, if at all, and spend much less time there. By staying up so late they are too tired to get up early to work, they say. Others complain that gossip is a main preoccupation at the drinking sessions, and that whereas women's gossip at mat-making sessions used to cause most mischief, now the men do more damage. Their critical tone contains implications of moral decay.

Alcoholic beverages are more readily available now than previously, and the young men get together for drinking bouts from time to time. Drinking liquor is especially prevalent on the Catholic side of the island (the Methodist Church prohibits alcohol consumption among its members), and home-brewed orange wine provides a low-cost substitute. Young women may also participate in drinking sessions, without the implications of moral looseness it would surely have had in 1960. Neither drunkenness nor drug use are yet social problems of serious concern, however.

The young women still play field hockey and netball, as they did in 1960. More interesting is the introduction of volleyball, which was played in our village (Oinafa) before sunset every afternoon, Sundays excepted, over a period of several months. Sides were composed of a casual mix of boys and girls, along with some of the older folks. Much high-spirited banter accompanied the play. This is another indication of relaxed rules governing cross-gender relations.

Although young women still perform a great many housekeeping chores for their families, they enjoy a good deal more autonomy than previously. Some take service positions for certain periods of time with prosperous relatives, or chiefs, in exchange for small payments and other benefits. A few have regular jobs with co-ops, government, or the National Bank of Fiji branch office. In general they are more mobile and less confined to their homes. Perhaps the biggest change in their activities, however, is the decline of mat making. Whereas in 1960 this was a prime occupation for young women, today very few take the time to learn. Mat

making is regarded as extremely arduous work, and given their increased independence, few young women choose to engage in it. As a result, fine mats, still a vital commodity in ceremonial exchanges, have become more scarce and more valuable, a trend that is likely to continue as older women, skilled at the craft, die off.

Young women in some districts participate regularly in women's clubs, which were founded in 1961. Some were started in association with churches; schoolteachers initiated others. These groups focus on demonstration and practice of skills such as baking, cooking, and needlecraft. Many young women have developed expertise in such areas as a result. In the early 1990s a resurgence of interest in traditional crafts, including mat making and basketry, attracted some of the younger women, so there is renewed hope that these traditional crafts will survive into the twenty-first century.

Church-centered activities for youths have retained, even increased, their importance over the intervening years. The Methodist Youth Fellowship is particularly active and sponsors a number of events over the course of the year. At rallies, some of which are all-day affairs, dramatic skits are enacted, dances performed, and a variety of games played. Here, too, increased mobility makes a difference; it is much easier now for youths to attend events on other parts of the island. As a result there are more large-scale, interdistrict events at which youths can meet a broader spectrum of their peers. These activities provide important opportunities for youths to take responsibility and to develop organizational and leadership skills.

The addition of tape players to guitars and ukeleles has resulted in a significant change in the ambiance of youthful social gatherings. While in some villages youths still get together and sing Rotuman songs, in others one is more likely to hear tapes of Western, Fijian, and professionally recorded Rotuman songs. In the latter villages, active involvement in composing, playing instruments, and singing has given way to passive listening. Youths everywhere, however, continue to participate in traditional group dances (*tautoga*) that are performed on special occasions. At rehearsals the young men are often a source of irritation to their elders because of their propensity to clown around, but at actual performances they can usually be relied on to do their best. This is very much like it was in 1960. Youths today also participate extensively in the church choir competitions held with some regularity.

The Christmas *av mane'a* season retains its special role in the lives of youths. The custom of *fara*, traveling to other villages to sing and dance, remains in full force, and visits from Rotumans resident abroad, many of whom are taking their school holidays, add spice to romantic possibilities. *Av mane'a* is a time for picnics and beach parties, and little work. Beach games, however, have disappeared from the scene, perhaps because courtship has become more open. There seems

to be less need to disguise flirtations and romantic encounters in the wraps of gamelike activities.

Courtship

Since the roles open to women today are more expansive than in 1960, grooming daughters to become desirable spouses is less emphasized. Seeing to it that their sons and daughters get good educations and well-paying jobs is now a priority for most families. This is not to say, however, that traditional female virtues of industriousness, modesty, and virginity have been forgotten. They remain important values, significant criteria for assessing marriageability, as opposed to a heavy emphasis on looks or glamour, for instance. But a family's fortunes now depend less on their daughters' ability to attract dependable husbands than they do on sources of income, to which their daughters may directly contribute. Both sons and daughters may add substantially to their family's income if they emigrate to Fiji or elsewhere, get a well-paying job, and send remittances home. Those who are admired most do just that.

As a result of this shift in emphasis, young women are under less pressure to publicly communicate their purity. They are freer to form romantic liaisons and are less compelled to hide them. Flirtations are more open, though still subdued by Western standards. My impression is that girls are now seen as exercising more volitional control over their bodies. They appear to be less under the direct control of their families and more personally responsible for their destinies. In short, they give the impression of being more autonomous in relation to courtship, as in other areas of social life.

One factor contributing to more female autonomy has been increased knowledge of birth control methods. Most young women are now aware of birth control, and at least know how to calculate their fertile periods. This reduces the likelihood of unplanned pregnancies, the most shameful consequence of premarital sex. As one young man put it, nowadays a boy may see his sister at a party drinking and acting silly, but he won't make her go home; he'll simply tell her to be careful not to get into trouble, that is, pregnant.

Despite increased freedom of movement, and fewer restrictions imposed by fathers and brothers, I doubt there has been any substantial increase in promiscuity, or that premarital sex is more prevalent than it was in 1960. On the whole Rotuman women manifest a strong sense of pride and are very much concerned about their reputations in the community. Teasing and ridicule still play an important role in keeping people discreet, and social penalties still exist for courting too openly. Couples, including married couples, still do not show affection in public, for example. But in general, controls over sexual behavior have shifted from overpoweringly social toward individual restraint. I must emphasize that all of these changes are matters of degree. Courtship behavior is still shaped by

characteristically Rotuman child-rearing practices and social sensitivities. Although moving in the direction of Western models of courtship, Rotuma in the 1990s still resembles Rotuma in 1960 more than it does contemporary Chicago or Sydney.

Marriage

Arranged marriages, those in which bride and groom barely knew each other, are relics of the past. While parents may still get involved, couples now are granted the right to initiate plans for marriage. Whereas in 1960 the bride's prior consent was not considered crucial, today it would be unthinkable to begin marriage negotiations without it. *Sok fāeag* weddings, with all the obligatory rituals and ceremonial exchanges, still take place, but they are now admired more for their adherence to, and affirmation of, custom than as statements about the social respectability of the bride. Such weddings have become prohibitively expensive for many families, and they choose to have small ceremonies attended only by close family and friends. The reduction in pressure by parents to choose their children's spouses also means that lovers are less likely to have to escape to one or the other's home in order to avoid being trapped in an undesirable union. In general, the processes leading to marriage, including courtship, are less weighted with tradition than before.

Integration Into the Community

While youths remain well integrated into their communities, and are valued for their contributions to communal labor, they enjoy a greater degree of autonomy than in the past. This is particularly true of young women, who have largely escaped the confines of their parental homes. They no longer engage in mat making to any significant degree, nor are they relied on to bring productive husbands into the group. Mobility has greatly increased, both within Rotuma and between the island and abroad. Almost all youths leave the island for extended periods of time; many never return. Their parents are well aware of this, and encourage it, especially if they perceive their children as having the potential to succeed educationally or occupationally. Their own economic prospects are at stake. Everyone is aware of the dramatic success stories of parents whose children have done well abroad and sent back money and goods to substantially enhance the family's standard of living. But those youths who remain, or return, are valued for their contributions as well. Whereas their siblings abroad may provide money and goods, they provide much needed labor. They are counted on to help with subsistence activities and household chores, as well as with communal events. Without them, large-scale feasts would be intolerably burdensome, if not impossible. Without them, the vitality of social life, marked in so many ways by their humor and youthful antics, would be greatly diminished.

They have more choices now and can leave more easily if they wish. That some choose to remain, even for a while, is interpreted by their elders as a sign of their commitment, of their *hanisi* (love and compassion).¹⁵ As a result households with youthful sons and daughters are deemed lucky, and envied. For youths, the knowledge that they can go abroad and try their luck, that if they fail or are dissatisfied they can return to a community that cherishes them, is a buffer that makes a potentially stressful period much easier to bear.