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ANIMALS AS METAPHORS IN ROTUMAN SAYINGS

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INTRODUCTION

Ralph Bulmer's research into the role of animals in Karam culture stands as a landmark in anthropology. Few others have examined the human-animal interface in such breadth, or paid such attention to detail. This paper is inspired by Bulmer's achievements, although its goals are far more modest. We explore the roles animals play in Rotuman sayings, and the ways in which they reflect Rotuman cultural values and attitudes. We then compare Rotuman sayings with collections from Samoa and Hawaii, with the aim of exploring the possibilities for developing a comparative framework. Our goal is to contribute, in however small a fashion, to an understanding of the ways in which human beings use their knowledge of the natural world in constructing a meaningful social existence.

The sayings used as the basis for this paper were compiled by Elsapeti Inia, a retired Rotuman school teacher and a remarkable woman. She was the first Rotuman woman to be educated as a teacher and enjoyed a long, distinguished career. She is a student of Rotuman culture and has written a number of stories and lessons in the Rotuman language for the schools. Mrs Inia compiled a typed list of some 458 sayings, along with their explanations in Rotuman, and graciously gave us a copy. She then spent many mornings over a period of weeks going over them with us, one by one, explaining their use and clarifying ambiguities.¹

ANIMALS IN ROTUMAN LIFE

Rotuma is located at 12° 3' S. latitude and 177° 40' E. longitude, some 300 miles north of Fiji, with which it is politically affiliated. The island is of volcanic origin, with the highest craters rising to heights of 850 feet. It is divided into two main parts joined by an isthmus of sand, forming a total configuration about 8 miles long along an east-west axis. At its widest the island is nearly 3 miles across. The total land area is approximately

17 square miles. A packed-sand road encircles the perimeter of the eastern part of the island, and extends to the northern and southern sides of the western part. For the past century, at least, almost all settlement has been in the coastal areas along this road.

The interior of the island is bushland that is cleared periodically to make room for swidden gardens. In recent years bush paths have been widened, and though still quite rough, make it possible to traverse the interior of the island by motor vehicle. From shoreline to summits, virtually the entire island is covered with coconut trees and other introduced vegetation. Indigenous forests have long since disappeared on Rotuma, although remnants of endemic plant life may still be found on some of the offshore islets. Most of the land either is currently under cultivation or has been under cultivation in the recent past.

Pigs, cows and goats are kept in the bush within convenient walking distance of the villages. Pigs are kept in stone-fenced enclosures where they are fed by their owners, each of whom uses a unique call to attract his herd. Cows and goats are usually tethered to trees and allowed to graze. Pork and beef are prized as feast foods, and are normally eaten only on special occasions. Goats are relative newcomers to the island and are exported to Fiji, where there is a ready market among Fijian Indians. Rotumans eat goat meat on occasion, usually curried. Chickens are sometimes kept in the bush, but they are also permitted to roam freely within the villages. They scratch for insects and grubs, but are also fed grated coconuts by their owners. Their eggs are rarely eaten, mostly because they are difficult to find; commercial eggs from Fiji are available from the Co-operative Association stores and are used to supplement the daily diet. Rotumans say that like pigs, chickens know their owners' voices and respond accordingly. Chicken is usually eaten on lesser occasions, such as family get-togethers, but at feasts chickens may be ceremonially presented as supplements to pigs and cows.

Dogs and cats are kept as pets, more so it seems in recent years. In 1960, when Alan Howard was conducting field work on the island, pets were treated rather badly by European standards. The dogs were scruffy, rarely petted, and fed only the meagerest of food leavings. They were usually treated as nuisances and were the targets of well-aimed missiles or feet when they came too close while scavenging for leftovers. Cats were rarely fed at all and were encouraged to hunt for mice and rats for their subsistence. On our visit in 1988 the situation had changed. As a result of outmigration, household size has decreased, and a number of single-person households were in evidence. Many of these single individuals keep pets in their households. Although cats still serve to control the rodent population, many more cats and dogs are now in the role of pets. They are generally well-groomed and fed, petted frequently, and spend more time *with* people, rather than skulking on the periphery of human activity.

Prior to the opening of the bush roads, horses were used widely to transport food and copra from interior gardens to coastal settlements. Now, however, pickup trucks and motorbikes are the favored means of transport, and fewer horses are to be seen. Like cows and goats, horses are generally tethered to trees in the near bush when not in use. They seem to be regarded more as work animals than as pets.

Other than rats and mice, there are no wild mammals on the island. Occasionally a few pigs break out of their enclosures, but they generally do not stray far and are easily rounded up. When the Fiji government sent a contingent of soldiers to Rotuma "to help control a sudden outbreak of extensive damage to food crop plantations by wild pigs" in January 1988, Rotumans treated it as a great joke. They understood the underlying metaphoric message well – that the group of rebels who were advocating Rotuma's secession from Fiji following the second military coup in September 1987 had better be careful!

Marine life, especially on the reef fringing most of the island, is extremely important to Rotumans. Fish are plentiful, and until recently were captured periodically in communal fish drives. Nowadays fish drives are relatively rare, but both men and women regularly work the reef with goggles and spears for a wide variety of species. Crustaceans and octopus are also gleaned from their reef habitats and are highly valued food items. Only a few Rotuman men now venture into the waters beyond the reef, but their catches of deep-sea fish and turtles are prized.

Both land and sea birds abound. The latter are sometimes hunted, especially on offshore islets, and their eggs are considered a delicacy. There are a few species of harmless snakes, a variety of lizards, and along the shore numerous varieties of crab. Insects, especially flies and mosquitoes, are ubiquitous and a general nuisance. A great deal of effort goes into fanning flies away, especially at mealtime.

SAYINGS IN ROTUMAN CULTURE

Mrs Inia titled her document "Hāihi'ag ne 'Ea'Ea Fak Rotuma"² which might best be translated as "List of Rotuman Sayings". It contains proverbs, aphorisms, epithets, and apothegms which are used by Rotumans in a wide variety of situations as cryptic remarks. The sayings generally condense a great deal of information, and often require an insider's knowledge of events, personages, and places. For example, one saying, "*noa 'o le Maikeli*", "Michael's labour", refers to an incident some years back when a Fijian man by the name of Maikeli was working for a European District Officer. He worked very hard, only to be rewarded by having hot water thrown on him by his temperamental employer. Rotumans use this saying to communicate about

situations in which work efforts are unappreciated by those in authority. As in this instance, the sayings often have strong connotative loadings that are disguised by metaphor. Since the references in many of the sayings are to local events and conditions, their use distinguishes integral members of the Rotuman community from mere Rotuman speakers, including Rotumans who have grown up abroad.

Metaphors are by no means confined to this set of sayings. Lay preachers pepper their sermons with Biblical references, but these seem to be largely confined to religious discourse. Also, news of general interest from abroad sometimes becomes the basis for cryptic comments, but these usually have only faddish appeal. As interest in the specific events decline, so do references to them. The sayings compiled by Mrs Inia, in contrast, are more deeply embedded in community experience. They are learned by most Rotumans as part of ordinary discourse and are not ephemeral allusions.

ANIMAL CATEGORIES

Rotumans classify animals primarily according to their location and means of locomotion, and secondarily according to their main characteristics. The basic division is into two groups, *i'a* 'sea creatures that swim' and *maṇmaṇu* 'land and air creatures'. *I'a* includes turtles, whales and octopus as well as fish, but does not include crabs, shellfish and other creatures that inhabit the shoreline.³ *Maṇmaṇu* are divided into *maṇmaṇ lā haphāke* (four-legged animals, including lizards and rodents as well as land mammals); *maṇmaṇ jijiji* (slithering animals, including snakes, worms, caterpillars and eels); *maṇmaṇ vatvata* (crawling creatures, including crabs, centipedes and millipedes, ants, spiders and lice),⁴ and *maṇmaṇ ferferē* (flying creatures). The latter category is further broken down into *maṇmaṇ 'es laḷavi* (feathered creatures (including birds of all sorts and chickens) and an unmarked category, *maṇmaṇ* (flying insects). Shellfish are an anomalous category, perhaps because their means of locomotion is unclear. They were referred to as *tē ma'on pilo* (things with shells), based on their main characteristic.⁵

Of the 458 sayings that constitute our corpus, 117 (25.5%) make reference to animals, with some selected from each major category.⁶ A breakdown, by Rotuman categories, is as follows:

I'a: fish (20), octopus (4), turtle (1), lobster (1)

Maṇmaṇ lāhaphāke: pig (9), cow (5), dog (4), horse (4), cat (4), rodent (3), lizard (1), elephant (1)⁷

Maṇmaṇ jijiji: snake (2), eel (2)

Maṇmaṇ vatvata: crab (5), caterpillar (1), ant (1), louse (1), cricket (1), cockchafer (1)

Maṇmaṇ ferferē

Maṇmaṇ 'es laḷavi: chicken (10), swamp hen (5), dove (5), owl (4), peahen (3), other (12)

Maṇmaṇ: fly (2), dragonfly (1), generic animal (1)

Tē ma'on pilo: shellfish (1)

Unclassified: monkey (2)⁸

CULTURAL VALUES AND ATTITUDES REFLECTED IN THE SAYINGS

In order to examine the ways in which the sayings reflect Rotuman values and attitudes we find it convenient to group them into seven thematic categories: work, status, interpersonal decorum, courtship and sexual conduct, personal appearance and hygiene, challenges, and emotions.

WORK

Rotumans place a high value on hard work, and indeed, are known in urban Fiji for their diligence and responsibility. In Rotuma, work revolves for the most part around the production and preparation of food. Men's work primarily involves preparing and tending gardens of taro, yams, bananas and other crops; in addition, they cut and dry coconut meat for exportation as copra. Women's work centres on the making of mats and keeping the home and its surroundings well-groomed. Both men and women may fish, tend the animals, prepare food and cook. Nearly equal in importance to working within the domestic orbit is communal effort – work on behalf of the church or the community. This generally involves efforts similar to those within the household since feasting is a central part of most communal activities. Until recently at least, an individual's worth was judged on the basis of his or her reputation as a worker, and producer, more than on any other factor. A prestige economy based on the production and distribution of surplus food, and produce of extraordinary size, flourished until recently (Howard 1970:102-3). Today hard work is still valued and is central to an individual's reputation, but having a well-paying job and/or a well-constructed and well-furnished European-style house provide alternative paths to gaining social merit.

Perhaps the saying which best sums up the Rotuman attitude toward work is the proverb "*pa ho sus ne k̄au, ma hag k̄au ta la loh*", "if you want to milk the cow, feed the cow until it's full". This conveys the message that success is a result of the work one puts into a project. Skill in producing food is also acknowledged in the phrase, "*le' maf i'e*", "someone with an eye for fish". The importance of working together to achieve success is encoded in the saying, "*moa ta pulou ka' uaf ta pulou*", "the rooster is fat and the

hen is fat". This is said not only of husbands and wives who prosper as a result of their joint efforts, but also in reference to events, the success of which is the product of contributions by guests as well as by hosts.

Positive valuing of work is also encoded in negative expressions. Several different sayings referring to birds, chickens and fish admonish shirking. "*A'u'ua ne tāvāke*", "repose of the tropic bird", refers to the long rest periods taken by the tropic bird, and is said to someone who takes a break from work that is too long. Even more sharply critical is the expression, "*itake'ipe te Kā' ta*", "like the dove at *Kā' ta*" (a natural bridge on the western side of the island). The allusion is to the behaviour of doves who start to fly, inciting other birds to fly off, then settle back onto their perch. This is said of someone who starts a project, gets other people working, and then abandons it. Similar in meaning is the remark, "*moa tau tatar*", "a fighting cock who repeatedly retires from the fray, then returns". It is said of someone who takes frequent rests during communal efforts while others are working. The expression "*le' Magere ne Tumagere*" is an allusion to two fish who are so big that they are unable to move quickly. It is used to describe people who are sluggish workers because of their size.

Socialisation to accept work graciously begins early and a child who shows reluctance to take on a task is often likened to "a horse with yaws", "*itake has lā jona*". This alludes to the child's shuffling back and forth from foot to foot, which is taken as a sign of displeasure over the assignment. If a child displays opposition by stomping around heavily he or she may be likened to an elephant, "*itake'alefene*".

The epitome of hard work in the sayings relates to hunting for the *kalāe* (swamphen). Thus the phrase "*rē kalāe*", "to catch the swamphen", is often said in reference to women working diligently weaving mats, or men hard at work in their gardens. Hunting swamphen is used to convey difficulty in other contexts as well. For example, the proverb "*kal vea' ma gagaj, pō'ia ma fek'ia ka saien ma fek'ia*," "don't hunt the swamphen with a chief; if you catch it he'll be angry and if you let it escape he'll be angry", refers to the difficulty of working with a chief. The notion conveyed is that if you do something with a chief, and perform too well, the chief may be upset because you have outshone him; but if you do not perform up to standard he may be upset because you have done less than your share.

STATUS

The latter saying encodes some very central propositions about Rotuman chieftainship, as well as about hard work. It presumes, for example, that commoners work *with* chiefs rather than *for* them. Although there are occasions in which chiefs are ceremonially inactive when work is being done, it is quite common for them to take their share of the burden. Indeed chiefs, as exemplary persons, are expected to be especially hard workers as long as they are physically capable. Implied in the proverb is the relatively egalitarian perspective Rotumans have on chieftainship. In Rotuma, chieftainship is a role played on occasion, but there is a good deal of "time out". One needs to be sensitive to when a man expects to be treated as a chief and when as an ordinary person. Working with a chief can therefore be a tricky business, as the proverb communicates.

The egalitarian emphasis in Rotuman social life is conveyed in several sayings focusing on relative elevation. "*Moa a' mamas lalavi*", "the rooster dries his feathers [spreading his wings this way and that while perched on something high]", is said to embarrass someone sitting on a chair or stool while others sit on floormats. "*A ka magke la pāe hēhē*", "like a monkey sitting up above", communicates the same message. The idea is that monkeys sit high in trees, people low on mats. The more cryptic, "*ka 'āe magke?*", "are you a monkey?", is often said to children to get the point across. It should be pointed out that while visiting dignitaries are almost always offered chairs to sit on, Rotuman chiefs are physically elevated only on special ceremonial occasions. Under normal circumstances they sit on mats like everyone else.

Also in support of the egalitarian ethic are sayings which impress upon listeners not to discount those of lesser status. The statement "*jikjik he ka ma'on'al*", "even the smallest crab has teeth", conveys the message that anyone, regardless of status, can do important things. However, when persons of lesser status make unwarranted claims or speak arrogantly in public, they are admonished for being "*itake'ufhe*", "like a head louse", – small, but with a big mouth. This may also be said to/of children who speak out inappropriately.

INTERPERSONAL DECORUM

Social life on Rotuma is based on reciprocal exchange and inter-household cooperation, at least ideally. In fact Rotumans put very little pressure on one another to engage in communal events. Those who choose not to participate are not hassled, and the phrase "*puer se 'āea [ia, iris]*", "it's up to you [her/him, them]", is often heard in this regard. Of greater concern are individuals who are involved, but do not follow the rules – those who are seen as selfish and/or two-faced. Many of the sayings in our corpus warn against trusting people of such reputation. The stonefish (which buries itself in the sand with only its poisonous stinger protruding), and the octopus (which displays a variety of deceptive behaviours), are favorite metaphors for such individuals.

Rotuman concerns for an honest presentation of self are subtly conveyed in the meta-metaphor "*noh he*", "little home". The "little home" referred to is that of the stonefish, which lies hidden, quiet and very poisonous. Thus a negative (covert) message is disguised beneath a positive (overt) image, paralleling the human masquerade being criticised. More direct is the straightforward comment "*ia' fāmu*", "stonefish", which is said of individuals who hide their true feelings, which are poisonous, beneath a pleasant façade.

The octopus is also used to characterise deceitful individuals, but it implies less venom. "*He' rou kī*", "the octopus leaves behind inky fluid", suggests a betrayal of trust, but it is the octopus' tendency to hide *after* being seen that captures the Rotuman imagination. "*He' tuku*", "the octopus goes down", is said of someone who has wronged another and tries to hide when he sees them because he feels guilty. The comment "*he' ta a'mofmofua ia*", "the octopus turns itself to look like a coral head", has a similar connotation. It refers to someone who pretends that he is not the one who has done something wrong.

English speakers are familiar with the use of snakes and rats as metaphors for individuals who turn on their benefactors. While the proverb "*haghag' on fa' heta ma fa' heta 'ānia ia*", "feed a pet and the pet eats you", does not overtly specify the kind of pet, it alludes to a story about a couple who fed a snake, first keeping it in a bowl, then in a larger vessel, until the snake was so big it chased them because they were unable to feed it enough. It is a comment made about adopted children who ultimately turn against those who adopted them.⁹ The portrayal of rats as turncoats is likewise indirect. "*Vā ne hōt ka la kao*", "[someone who] wants to come aboard, but sinks the ship", refers to a story about a rat who successfully begged the captain of a ship to come aboard, but once aboard chewed the wood and sank the vessel. The saying is used to chastise those who are given things, but are not satisfied and ask for more.

That one cannot expect to get away with such behaviour – that taking advantage of others will eventually incite retaliation – is encoded in the proverb "*terānit ka mas heta la 'af*", "one day the *mas* (a type of crab) will bite". This particular type of crab is a favorite food of the octopus, but it seems that on occasion it will defend itself by biting off an octopus' tentacle. More generally the saying communicates that greed has a social cost.

The hermit crab figures in two sayings that implicate interpersonal decorum. "*Fikou heta lel ma 'af'āfiamā ia*", "the hermit crab bends around and bites itself", implies that individuals or groups are only hurting themselves by their behaviour. This is often said of a group of relatives who are fighting among themselves, or of a chief whose behaviour is not in the best interests of his people. Of an older person who is ignorant of Rotuman custom it is said, "*mafua 'a fikou*", "[the] old one eats [the] hermit crab", which is classified as inedible by Rotumans.

The importance of reciprocity as a principle is also reflected in two other sayings, which focus on the improper disposition of valuables. "*ūh' eseāt ma na 'en kalāe*", "[there is] only one yam, but it is given to the swampen", is a warning not to give away precious gifts, like fine mats, frivolously. One should save them for when they are truly called for. The saying "*ou telul mahmahan heta 'āe hoā' hoā' tuen*", "your warm *telulu* (fish wrapped in banana leaves) you have been giving to the wrong place", refers to a story about a brother and sister who lived in separate houses. The sister kept making *telulu* but only gave it to local dignitaries, never to her brother. Then one day the roof blew off her house, and instead of going to the dignitaries she asked her brother for help. He replied with the above saying, meaning, take care of those on whom you rely.

Rude behaviour is the focus of several sayings. Staring at people is considered offensive and is the critical target of the saying, "*io mag ma 'a lag*", "stare with an open mouth and eat flies". Staring at food as it is being served is admonished by likening the offender to a dog: "*kām pa vār sui*", "[the] dog wants to bite a bone".

Indiscriminately calling out to people passing by is also considered rude behaviour. Proper etiquette calls for maintaining a demure manner with strangers and visitors, so someone who loudly engages anyone who comes along is likened to "a dog that barks on the road", "*kām au sala*". "*itake helavao he*", "like a *helavao* (a whistling bird)", communicates the same thing. Rotumans say that in the bush, when a *helavao* sees someone it whistles, and another one will answer, because *helavao* always answer whistles indiscriminately. Someone who complains too much is compared with a dove (the Pacific pigeon) in the expression "*itake 'ipe te' gugu' i*", "like a dove who's always complaining" (but note that "*otou 'iap he*", "my dove", is used to express endearment).

Rotumans are quick to accept apologies for interpersonal offences and to forgive wrongdoers, which helps to promote community harmony – a prime value. But chronic offenders get labeled as such and may lose their right to be trusted. Two sayings specifically refer to skepticism over promises to reform by those who habitually break the rules: "*Tinanam ta ho' ien se 'on kakauag ta*", "the sow has returned to her wallow", and "*Hi' i 'ea 'otou ag 'alaga la rou la sei la sap*", "Hi' i says, 'it is my habit to eat flies and it will be difficult to break it'". Those with a reputation for periodic bouts of drunkenness are particularly likely to be the targets of these gibes.

Finally there are a number of sayings directed primarily at children. Youngsters who bully others, or are cruel to those smaller than themselves, are said to be "*itake sia'leva*", "like the *sia'leva* bird" (a large bird that bullies smaller ones), or "*u'ui ne tanife*", "offspring of a shark".

When not working, Rotuman adults spend a good deal of time together in relaxed conversation. They might sit quietly for hours on someone's veranda or under a shade tree. Children are ubiquitous and are permitted to move freely about, often going from lap to lap without impeding adult interaction. If, however, the youngsters fidget about too much, they are apt to be compared to dragonflies or mullet, or as with the English expression "having ants in one's pants", they might be asked if they are sitting on an empty coconut shell full of stinging ants, "*päe se pupu rau'at he*". And a child who drops food scraps about while eating is said to "eat like a chicken", "*ate ne moa*".

As many observers have pointed out, rights over children in Polynesian societies tend to be diffuse, and the community or extended family is more likely to be considered the appropriate unit of socialisation than the nuclear family. This is the case in Rotuma, and disapproval of mothers (or mother surrogates) who overprotect their children, or keep too tight reins on their mobility, is expressed in the saying "*täntän'ul he*", "the *täntän*" (a kind of fish with a sucker on its head by which it clings to sharks and other large fish). A related saying identifies youngsters as old enough to be free from their primary caretakers by comparing them to "wet chicks", "*u'ui uas he*" – chicks away from the protection of their mother's wings.

COURTSHIP AND SEXUAL CONDUCT

Rotuman attitudes toward sex favour constraint and modesty, although male potency is admired and its exercise tacitly encouraged. This leads to courtship customs which are subtle and hidden from public display (see Howard 1964, 1970). This subtlety is matched in some of the sayings referring to courtship. For example, the comment "*arfakte'äk*", "fit for special treatment", has two layers of meaning. The first layer makes reference to the expectation that chiefs be presented with large pigs (*hata*) on special occasions, but that if a large one is not available a smaller one will do. The second layer refers to a woman who is a bit young for courtship, but is nevertheless desirable. Pigs (specifically boars) also stand as metaphors for young unmarried men. The saying "*kou möl pa*", "[the] boar climbs [the] fence", suggests the restlessness of a young man who frequently strays away from home looking for romance. That the imagery of man as boar reflects more admiration than concern is made clear in the simple comment "*kou ta'a*", "that boar". It connotes someone who is strong and fearless, and is often said to a young boy who has fallen or been injured in order to encourage him not to cry. It is also a flattering comment about a man who has sired many children, or an older man who has had many wives. The equation of boars with potency is thus very clear.

There are limits, of course, and a man who courts more than one woman, or who is married but pursues extramarital relations, is likened to "an animal with a double throat", "*manman kia maja*". The equation here is between sex and eating, and such a man is criticised for wanting more than his rightful share. Equally caustic is the saying "*käm ta ho'ien se'on mumuaf ta*", "the dog returns to its vomit", which is said of a man who has treated a woman badly, seducing then discarding her, but who, after a time, returns to marry his victim. A woman who is unfaithful to her husband or lover is likened to "a brooding hen", "*uaf'o'o*", an allusion to the evasive actions taken by a hen when its nest is threatened by a predator. The hen moves away from its nest and cackles here and there in order to distract a predator from the eggs or chicks. The idea is that the woman "makes her nest" in one place but dallies about elsewhere.

In a more positive vein is the proverb "*iap sui mano'a, sai ma'oroan*", "a tied-up dove, once it is free it starts to sing". This is used in reference to a woman who has been under the thumb of a domineering husband who leaves or dies. The notion is that his departure gives her the freedom to enjoy life once again.

PERSONAL APPEARANCE AND HYGIENE

Rotumans associate healthiness with large body size and strength, as do most other Polynesians. They also value light skin; a pleasing, open countenance; cleanliness and smelling good. All of these values are represented in the sayings by negative counterexamples.

Three sayings contain allusions to thinness. Equating a person with the *'iva'o* bird, which is very slender, figures in two of them: "*le'iva'o*", "a person [like an] *iva'o*", and "*iva'o'äe sua'ia, la' sagsaga la hai'oflag*", a rhyme which translates as, "*iva'o* you have started, go smartly to the race". The latter comment is said mostly by young men in response to a young woman's tucking up her skirt to run, thereby revealing her legs. The joking and somewhat rude reference is to her legs' being as skinny as those of the *'iva'o* bird. The other expression mocking thinness is, "*jiaj ur finäe*", "[a] garfish with its intestines pulled out", which implies that the person is already thin and getting thinner.

Dark skin is the target of the comment, "*nönö ma jül het fer ma foa' sio sin*", "after a while the plover flies and lands on it". This is a teasing warning to someone who fishes on the reef so often that their skin becomes

quite dark. The idea is that plovers will think the person, while bending over to catch fish, looks like a black rock that plovers like to perch on.

The emphasis on having an open face is stressed by counterexample in the observation that someone has "the face of an owl", "*maf ne ruru*", the epitome for Rotumans of a devious-looking countenance. To say that someone has the "eyes of a cow", "*itake maf ne kau*", is a gentler remark chiding an individual who is looking wide-eyed at something he or she desires. A more general comment on someone's ugly appearance is to equate them with a sea snake, "*itake uahgia*", which includes the connotation that the person so described is harmless. An unattractive person who dresses up elegantly is said to be ready to "frighten the swamphen", "*rar kaläe*", a reference to the dressed-up scarecrows Rotuman farmers sometimes put in their gardens.

Most sayings referring to dirtiness and smelliness are directed as scolding remarks to children. They may be told that they are "*itake puaka*", "like a pig", or "*itake kī he*", "like octopus ink". If they track mud in the house they may be reproached with the comment, "*pā'on puaka*", "pig sty", implying that they are treating their home as a pig would. Children who fail to wash their hands properly are told they are "like blackfish", "*itake iā' kele*", a particularly strong-smelling fish, or that they "smell like an owl", "*pen rur*". If their head is smelly for lack of washing their hair it may be likened to the "nest of an owl", "*o'oag ne ruru*". Of adults who bathe infrequently or inadequately it is said, "*le' ta vea' se iā*", "the person is a peahen".

CHALLENGES

Four of the five sayings used as challenges are banter that accompany dance competitions between villages or districts. Typically this occurs during large weddings, church conferences, or the Christmas season when one locality hosts another. All can be used as taunts by the visitors. "*Kaläe ta kiākiā ma e'on susu heta*", "the swamphen squawks only in its own bush", and "*moa tau ne hanuet nōnō ma'e hanue ta*", "the fighting cock is only known at home", both refer to the advantage local dancers have over their visitors because they receive more encouragement from (local) spectators. The implied comment is, "just wait until you're on our turf". The other tack is for the visitors to taunt their hosts after giving a particularly spirited, well-rehearsed performance. While waiting for their hosts to perform they might call out that "the swamphen flies away from its nest", "*kaläe ta fer'e'on susu heta*", or "the dove flies away and is afraid to approach", "*iap ta fer ka manaf*", which implies that the host dancers have been so intimidated by the quality of the visitors' dancing that they will want to give up. The latter two sayings may also be used by the hosts, if they have prevailed, implying that the visitors have been so badly humiliated they may not want to reciprocate the invitation. Although primarily associated with dance competitions, each of these sayings can be used to refer to individuals in other contexts. The first two are sometimes said of persons who act like big shots in their home villages, but are timid elsewhere, and the second two may be used to describe people who move away from their villages or homes in order to escape work obligations.

The fifth saying implying a challenge is more serious, and was used to incite warriors in traditional times. It is associated with Riamkau, a folk hero who told his army that he would "return as a cockchafer" (stinkbug), "*la ho'im ka ia riagriag he*". This was a metaphor for fighting to his death, since the vile smell of the cockchafer is associated with the smell of a rotting corpse.

EMOTIONS

The main emotions targeted by the sayings are anger and fear. With regard to anger, all three sayings that refer to it are descriptive. They neither contain overt moralistic judgments nor do they suggest undesirable consequences. They merely seem to call attention to the person's affective state. When someone is perceived as angry for no apparent reason, they are said to have "eat[en] eel". When an angry wife rushes about the house, going in and out, a husband might chide her by saying, "*uaf pa sarap te*", "the hen wants to flap her wings". This alludes to the behaviour of a hen when aggressively protecting her chicks from threat. "*itake pūs feke*", "like an angry cat", is the third metaphor indicating anger, and indirectly alludes to spitting behaviour, which is one way Rotumans express their ire.

The sayings focusing on fear can be divided into those praising fearlessness and those chiding fearfulness. As pointed out above, for Rotumans the boar epitomises bravery and courage, and to liken a boy or man to one connotes fearlessness. More generally, the saying "*ia' se fea'e mamasa*", "[a] fish unafraid of drying out", communicates an individual's lack of trepidation. Depending on context, it can be used as praise or as criticism for foolish risk-taking.

Interestingly, five different animals are used as metaphors to suggest fearfulness: dog, horse, peahen, turtle, and mouse. Also noteworthy is that the main social contexts for sayings indicating fearfulness is teasing and banter. In many instances they are used as taunts by perpetrators of practical jokes who have incited fear by their actions. As in English, the dog's habit of fleeing with its tail between its legs makes for an apt metaphor: "*kām ta fea ma nāe feu*", "the dog is afraid and puts its tail between its legs". But Rotumans also focus on the horse's tail in the saying, "*rōj se ma'on joniga*", "[it] extends out by his/her running", which

equates the extension of a horse's tail in flight with the way a running person's hair flows backwards. "Jē haat vilien, la vea' heta kien", "when the dried coconut leaf falls, the peahen cries", suggests that there is little reason to be frightened, and is a teasing remark to someone who reacts with fright to a practical joke. More serious in its connotation is the saying, "itake hoi jaja", "like a turtle trapped in a circle of canoes". It implies that the individual referred to is in a desperate state. The metaphor of the mouse, "feafea 'on pija", "fearfulness of a mouse", parallels the English saying, "when the cat's away the mice will play", in its implications. It refers to people who are ordinarily well-behaved (presumably out of fear), but who play around when those having authority over them are gone. Most commonly, the cat in this instance is equated with a chief, the mice with his subjects.

ROTUMAN SAYINGS IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Sayings provide excellent opportunities for comparing cultural values, since they share similar forms. Restricting comparisons to metaphors based on common elements, such as animals, is especially appealing since it provides a control on the overt subject matter. We are presented, in effect, with an experimental condition. While it is beyond the scope of this essay to present an exhaustive study of Polynesian sayings, we hope to stimulate further work in this area by highlighting some of the possibilities.

We have chosen Samoan and Hawaiian sayings to compare with our Rotuman corpus since good collections have been published for each of these cultures. The Samoan sayings were collected by Erich Schultz in the first decade of this century and first published in Samoan in 1916. They were later translated into English by Brother Herman and published by the Polynesian Society in 1953 under the title *Proverbial Expressions of the Samoans*. It is this latter version that we have used for our comparison. The Hawaiian sayings we used were compiled by Mary Kawena Pukui, who collected them over a lifetime, from around 1910 to 1960. The collection was published by Bishop Museum Press in 1983 as *Ōlelo No'eau: Hawaiian Proverbs & Poetical Sayings*.¹⁰

Our first question concerned the relative significance of animals as referents in the three cultures. We found the differences to be surprisingly small. In Rotuma 117 of 458 sayings (25.5%) allude to animals. For Samoa the figures are 132 of 560 (23.8%) and for Hawaii 534 of 2942 (18.2%). Although the proportion for Hawaii is smaller the absolute number is considerably greater. Whether the higher number of sayings in the Hawaiian corpus represents a greater cultural elaboration of idiomatic usage in the Hawaiian archipelago or an artifact of compilation is a question we cannot resolve. Nevertheless, it does seem evident that the use of animals as metaphoric referents is important in all three societies.

Somewhat more revealing of differences are the types of animals alluded to in the sayings. Table 1 shows that in the Rotuman corpus domestic animals are referred to most frequently, followed closely by sea creatures and birds. The Samoan corpus, in contrast, lists only a single referent to domestic animals (a chicken). Sea creatures account for nearly half of the Samoan set, with birds a predominant second. The Hawaiian list shows sea creatures to be dominant, accounting for more than half of the referents, with birds a close second, followed by domestic animals.

TABLE 1: TYPE OF ANIMAL REFERRED TO BY SOCIETY

Type of Animal	Rotuma		Samoa		Hawaii	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Generic animal	1	(00.8)	0	(00.0)	8	(01.5)
Birds	29	(24.6)	51	(37.8)	133	(24.8)
Domestic animals	36	(30.5)	1	(00.7)	76	(14.2)
Sea creatures	34	(28.8)	65	(48.1)	309	(57.5)
Insects	8	(06.8)	5	(03.7)	4	(00.7)
Miscellaneous	10	(08.5)	13	(09.6)	7	(01.3)
Totals*	118	(100.0)	135	(99.9)	537	(100.0)

* Totals differ from the number of idioms containing animals because some idioms include reference to more than one animal.

What might account for these differences? One possibility, of course, is that there may have been systematic biases in the processes of collection and compilation. It certainly seems odd that Samoans should so thoroughly ignore domestic animals as a source of metaphor, since there is no reason to believe they are of any less economic significance in Samoa than in Rotuma or Hawaii.

Another possibility is that the relative importance of activities that bring humans into contact with animals – like fishing, hunting or animal husbandry – is a key variable. This would suggest that fishing is a more salient activity in Hawaii and Samoa than it is in Rotuma, which may have a basis in fact. What is striking is that all but one of the marine life references in the Rotuman corpus are to reef animals, while both the Samoan and Hawaiian sayings contain numerous references to deep sea fish like sharks, bonito, swordfish, barracuda and the like. Indeed, only a few Rotumans have done deep sea fishing in recent years, and most fishing activity is confined to the reef fringing the island.¹¹ The relative importance of birds in the Samoan corpus may reflect the importance of pigeon hunting as an activity there. Such a conclusion is supported by the fact that 28 of the 51 sayings referring to birds in the Samoan collection are about pigeons, and 32 directly refer to the hunting of pigeons or seabirds. By the same reasoning we would expect animal husbandry to be of greater relative importance on Rotuma. While it is difficult to compare societies in this regard, we can attest to the fact that nearly every Rotuman family keeps pigs and chickens, at least, and that caring for them is a task that is taken quite seriously.

Still another possible factor may have to do with the symbolic significance of types of animals for different cultures. Can it be, for example, that domestic animals have symbolic appeal for Rotumans precisely because they are not wild? One could argue that domesticity signifies cultural control for Rotumans, who are a remarkably non-violent people. Domesticity may also be opposed to hierarchy in the Polynesian mind insofar as higher-ranking chiefs are associated with gods, and hence uncontrolled nature. Then, too, there is very little of the Rotuman landscape that can be considered “wild”. Virtually the entire island, up to the summit of the highest hills, is or has been under cultivation. The Hawaiian elaboration of shark metaphors (13 instances compared to 3 for Samoa and 1 for Rotuma) may be related to the Hawaiian equation of a chief with “a shark that travels on land” (Pukui 1983:87), and hence to a concern for the predatory potency of chiefs.

Clearly all of these explanatory possibilities are speculative, but they point to some of the dimensions to be considered in a comparative analysis of choice of animals for metaphoric constructions.

At a more refined level one can explore which specific animal behaviours are focused upon in each set of sayings. Thus in the Hawaiian set there are several references to a cock’s crowing, but such an allusion is absent in the Rotuman corpus. And while both Hawaiians and Rotumans refer to a chicken’s eating habits, the latter focus upon the sloppiness of the animal’s demeanour, the former on the habit chickens have of cleaning their beaks after eating. In both the Hawaiian and Rotuman sets, however, the staring of dogs is contrasted with proper human behaviour.

What emerges from our examination of the comparative materials is the great flexibility that animals provide with regard to metaphoric construction. Within each set the same animal is often used in a variety of ways. For instance the Hawaiian sayings allude to a wide range of crab behaviours – scavenging, making noise in the dark, digging holes in the sand, climbing up on rocks, scattering sand, exposing their teeth, hiding in fissures. To further complicate matters the same behaviours may be given entirely different meanings. For example, both Rotumans and Hawaiians allude to the observation that dogs eat their own vomit. But whereas Rotumans use this behaviour as a metaphor for a man’s mistreatment of a woman followed by his return to her (see above), Hawaiians use it in reference to immanent justice – that speaking ill of someone may result in those very things happening to oneself.

Another example is provided by the golden plover, a migratory shorebird that breeds in the Arctic and winters in Hawaii (where it is called *kōlea*), and other Pacific Islands including Rotuma (where it is called *juli*). Both Hawaiian and Rotuman sayings refer to the plover’s call, and in particular, to the fact that the bird seems to repeat its own name. This is interpreted as egotistical behaviour (both groups), telling lies about someone (Hawaiian), or seeking one’s kin by repeating a family name (Hawaiian). It is also the basis of a child’s game in Rotuma (“*juli, juli, don’t talk!*”).¹²

The plover’s migratory nature is the basis of many Hawaiian sayings, in which a *kōlea* represents any foreigner who comes to the islands only to “grow fat” and then leaves without giving anything back. If a pregnant woman craves *kōlea* meat, it is said her child will be a traveler. Since the plover neither breeds nor lays its eggs in the islands, its nest is used as a metaphor for something which is impossible to find, and “a *kōlea*’s egg” is a subject no one knows anything about, or something far away and out of reach.

In contrast, Rotuman sayings do not mention the migratory behaviour of the plover at all. Since the bird exhibits the same behaviour in both locations, we assume that its migratory behaviour strikes a chord in Hawaiian culture that is absent in Rotuma. Perhaps the post-contact situation in Hawaii, where many foreigners have behaved in the way described, gave rise to such an expression; Rotuma, on the other hand, is located off all major trade routes and has remained under the control of Rotumans.¹³

In addition to behaviour, an animal’s physical features are often the source of metaphor. Here again flexibility is evident. Both Hawaiians and Samoans allude to the softness of an octopus’ body, but with quite different meanings attached. Thus the Hawaiian saying, “*he he’e ka i’a kino palupalu*”, “it is an octopus, a soft-bodied creature”, is said of a weakling (Pukui 1983:66), whereas the Samoan saying, “*o le vaivai o le*

fe'e", "the softness of the octopus", implies that although it has a soft body the octopus is a powerful creature. Samoans use this saying in reference to a small but influential family or village, or a calm but momentous speech (Schultz 1980:24).

Another way of making comparisons is to examine the themes in each corpus. While there is some degree of overlap between the three cultures, what was striking to us is the degree to which each corpus exemplifies unique themes. The Rotuman corpus reflects elaboration upon the themes of personal appearance (12 instances, involving 11 different animals) and interpersonal trust (7 instances, involving 4 animals). The Samoan sayings emphasise themes related to leadership and chiefly protocol (20 instances, involving 12 animals), while the Hawaiian sayings reflect strong concerns for status (17 instances, involving 4 types of animals, all birds), and sexual behaviour (16 instances, involving 8 animals). One could make a good case for these differences reflecting basic value themes in each culture, but a proper comparative analysis of values as reflected in animal metaphors would require a more intensive analysis that we can present here. As Bulmer has taught us, to do a convincing job of it one would have to link the metaphors to their ethnographic contexts and to their usage in everyday life.

CONCLUSION

As Lévi-Strauss (1963) has pointed out, animals are good to think. They provide human beings everywhere with a rich set of possibilities for constructing meaning, and for commenting about the nature of social life (see Brandes 1983, Crocker 1977, Halverson 1976, Leach 1964, and Tambiah 1969 for examples). What we have presented in this paper only scratches the surface. The main lesson we have learned by engaging in this exercise is to appreciate the flexibility of the communicative codes humans construct out of animal metaphors. They are codes that permit the expression of subtle nuances of connotative meanings, a fact which makes them so suitable for social commentaries.¹⁴

The flexibility of animal metaphors for expressing cultural values was brought home to us when we compared the Rotuman, Samoan and Hawaiian corpora. One might have expected that there would have been a good deal of overlap in the metaphoric usage of animals between these historically related Polynesian cultures. The types of animals available are similar and the cultural logic of the three cultures has a common core. Proto-forms of idiomatic usage could well have persisted under these circumstances. But we are convinced by our brief comparative excursion that animal sayings are highly responsive to new social contexts, and that they reflect the subtle concerns of social life as well as its broad outlines. The careful analysis of such sayings may therefore provide insights into cultural life that go beyond those reflected in the use of ordinary language. They may prove to be one of our best keys to illuminating the values of particular cultures, as well as providing us with a workable framework for comparative analysis.

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NOTES

1. Another compilation of Rotuman Idioms has been published by Parke (1971). Mrs Inia's collection is considerably more extensive, however, and provided a better corpus for our purposes.
2. Throughout this paper we use Churchward's orthography for Rotuman words. He offers the following guide to pronunciation, using English equivalents: a as in clam, but shorter, unless written ā; ʻa as in want; ʻā as in cat; ʻā as in fan; e as in bet; f as in fish; g as ng in sing; h as in heart; i as in sit; j as tch in pitch; k as in rake; l as in laugh; m as in mask; n as in nine; o as in obey; ʻō pronounced as in German, somewhat like er in her; p pronounced as in English, but blunted somewhat towards b; f as in fish; r pronounced with a slight trill; s between English s and sh; t pronounced strictly dental, the tip of the tongue being pressed against the back of the top teeth; u as in put; ü pronounced as in German (this sound may be approximated by endeavouring to pronounce ee in see, with the lips rounded); v as in vat; when v falls at the end of a word, particularly when following an a, it is often imperfectly articulated and sounds like o; ʻglottal stop (Churchward 1940, Part II). Where current usage deviates from Churchward we have opted to spell words in accordance with the former.
3. The classification of animals in this section is based on Churchward's *Rotuman Dictionary* (1940). Additional information was provided by school teachers attending a science education workshop conducted on the island in July, 1988, by the junior author. The teachers were well aware of scientific classifications and were careful to distinguish sea mammals and amphibians from fish, although these distinctions are not made by Churchward. The classification presented here should be regarded as tentative rather than definitive. In practice there is some degree of ambiguity regarding the classification of several animals.
4. Eels and crabs can be distinguished from land animals in the same group by adding *ne sās ta* (of the sea) to their category. Thus crabs are *manman vatvata ne sās ta* (crawling creatures of the sea).

5. This may be a direct translation from English.
6. The total for the individual animals adds up to more than 117 since several idioms contain reference to more than one animal.
7. Elephants do not inhabit Rotuma and are known only from books, motion pictures and visits to zoos abroad.
8. Monkeys are not present on Rotuma, although in the past there is at least one instance in which a Rotuman sailor brought back a monkey as a pet. Monkeys are ambiguous in their means of locomotion and not readily classified within the Rotuman schema.
9. Adoption, particularly of grandchildren, is quite common in Rotuma and we do not believe this proverb carries the implication that it is unwise to adopt children. Rather it seems to aim at chastising someone who has failed to reciprocate properly for the care his adopted parents have given him.
10. We acknowledge that there is a methodological problem created by the different time periods covered by the collection of idioms in the three cultures, so our results should be interpreted with caution. Ideally idioms should be collected during the same time period. Nevertheless, comparisons can still be valid if it is acknowledged that one is contrasting Rotuma of 1980 with Samoa of 1910, provided the ethnographic data used is confined to a period contemporaneous with the idioms. The Hawaiian case is more problematic since the collection took place over a 50 year period. Our assumption, based on the history of Hawaiian culture, is that most of the idioms reported by Pukui were current in the earlier years of her collection. We therefore take them to be indicative of Hawaiian culture during the early part of the 20th century.
11. While turtles are captured in deep water, Rotumans dive for them in inshore waters, between the main island and offshore islets.
12. The game involves singling out one of a group by following a chant ending in "Juli, juli, don't talk!" That person then is supposed to keep silent. This game is referred to by someone entering a group where no one is talking. It's a way of jokingly asking why everyone present is so quiet.
13. There are no Samoan sayings about the plover (*tuli*) in the collection we examined.
14. This is not to deny that the same may be true of plant metaphors or metaphors of any kind. However, we believe that animals provide special metaphoric opportunities for human beings because they share such a wide range of characteristics with their human counterparts.

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