

## Reflections on Change in Rotuma, 1959-1989

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When I first went to do dissertation research on Rotuma, in December 1959, I was twenty-five years old. At the time Fiji was still a colony of Great Britain, Morris Hedstrom and Burns Philp dominated trade on the island, and politically the District Officer was very much in charge. Rotuma's isolation was brought home to me when I tried to obtain boat passage there after arriving in Fiji. It took over two months from the time I first attempted to purchase a ticket to Rotuma until I finally arrived aboard the *Yanawai*. The trip from Suva took five days, with multiple stops along the way.

My dissertation concerned land tenure on Rotuma. This was not the topic I had originally intended to study, but it was such a hot issue at the time it was irresistible. A land commission had been sent to the island shortly before my arrival for the purpose of surveying the land, but it aroused so much resentment it was withdrawn. When I finally got there people were eager to vent their feelings, even to a stranger, so I listened-- and took notes. But during the year I spent on the island I became interested in many other things as well: education, leadership, health and medicine, myths and legends, and adoption, to name a few. I published a book, *Learning to Be Rotuman*, and some 16 articles based on my research, but did not revisit the island until 1987.

In truth I had been reluctant to return, not because of any unpleasant memories, but for the opposite reason. My memories were so sweet that I was reluctant to tarnish them. My fear was that Rotuma would have changed so much in the 27 years since I had been there that I would be disillusioned. But that was not the case. During this brief visit I again found the island and the Rotuman people enchanting, and was determined to return more often, and for longer periods. As a result I went to Rotuma for three months in 1988, and again for six months in 1989, with my wife, Jan Rensel, who is doing her own dissertation research on the changing nature of Rotuman society. Most of the data for this chapter were obtained during these visits, supplemented by documentary sources. [1]

### ROTUMA 1959-1960

As part of the Colony of Fiji, Rotuma was governed by a District Officer (D.O.), appointed by the Governor of the Colony. The D.O. was advised by the Council of Rotuma, but he was clearly the **Gagaj Pure** 'Governing Authority'. The Council held no significant legislative or policy making powers. The D.O. acted as magistrate in all but the most serious criminal cases. He was the chief arbiter of civil disputes, and was responsible for interpreting and implementing colonial policy. He was also the "Inspector General," who made sure health and cleanup regulations were followed, and in the case of Fred Ieli, who was D.O. during the first part of 1960, was overseer of Rotuman custom. Political power, in other words, was very much concentrated in the office of the District Officer.

Being a **gagaj 'es itu'u** 'district chief' under these conditions was often difficult, and not very rewarding. The benefits were primarily ceremonial. Politically chiefs were in the position of middlemen, taking instructions from the D.O. and attempting to gain the compliance of the

people in their districts - which was not always an easy thing to do. When policies proved unpopular chiefs were criticized by people in their district for not properly representing their interests, and by the D.O. for being weak leaders (see Howard 1963, 1966 for a discussion of chieftainship during this period). After the Council was reconstituted in 1958, the chiefs' role on the Council was supplemented by elected representatives, one from each district, which further diluted their already meager political powers.

The main issues commanding people's attention during my initial visit concerned land. This was in large part an aftermath of the land commission fiasco. The commission had proposed reforming inheritance principles to make them essentially patrilineal, whereas customarily Rotumans could inherit land from either their father's or mother's side. Many people were very distressed by what they foresaw, rightfully in my opinion, as dire consequences of such a change. But inheritance was only one issue. More immediate for many people was the issue of boundaries, which had never been properly surveyed. There were quite a few disputes pending, and a major portion of the D.O.'s time was spent in hearing, and mediating, land cases. The land commission was sent to Rotuma to survey land holdings, but withdrew in response to the people's anger over the proposed rule changes.

In retrospect it seems clear that land issues were of such great importance then for other reasons as well. At the time there were few opportunities for obtaining cash other than from copra, which required access to land. Economically, copra was king. Furthermore, since the large majority of Rotumans on the island were subsistence farmers, the land was the main source of their food. Indeed, a man's worth was primarily measured by his competence as a food producer, and this required access to land. One way in which the importance of producing food was stressed was through the custom of *kiu*. *Kiu* 'ten thousand' refers to the ceremonial presentation of 10,000 taro corms, along with countless other food products, to a district chief. In 1960 seventeen men from the village of Losa presented Chief Fer of Itu'ti'u with a *kiu*, and gained tremendous prestige by doing so. Chief Fer then distributed the produce to the other district chiefs and various dignitaries, thus gaining considerable prestige for his district. Another way in which food production was rewarded with prestige was through the awarding of prizes for the biggest, heaviest and best at the annual Cession Day celebration. Men worked hard and long to produce the heaviest and longest yams, the largest taro corms, the biggest bunch of bananas, etc.

Beyond the economic importance of land, specific places were associated with one's ancestors, and thus held religious significance. The combined force of these factors resulted in land being the focus of nearly everyone's attention in 1959-60.

The population of Rotuma during that time was approximately 3000, with an additional 1500 or so Rotumans in Fiji. The population pyramid on Rotuma reflected the recent drop in mortality rates, particularly among children. It was broad at the base and tapered gradually to a peak of elders. Households were correspondingly large. The survey that I conducted in 1960 revealed an average of 6.9 persons per household, with the large majority being either nuclear (parents and children) or nuclear with one or more resident kinsmen. The effects of outmigration were only just beginning to be felt at the domestic level.

There were a variety of housing structures represented -- limestone, corrugated iron, wood, and thatch in varying combinations. Native-style houses were quite common, and a good deal of labor went into the periodic repair of thatched walls and roofs. The large majority of household interiors were covered by mats; only a few houses in each district had European style furnishings.

Socially, I was impressed with the high degree of solidarity within villages in 1959-60.

People seemed to enjoy working together on community projects and almost everyone was willing to participate. Families shared food freely with one another, and anyone in need could expect help from his kinsmen and neighbors. There was some inter-district rivalry, mostly expressed in sports and dance competitions, but it was relatively low key and essentially good natured. The one rather serious rift was between Methodists and Catholics. Some of the elders still harbored resentments based on the war of 1878, when the Methodists defeated the Catholics. The two groups rarely co-operated with one another and generally refused to attend each other's functions. Kinsmen who married across religious lines were often ostracized. If Rotuma was a "split island" in 1960 the split was between these two Christian denominations.

From a cultural standpoint Rotumans at that time seemed more interested in their past than they do today. Many of the elders were quite knowledgeable about Rotuman customs and took pains to make sure that ceremonies were properly conducted. Fred Ieli, as D.O., was harshly critical of lapses in ceremonial protocol, and people did their best to avoid his admonishments. I also had the feeling that the spirits of the ancestors—the 'atua—were more on people's minds then. Although most denied doing anything special to propitiate these spirits, people were careful to avoid offending them and acted as if their presence were immediate.

### ROTUMA 1987-89

Perhaps the most vivid impression I have of my return to Rotuma in 1987 was the view from the air as we approached the landing strip in Malhaha. The contrast with my first arrival, after five rocky days at sea, was remarkable. Coming in from the sea one has less sense of the size of the island, and of its isolation. As one approaches by boat, the details—of tree-covered hills, sandy white beaches, houses along the shore, coconut trees, and finally people—emerge slowly, allowing one to absorb them into consciousness little by little, until the emergent mosaic forms a pattern of sorts. Approaching the island by plane is quite a different experience. Once the island is in view one is impressed with how tiny it appears in that vast expanse of ocean. Its configuration becomes apparent all at once -- a dark green gem with white trim anchored in a deep blue sea. There is little time while the plane is landing to make out details. They go by too quickly for the brain to absorb. Then all of a sudden one is immersed in people. In a sense, this speeding up of time is symptomatic of some of the most important changes that have taken place since my first visit.

#### *Physical Changes*

The things that struck me first were the physical changes, like the airport itself, which was opened in 1981 in time for the celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of Cession. The wharf at Oinafa, which was built in the 1970s, was another new feature. One might expect that with these new facilities Rotuma's sense of isolation would have greatly diminished, but after staying there a while we discovered that was not quite the case. Air fare is too expensive for most Rotumans, and because of low passenger loads Fiji Air has decreased its bi-weekly flights to once a week. And although the wharf makes unloading and loading easier than anchoring outside the reef, using launches and punts to transport goods to shore and back, shipping schedules are as unreliable now as they were in 1960. It soon became clear that isolation is still one of Rotuma's major problems.

Another physical change that was very much in evidence was housing. Hurricane Bebe destroyed most native style houses in 1972. For the most part they had been replaced by concrete

houses with corrugated iron roofs. The New Zealand army had come on a relief mission following the devastation and engineered the building of some 300 houses in about three weeks time. Their technical skills have become legendary (and a source of yearning by many for their return as long-term benefactors). A 1966 survey of house types by the Rotuma Council categorized 240 (50.7%) as **ri hafu** (cement or stone), 60 (12.7%) as **ri ai** (wood), 84 (17.8%) as **ri pota** (iron), and 89 (18.8%) as **ri fakrotuam** (Rotuman style). [2] In a subsequent count, during 1981, 82.8% of the houses were categorized as **ri hafu** and the count for **ri fakrotuam** was zero [3] (see Rensel, this volume for a discussion of housing changes on Rotuma).

But an increase in hurricane-proof housing is only part of the story. Rotumans seem to be putting more and more of their resources into modernizing and improving their homes. A number of two-story homes have been built, and such features as verandahs, louvered windows, and rubber-tiled floors are now common. European-style furniture is also very much in evidence. Almost every home has tables and chairs; most have sofas and standing beds.

Furthermore, the discovery of underground fresh water supplies in 1976 has had important effects. Piped water is now available just about everywhere, so people no longer have to depend on rainwater storage tanks. Most homes now have indoor kitchens, with sinks. Also, thanks to additional assistance from New Zealand, many have water-seal toilets either inside or just outside the main building. These have replaced pit latrines in the near bush and outhouses on piers over the ocean. One of the main purposes for installing water-seal toilets, as I understand it, was to eliminate some of the main breeding environments for flies and mosquitoes. Unfortunately no improvement is noticeable. The flies and mosquitoes were as much a nuisance in 1987-89 as they were in 1959-60.

People have also made their domestic lives more comfortable by importing a variety of household appliances. We conducted a survey of households in Oinafa during 1988, and included questions about household goods and sources of income, as well as demographic data. The survey revealed that the majority have radios and sewing machines, nearly half have either a refrigerator or deep freeze unit, and a significant proportion have gas stoves (see Table 1).

Over one-third of the households also own power lawn mowers, which corresponds to another visible change. In 1959-60 most homes were surrounded by packed sand, which was kept tidy by frequent sweeping. Nowadays lawns are preferred. People encourage grass to grow, then keep it trimmed with the power mowers. This gives a somewhat different appearance to villages, although they are generally as neat now as they were then. I did notice, however, that the importation of increasing quantities of tin and plastic containers is causing a waste disposal problem. Although such items are supposed to be deposited in pits, they often seem to find their way to the beaches where they are as hazardous as they are unsightly.

Far more of the island is electrified now. On my first visit the only generators were at the government station and the Catholic churches at Sumi and Upu. Now several villages have generators that provide electricity for a few hours per day, [4] and quite a few individual households have their own generators. Approximately 1 out of 7 households in Oinafa reported owning an electrical generator during our 1988 survey (Table 1).

Some work had been done on the roads during the interim between my visits, but I did not notice much improvement in the main road around the island. It is still extremely rough in places, hard on automobiles and pickup trucks, and requires caution by motorbike riders. What I did notice, however, is that there were far more vehicles using the roads. Our informal count indicated that there were over 30 cars or trucks and well over a hundred motorcycles/motorbikes. In Oinafa slightly more than half of the households owned at least one motorbike (5 households

owned 2), and 8 families owned a car or pickup truck (Table 1). While traffic lights are not yet needed, there is far more traffic on the roads than in 1959-60 when the only motor vehicles on the island were a couple of trucks at the government station, a couple of others belonging to the firms, two cars operated as taxis by the Indian shopkeepers, and a handful of motorbikes. The helmets people now wear while riding motorcycles is a constant reminder that serious accidents are a distinct possibility.

TABLE 1

*Inventory of Oinafa Households, 1988*

Number of Households	65*	
Households owning		
radios	52	(80.0%)
sewing machines	44	(67.7%)
motorbikes	33	(50.8%)
refrigerators	26	(40.0%)
power mowers	24	(36.9%)
gas stoves	15	(23.1%)
electrical generators	10	(15.4%)
pushbikes	10	(15.4%)
cars or pickup trucks	8	(12.3%)
electrical tools	7	(10.8%)
gas ovens	6	(9.2%)
freezers	4	(6.2%)

\*excluding our household

Data obtained from household survey conducted by Jan Rensel and Alan Howard

The big improvement has been in the construction of bush roads out of what were previously footpaths. This permits people easier access to their remote gardens, since motor vehicles can now be used to go to them. The bush roads also make it easier to bring out food crops and copra by motor vehicle. I saw much fewer instances in 1987-89 of men carrying baskets on a shoulder pole, or on horseback, than I did during my earlier visit.

Finally, I noticed some major changes at Ahau, of which the new Council House is the most noticeable. When counterposed to the deterioration of the D.O.'s residence, it signals a marked shift in political status, and power.

*Political Changes*

When Fiji gained independence in 1970, and the colonial regime ended, the relative positions of the Rotuma Council and District Officer were reversed. The Council was given primary policy making powers and the D.O. was made its advisor. One consequence of this change is that the position of **Gagaj 'es Itu'u** has gained in attractiveness, and competition for chiefly titles has intensified. I noticed, for example, a heightened concern for genealogies. In

1959-60 genealogies were of importance to Rotumans primarily for validating claims to land. There was little overt concern for their significance as bases for making claims to chiefly entitlement. In 1987-89 the focus had shifted. A significant number of people now keep written genealogical records where the emphasis seems to be on tracing ancestry to previous title holders, rather than to more immediate ancestors whose land holdings might be tapped.

In general, Rotuma in the 1980s seems to be a far more political community than it was in 1960. During the colonial period people rarely discussed political issues, and were reluctant to express viewpoints concerning the directions future change should take. Dissatisfaction with the D.O.'s policies were usually expressed by grumbling and passive resistance. Now many people seem to have a definite point of view and are prepared to speak out openly, to debate issues, and to criticize those in authority directly. If Rotuma was a "split island" during colonial times, the fracture was mainly along religious lines; in the post-colonial period the divisions are political. Two of the most prominent political issues in recent years have been tourism and Rotuma's position vis-a-vis Fiji following the second coup.

Tourism became a hotly debated issue in 1986 over the proposed visit of an Australian tourist ship, the *Fairstar*, to the island. Opposition, led mainly by the Methodist clergy, was based on the kinds of changes large numbers of tourists might provoke in the Rotuman lifestyle. Several influential ministers, in Fiji as well as Rotuma, argued that young Rotumans would be susceptible to corrupting influences, and that sexual modesty would give way to bikinis and promiscuous sex. They also expressed fears that greed would replace neighborly cooperation in the scramble for tourist dollars. Many of the people on the island were persuaded, but others saw no harm in such a brief (one day) visit. Ultimately the *Fairstar* visited Rotuma in June 1986, marking the beginning of a new era in the island's history. The visit proved relatively uneventful, and was followed by two visits in 1987, one by *The Society Explorer*, the other a return visit by the *Fairstar*. Opposition seems to have softened, although Rotumans still debate the pros and cons of incorporating tourism as a significant component of the island's economy.

One of the understated dilemmas underlying the tourism issue is who will benefit financially from such visits. The visiting vessels have paid substantial docking fees, and the tourists have spent significant sums on food, handicrafts, shells, & other souvenirs. So far the money has been going to the landowners of the beach area at Oinafa, to the workers who help prepare for the visits, to the dancers who have entertained, to the handicraft makers, and other participants. To my knowledge no plan exists for using a portion of the money for the benefit of the whole island. As long as only a few are benefiting from such visits opposition is likely to continue, even though it now seems clear to most that the middle-aged to elderly passengers who take these luxury cruises do not constitute a significant threat to Rotuman morals. The question of a more intensive commitment to tourism -- the building of hotels for example -- remains lurking in the background and is likely to be hotly debated when the first serious proposals along those lines are made.

The second political issue that has divided the Rotuman community concerns Rotuma's ties to Fiji in the post-coup era. Shortly after the first coup in Fiji, which took place on May 14, 1987, the Rotuma Council held an emergency session to discuss the coup's implications for Rotuma. The members of the Council resolved to pledge their support to the new government and remain part of Fiji. In response, Henry Gibson, who claims the title of *sau* 'king', wrote to the Council expressing his fears that the position of the people of Rotuma would deteriorate. Subsequently Gibson addressed the Council and said he would not follow its decision for Rotuma to remain with Fiji.

The importance of Gibson's opposition to the Council ruling lies in the fact that he has a substantial following in Rotuma. Although he is only part-Rotuman, and maintains his domicile in New Zealand, his claims to genealogical connections with previous Rotuman sau are accepted by many of his kinsmen, who recognize the title (*Gagaj Sau Lagfatmaro*) that he claims for himself. [5] A karate master by training, Gibson has also captured the imagination of a number of other Rotumans who are dissatisfied with the Council.

Despite Gibson's objections, in July 1987 the Rotuma Council sent representatives to attend a meeting of the Great Council of Chiefs in Fiji to express Rotuma's desire to remain part of Fiji. Following the return of this delegation meetings were held in each of Rotuma's seven districts to ascertain the views of the Rotuman people. According to the deposition of the D.O. at the time, Viki Epeli, "It was the overwhelming view of the majority of the Rotumans who attended these meetings, that Rotuma should remain part of Fiji even if Fiji were to become a Republic." [6]

Following the second coup in Fiji, on September 25, 1987, and the declaration of the Republic by Rabuka, the Rotuma Council again met and resolved that Rotuma would remain part of Fiji. A copy of the resolution was sent to the President of the newly formed Republic with a copy to the Prime Minister. The following month, in New Zealand, Henry Gibson declared Rotuma independent of Fiji and wrote to Queen Elizabeth asking for recognition. His argument was that the Rotuman chiefs had originally ceded the island to Great Britain, not to Fiji, and that Council members serve only by sufferance of the Queen. Hence by renouncing their affiliation with the Commonwealth they lost their legitimacy. According to Gibson only the Queen could sever the Commonwealth tie.

Acting on the basis of Gibson's pronouncement, his followers held a meeting in April 1988 and selected new headmen for each district. [7] In May the dissident "chiefs" were arrested and charged with sedition, and after a hearing at a special sitting of the Magistrate's Court on Rotuma the case was sent to the High Court of Fiji. This action was taken in response to the argument of Tevita Fa, lawyer for the defendants, that given the nature of the dispute Fiji's right to try his clients was a matter of contention. The following month Chief Justice Sir Timoci Tuivaga issued a judgment ruling that "for legal and other purposes Rotuma continues to be a part of the independent sovereign State of Fiji." [8]

I found opinions to be quite diverse regarding the issues involved. Among Henry Gibson's staunch followers the view is openly expressed that Rotuma will suffer in the long run if it remains politically integrated with Fiji. They are fearful about Fiji's future prospects, and believe Rotuma might do better on its own. In response to questions concerning an independent Rotuma's economic viability the program they favored included four major sources of income: (1) the leasing of fishing rights in the 200 mile zone around Rotuma, (2) foreign aid from developed countries, (3) tourism, and (4) harvesting and processing of Rotuman oranges. Those in direct opposition to Gibson regard him as a political menace and threat to Rotuma's security. They resent the disruption he has created within the Rotuman community and are apprehensive about the effects the secessionist movement he initiated will have on Rotuma's relations with Fiji. They see Gibson as self-aggrandizing and with no legitimacy whatsoever.

Many Rotumans I talked with were ambivalent. They could see some merit in at least considering the possibility of an independent Rotuma, and regarded Gibson as a basically good man who has gone about things in the wrong way. They felt the issue of Rotuma's status vis-a-vis Fiji was legitimate grounds for discussion and debate, and had not reached firm conclusions. I was somewhat surprised to discover that a good many Rotumans in Fiji held such a viewpoint, since Rotuma's independence might jeopardize the possibilities they now have for moving

readily back and forth between Fiji and Rotuma. Some, however, suggested that a status for Rotuma short of full independence -- some version of free association -- might resolve this problem. In any case, during 1988-9 at least, Rotumans had a number of rather meaty political issues to chew on.

#### *Demographic changes*

When I left Rotuma after my first visit, in December of 1960, it was clear that the process of outmigration was accelerating and would have a major impact on the future of the island. At that time there were approximately 3000 persons on the island and about half that many Rotumans in Fiji. One could sense the pressure on land (manifest in an increasing frequency of disputes and much talk about land issues). Fueling the problem was the fact that while death rates on Rotuma had dropped dramatically in the 1950s, birth rates remained high, so that the Rotuman population was increasing at a rapid rate. One could also sense, particularly among youths, the pull of Fiji's urban centers as sources of employment, education and a more modern lifestyle.

An examination of census data collected since then vividly shows that although the Rotuman population has continued to increase rapidly, outmigration from Rotuma to Fiji has actually reduced the population of Rotuma. Using the 1956 census as a baseline, when the number of Rotumans on the island was reported as 2,993, we find an increase to 3,235 in 1966, followed by a sharp decrease to 2,707 in 1976 and 2,588 in 1986. Since the total population of Rotumans continued to increase rapidly over this period, [9] it is clear that this decline in the island's population is due to outmigration.

The effect of this outmigration on Rotuma's age structure can be seen in Figure 1, which shows the shape of the island's structure in relation to the total Rotuman population. In 1956 the age structure of the total Rotuman population reflects the recent increases in numbers resulting from the decrease in death rates with continued high birth rates. Thus it has a broad base of children and tapers toward a peak at old age. The age structure of Rotuma parallels that of the total Rotuman population, suggesting that migration to that point had included both sexes and all age groups in approximately equal proportions (with perhaps a slightly disproportionate number of males in the 20-29 age group leaving and few of the elderly).

By 1966 one sees the effects of increased outmigration among young men; there is a distinct indentation in the 20-29 age group for males on Rotuma. The overall population continues to show the effects of rapid increase, with even more broadening of the base. By 1976 outmigration has affected a broader segment of the population. A pronounced reduction in the proportion of women on Rotuma in the 20-29 age group now appears alongside that of men, and the structure of the island's population above the age of 20 begins to look more like a column than a pyramid. In contrast, the structure for the total population resembles an even more sloped pyramid than before, although a reduction in the size of the 0-4 age group suggests a decline in the birth rate. As can be seen from the 1986 figure, however, the decline was only temporary. By 1986 the difference between the structure of the overall Rotuman population and that of the island is more dramatic still. Although the overall structure retains the shape of a broad-based pyramid, the population on Rotuma looks like it is approaching the shape of an hourglass, with smaller proportions of young children than previously, an indentation in the middle age groups, and relatively high proportions in the older age categories. This suggests that outmigration has increasingly involved young couples who either migrated with their children, or left Rotuma single, married in Fiji and had their children there. [See Figure 1]

The effects of outmigration on Rotuma's social and economic life can be better appreciated by examining what has happened to household size. According to census reports the number of



persons per household decreased from 7.1 to 5.9 persons on Rotuma between 1966 and 1976 (see Table 2). This corresponds to the period of maximum outmigration, when the population of Rotumans on Rotuma dropped from 3,235 to 2,707. The change is reflected in our own survey data. In 1960 I recorded 417 households on Rotuma with a total of 2892 persons, or 6.9 persons per household. Our 1989 survey revealed an average of 5.3 persons per household. As can be seen in Figure 1, this drop in average household size can be mainly accounted for by the dramatic increase in small households, those with three or fewer persons, and to a lesser extent by a decrease in large households, those with 7 or more persons. In part this may reflect the loss of individuals from existing households through outmigration. Where whole families have migrated it may be especially important to leave at least one person behind to insure continuance of rights in *kainaga* 'kin group' land.

TABLE 2  
*Persons per Household on Rotuma, 1956-1986*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Persons per Household</i>	<i>Rotumans on Rotuma</i>
1956	7.4*	2,993
1966	7.1	3,235
1976	5.9	2,707
1986	5.8*	2,588

\* Approximate figures, based on total of "other" households (non-Fijian, non-Indian) and thus including some "Part-Europeans" and "Other Pacific Islanders"

Data obtained from Fiji Census Reports, Government Press, Suva, Fiji.

But that cannot be the whole story, since there has been a substantial increase in households as well. To some extent, at least, the increase in small households may represent return migration by individuals who have opted to establish their own households rather than join existing ones. It may also reflect investments in maintaining an active link to the island by Rotumans abroad. By building a home and having it occupied by close kinsmen, outmigrants insure that they, and/or their immediate family, will have a place to return to in Rotuma. A number of houses on Rotuma are in fact occupied on a caretaking basis for relatives who have sent remittances to have houses built and improved. In other words, the occupants of many small households may be in the position of protecting the resettlement rights of their close kinsmen abroad. [10]

A comparison of findings from our 1988 survey of Oinafa households with my 1960 survey of that district gives additional insights into changes in household structure (see Table 3). The major change over the years has been a substantial increase in households composed of single persons or married couples (11 in 1988 compared to only 1 in 1960). This difference, and a somewhat lesser proportion of "expanded" households (see Table 3 for definitions), accounts for most of the variation between the two surveys. Considering the fact that single individuals are not viable production units for subsistence purposes, the data on household structure would

appear to support the interpretation offered above -- that a number of households are occupied by caretakers for kinsmen abroad.

TABLE 3

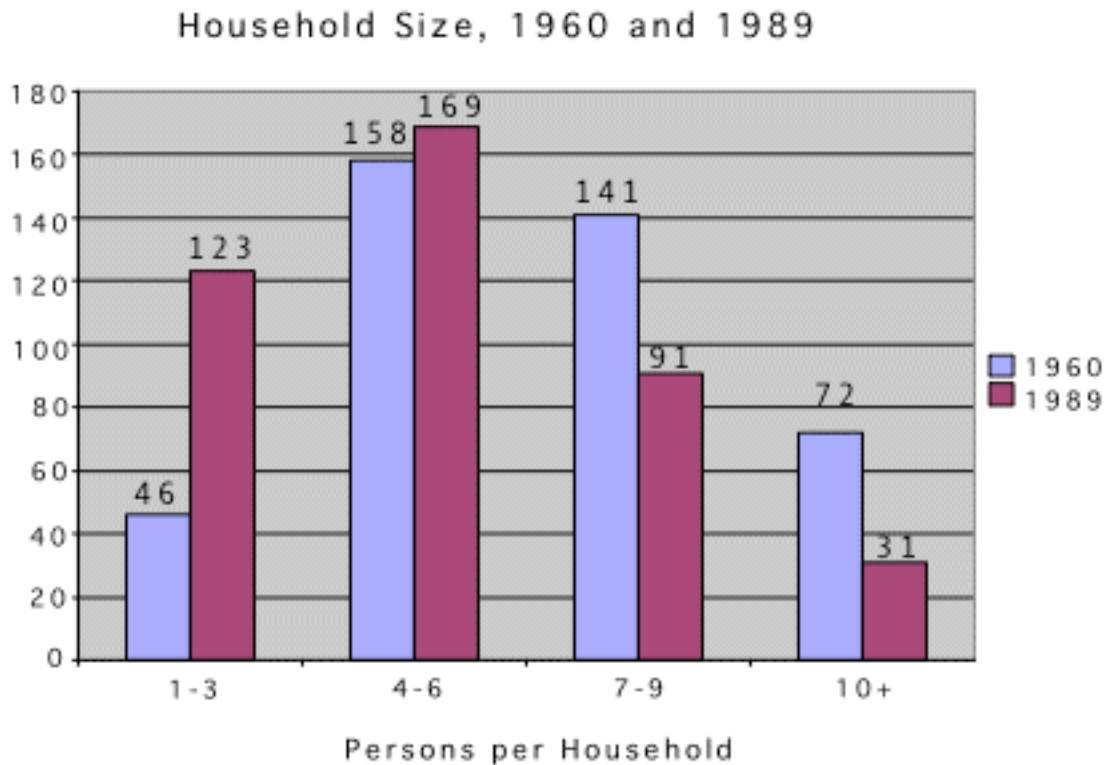
*Household Types in Oinafa, 1960 and 1988*

Type	1960	1988
Single	0	8
Single (expanded)	1	2
Single (extended)	0	1
Single (expanded + extended)	1	0
Total Single	2 (4.1%)	11 (16.9%)
Married Couple	1	3
Married Couple (expanded)	0	1
Married Couple (extended)	1	1
Married Couple (expanded + extended)	0	2
Total Married Couple	2 (4.1%)	7 (10.8%)
Nuclear	14	11
Nuclear (expanded)	15	15
Nuclear (extended)	3	7
Nuclear (expanded + extended)	2	2
Total Nuclear	34 (69.4%)	35 (50.8%)
Joint	1 (2.0%)	1 (1.5%)
SubNuclear	1	6
SubNuclear (expanded)	6	2
SubNuclear (extended)	3	2
SubNuclear (expanded + extended)	0	1
Total SubNuclear	10 (20.4%)	11 (16.9%)
Total minimal, all types	17 (34.7%)	29 (44.6%)
Total expanded, all types	22 (44.9%)	20 (30.8%)
Total extended, all types	7 (14.3%)	11 (16.9%)
Total expanded + extended, all types	3 (6.1%)	5 (7.7%)
Total, All Types	49 (100%)	65 (100%)

The basic (minimal) type was determined by the presence or absence of primary kinsmen of the household head (spouse, children, parents, siblings). If the household head's spouse and children were present the household was classified as *Nuclear*; if only his/her spouse as *Married Couple*; if no spouse, but a parent or sibling, as *SubNuclear*; if his/her spouse + a sibling and the sibling's spouse as joint; and if no primary kinsmen as *Single*. If grandchildren or great-grandchildren were present the household was additionally classified as *extended*; if kinsmen other than those meeting the criteria for the basic type (or for extension) were present, the household was additionally classified as *expanded*. Only individuals listed as regular members of the household who were resident at the time of the census interview were considered.

In taking our survey in 1988 we asked three questions concerning household membership: (1) who are members of this household and are currently here, (2) who are members of this household and are currently away, and (3) is there anyone staying here now who is not a member of this household. [11] Question one generated a list of 319 individuals, question two 173 and question three 6 individuals. In other words, more than one-third of those people considered to be household members were away, and quite a few had been away for many years. [12] Figure 2 shows the distribution of "stayers" and "leavers" by age and sex. What is most noticeable is the high proportion of men and women in the 20-29 age group, and men in the 30-39 age group, who are absent. The large majority of absentee household members are either children (56.6%) or siblings (23.7%) of the household head and his/her spouse. Many of these individuals provide periodic or regular support for their households through remittances and gifts of household goods, building materials and other costly items.

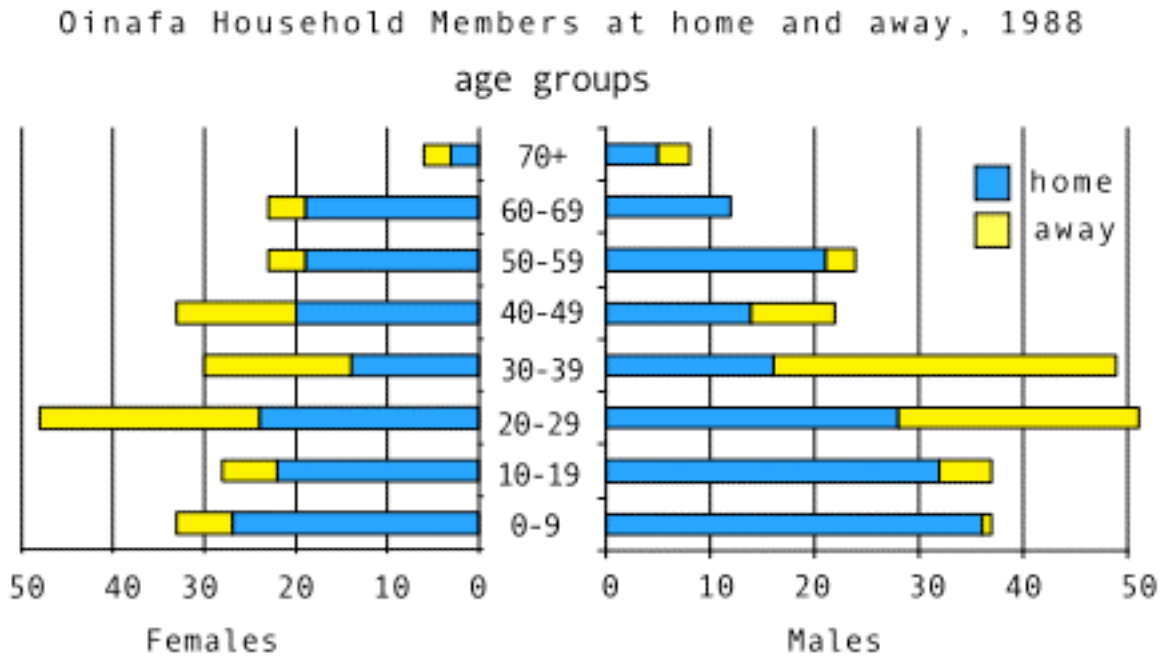
FIGURE 1



*Economic Change*

The most obvious economic change between 1959-60 and 1987-89 is the closing of the two firms, Morris Hedstrom and Burns Philp, and the virtual monopoly over the island's business affairs enjoyed since the late 1960s by the Rotuma Co-operative Association (RCA). [13] In many respects it was heartening to witness the success of the co-operative movement in Rotuma. The strength of the RCA is a tribute to the courage, fortitude and responsibility of the Rotuman people. It is also a monument to the genius of Wilson Inia, RCA's founding father whose guiding hand is still apparent, even after his death. But the success of the RCA has not been without costs and problems.

FIGURE 2



Some of the main economic problems confronting Rotuma are beyond the RCA's immediate control. As pointed out above, in some important ways Rotuma is almost as isolated today as it was in 1960. It is still dependent upon shipping for exporting produce and importing goods, and the shipping schedules are no more reliable now than they were 30 years ago. While the exportation of copra is not seriously affected by this irregularity of shipping, since it stores well, other potential exports, like Rotuma's wonderful oranges, cannot survive long intervals after harvest. Rotuma has therefore not been able to take advantage of possibilities for improving its economic position through the export of surplus produce, and copra remains its only significant cash crop.

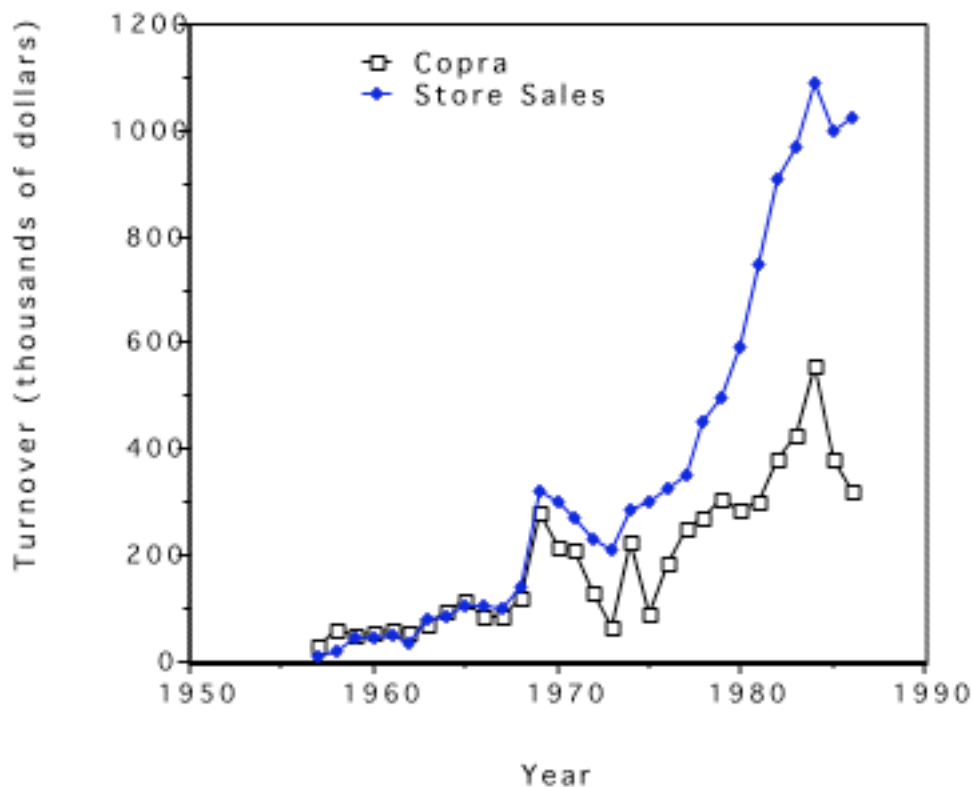
The irregularity of shipping also affects the supply of imported necessities. While on Rotuma in 1988 a boat did not come for several weeks, and basic supplies like flour, sugar, butter, fossil fuels (and of even greater importance for a number of desperate individuals, cigarettes) ran out of stock. People grumbled about this, and some blamed the RCA's management strategy of aiming for rapid turnover of merchandise rather than stocking necessities against shortages. Some also complained about the shoddiness of goods sold at the co-op stores. [14] What was noticeable to me is that there is a narrower range of goods sold on the island now than in 1959-60. The firms, it seems, were willing to take some risks, and imported a relatively wide range of items. The RCA, perhaps governed by their strategy of rapid turnover, seems to stick to high demand items. As a result, people either have to place special orders for many items or plan shopping trips to Fiji. In general, I sensed a growing discontent with the RCA.

Despite complaints about economic problems it is clear that the standard of living has increased significantly over the past three decades. In large part this is the result of increased access to cash. In 1960 copra exports accounted for most of the money available to the people on

Rotuma. A few individuals earned wages from government jobs or employment by the firms. But for the vast majority of people cutting copra was their sole means of obtaining cash. This situation has changed dramatically. Not only are more people employed, but remittances from abroad have become a main, if not the main, source of money for many families. A glance at Figure 3 is revealing. It shows the relationship between copra and store turnover recorded for the island by the RCA between 1957 and 1986. Since the RCA has been the main marketer for copra since the late 1960s, and handles most of the retail business, these figures can be taken as indicative of the island as a whole. The graph shows that until the late 1960s copra turnover and store sales were just about parallel; by the late 1970s store sales were more than double copra turnover; and in 1986 they were more than 3 times copra turnover. Thus it is clear that copra is no longer the nearly exclusive monetary wellspring it once was.

**FIGURE 3**

**Rotuma Cooperative Association Turnover  
1957-1986**



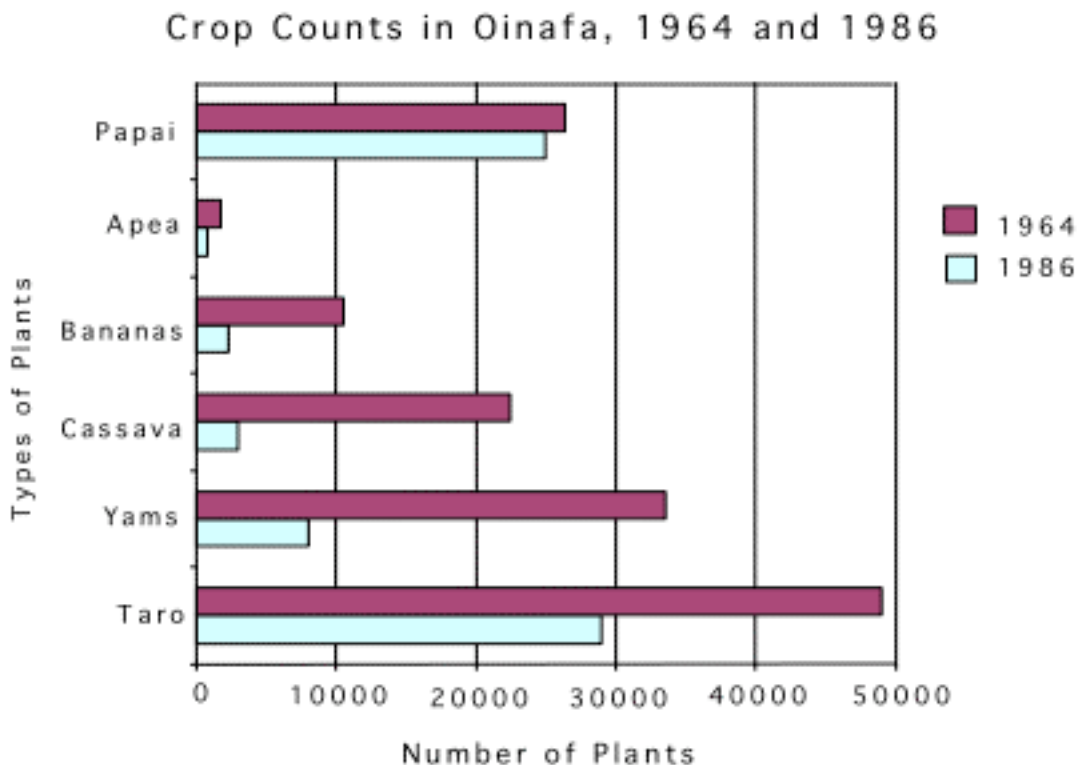
Some indication of how much money now comes from various sources -- remittances, wages, copra -- can be gained from our Oinafa data. For the households on which we were able to obtain information concerning remittances (52 of 65), thirty-seven (71.2%) reported receiving remittances from abroad. Seventeen (32.7%) reported receiving more than F\$500 during the past year. (Cash remittances are not the only way in which relatives overseas have helped to improve living standards on Rotuma. Most of the vehicles and household appliances listed in Table 1

were paid for fully or in part by relatives abroad.)

Nineteen (29.2%) of the sixty-five households had at least one wage-earner, and fourteen (21.5%) had an annual income from wages of more than F\$500. We had records of copra earnings for only thirty-one households, eight of which (25.8%) had no reported income from that source. [15] Only four (12.9%) households had recorded incomes of more than F\$500 for the previous year. What this seems to show is that copra has become a secondary source of income for many families, and that remittances and wages now provide far more substantial amounts.

A question can be raised concerning the effects of increased cash income from remittances and wages on agricultural productivity. Does having more money mean that people come to rely more on purchased food than their own produce? The people we talked to on Rotuma seemed to think so, although they more often cited the evils of kava drinking than the availability of money as a cause. The general opinion was that Rotumans are no longer as hard working as they were thirty years ago. In order to gain an objective measure of changes in garden productivity over the years we obtained data from Oinafa concerning crop plant counts in several different years. A comparison between the earliest year for which we have data, 1964, and the latest, 1986, is revealing. As can be seen in Figure 4, while the production of **Papai**(*Cyrtosperma*) and **'Apea**(*Alocasia*) counts were only slightly less in 1986, the counts for bananas, cassava, yams and taro were considerably less. If these counts can be taken at face value they do indeed indicate a drastic drop in food crop production over the past 20-30 years. [16] To some extent this drop in production is undoubtedly the consequence of more money being available, but it also reflects the loss of males in their most productive years to outmigration, as indicated in Figure 2.

**FIGURE 4**



## *Social Change*

The most pronounced social change I noticed in my 1987-89 visits was the healing of the rift between the Catholics and Methodists. A new generation of ministers and priests apparently took positive steps to encourage cooperation and participation in each other's events. It was heartwarming to see the Catholic priest and Catholic nuns attending Methodist Conference fundraisers (and donating money as well). Perhaps even more significant was the fact that Pepjei, a predominantly Catholic district, hosted the Conference in 1989. Likewise, Methodists now donate labor, money and goods to events sponsored by the Catholic Church.

Another religious change is the establishment of two new denominations to the island, Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. The number of Seventh Day Adventists is now large enough to support a church (in Hapmafau) and pastor. The group of Jehovah's Witnesses is smaller, consisting of the members of some six households in 1988. Given the importance of church activities in the social life of Rotuma, these changes suggest that communities are becoming more fragmented, although as yet the fragmentation has not proceeded very far; either the Methodist and Catholic Church remains at the core of social life in most villages.

More generally, it seemed to me that in 1987-89 the rules governing social relations between various categories of people were somewhat more relaxed. In 1959-60 relations between young unmarrieds, for example, appeared to be more constrained. Boys and girls who were romantically interested in each other were extremely careful to hide their feelings, lest they be teased unmercifully. Nowadays, although courtship behavior is by no means flaunted in public, flirtations were more open and obvious. Also less constrained are relations between adolescent brothers and sisters. In the past brothers and sisters of courting age avoided each other, especially in contexts where one or the other might be with actual or potential sweethearts. In general the respect behavior between brothers and sisters infused their relationships with an air of formality, perhaps even tension. Today, while respect is still evident, formality and tension have been reduced.

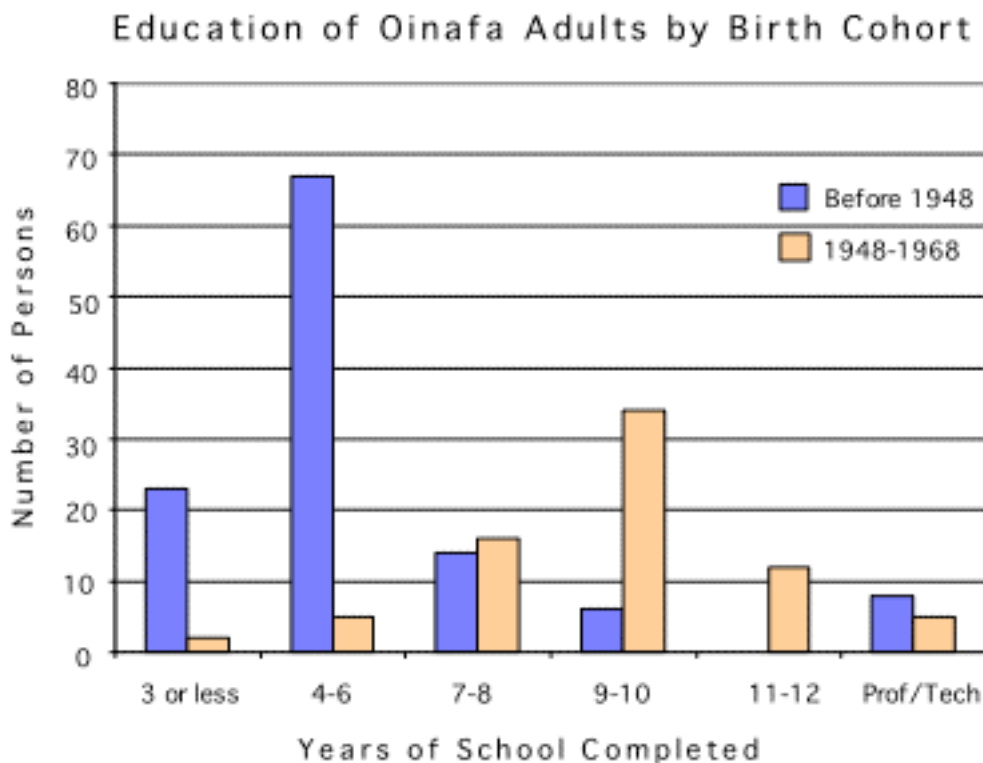
Parallel changes have taken place between chiefs and their subjects. It appeared to me during my recent visits that much of the formality and ceremonial respect behavior that marked interactions between chiefs and commoners is on the way out. Low bowing in the presence of chiefs, and lowered voices when addressing them, were less in evidence. Respect protocol, such as getting off one's bicycle when passing a gathering of people or a chief's house, seemed less common (of course, it is somewhat more cumbersome to get off a motorcycle for such purposes). Except during ceremonial presentations, people now seem to treat chiefs much more like ordinary individuals. [17]

Perhaps the most obvious difference in social life is the degree to which men now meet in groups to drink *kava*. During my past visit *kava* was only drunk at ceremonies, almost never socially. However, the Fijian custom of drinking *kava* socially apparently caught on among men who spent some time in Fiji, and now most villages have *kava* drinking groups who meet frequently -- sometimes for several hours a day -- and spend time engrossed in casual conversation. In 1959-60 the men used to complain that the women spent too much time sitting around gossiping; now it seems to be the men around the *kava* bowl who are the greatest offenders. And as pointed out above, many critics (including a number of outspoken preachers) claim that excessive *kava* drinking is at least partially responsible for the decline in agricultural

productivity.

One additional social change is noteworthy, and in some respects may have had the most pervasive effects. I am referring to the increased level of education that characterizes the current Rotuman population. In 1960 only a handful of adults on Rotuma were educated beyond standard eight. Today, most younger adults have been completed Form III or more schooling. This is evident in Figure 5, which is based on data collected from our survey of Oinafa households in 1988. It shows that among older adults (those born before 1948) the mode is from 4 to 6 years of education, while for the younger adults (those born between 1948-1968) the mode is from 9 to 10 years. While it was true that there are some well-educated people among the older cohort -- those with advanced professional (including the ministry) or technical training -- they stand out from their age-mates. Overall, the educational advancement of younger adults seems to lend a greater air of worldly sophistication to Rotuman social life. Young adults on Rotuma read more, are better informed, and perhaps are less prone to accept authority in an unquestioning fashion than in the past. [18]

**FIGURE 5**



### *Cultural Change*

Corresponding to the greater worldly sophistication of young Rotuman adults is a change in world view. In 1959-60 it seemed to me that people were more in touch with their past -- that they had a stronger sense of cultural tradition. This was often expressed in concerns about the ancestors, who it seemed to me, had a strong "presence" in Rotuma at the time. In 1987-89 I sensed that people were much less interested in the past. The kinds of experiences that would have raised hair on the back of one's neck before, like walking past a graveyard at night, seems to arouse little apprehension today. In my recent visits I gained the distinct



impression that contemporary Rotumans look more to the future than the past, or to the extent they do show an interest in the past it is in a rather detached, academic, fashion. For better or worse, such changes in perspective are a reflection of the degree to which Rotuma has been drawn into the modern world.

Also noticeable are changes in language and language usage. As a reflection of education many more Rotumans are fluent in English today; as a result of experience in Fiji many contemporary Rotumans are also fluent in Fijian. It was fascinating to listen to speakers switch from English to Fijian to Rotuman several times within the course of a speech without losing the attention of his Rotuman audience. Correspondingly, many English and Fijian words are now part of everyday usage; in some instances they have replaced Rotuman words that were commonly used before.

In observing ceremonies being performed I had the impression that people are somewhat less meticulous today about following protocol, that practicality is relatively more important than attempts to be faithful to tradition. Perhaps it is because no one today plays the part of a Fred Ieli, who both occupied the position of D.O. when it carried real authority and was a stickler for ceremonial precision. But for whatever reason, ceremonies seem to have lost some of their formality. More often than not, nowadays, protocol is now a negotiated process, with no one playing the role of confident overseer.

### Conclusion

I was asked several times during my recent visits to Rotuma whether I thought things were better or worse than they were in 1959-60. It is not an easy question to answer. In some ways things are clearly better. The improved hospital facilities and greater number of trained medical personnel available is one example. In some ways things are about the same -- the pesky flies and mosquitoes, the bumpy road around the island, the ships that do not come on time. And I suppose, there are a few changes I was sad to see, including the number of older people living alone, their families away. It was also sad to see the increase in political dissension that disrupts the harmony of communities.

But perhaps the best way I can answer the question is to refer again to the island that stands as a metaphor for what this book is about -- Hofliua -- the split island. If one looks closely at Hofliua one finds that between the two parts of the islet a large rock is wedged, forming a connection between them. This corresponds to the feeling I had about Rotuma in the past and to the feeling I have about it today. There have always been splits among the Rotuman people. Before the Europeans came there were wars fought between districts striving for supremacy. When the Europeans arrived the split was rearranged somewhat, and expressed as a conflict between Wesleyans and Catholics. After the Europeans left the cleavage has taken on a new form -- between those who wish to conserve Rotuma's traditions and those who wish for development and "progress." But as long as people continue to talk with one another, as long as they respect the rights of their fellow Rotumans regardless of viewpoint, as long as the spirit of **haihanisiga** (which I would translate as 'compassionate concern for one another') survives, Rotuma will be one of the better places in the world to live. I am pleased to say that from my perspective the spirit of **haihanisiga** is still firmly a part of Rotuman culture. That is why I was not disappointed or disillusioned when I returned. The rock of common caring has been jarred a number of times to be sure, but it seems to remain as firmly in place as the rock that connects the two parts of Hofliua.

## NOTES

[1] My wife's (Jan Rensel) contribution to this paper have been both substantial and inspirational. She helped design the survey instruments used to collect much of the data presented and conducted a number of interviews. Several of the questions were asked because they are of relevance to her research, which concerns changes in patterns of economic exchange over the past few decades. More important, however, were the insights that she offered for interpreting the information at our disposal. I am also grateful to Tarterani and Mario Rigamoto for conducting interviews on our behalf, and to all the people of Oinafa who made us feel so much a part of the community. This research was supported in part by funding from the Office of Research Administration , University of Hawaii; the Program on Conflict Resolution, University of Hawaii; and the Wenner-Gren Foundation.

[2] For some reason figures for one district, Malhaha, are excluded from the copy of the survey made available to me.

[3] There is some evidence that native style houses are making a comeback, however. A 1986 count in the district of Oinafa lists 2 such houses.

[4] Village generators can be a source of conflict as well as a benefit. In Oinafa village a conflict developed over the question of a fair basis for paying for fuel for the generator. Then, when the generator broke down and required expensive repairs, the question of how they were to be paid for further exacerbated the issue. As a result the generator had been inoperative for nearly two years when we arrived in 1988.

[5] Given the historical documentation concerning the manner in which **sau** were selected in pre-Christian times, Gibson's genealogical claims, even if valid, would be subject to question. **Sau** were chosen by the **fakpure** 'dominant district chief' from each district in turn for ritual cycles of approximately six-month duration (Howard 1985). Thus genealogy was, if at all important, only of minor concern. Gibson's primary claim to legitimacy, however, is that he had a vision in which he was asked to assume the title and restore the **fuag ri** 'house-site' at Molmahao.

[6] *Fiji Times*, June 10, 1988. p. 13.

[7] There is some ambiguity about the titles these new "officials" were supposed to hold. In the press, and among most Rotumans I spoke with, the English term "chiefs" was used in reference to their claims. Some of Gibson's followers, however, insisted that these new officials were not meant to replace the present **gagaj 'es itu'u**, and referred to them as "ministers" (as in "governmental ministers").

[8] *Fiji Times*, June 10, 1988. p. 41. He concluded, therefore, that Fiji had jurisdiction over the case.

[9] In fact the full extent of the increase in the population of Rotumans cannot be determined by the Fiji censuses alone, since a substantial number of Rotumans now reside abroad in New Zealand, Australia, England, the United States and elsewhere.

[10] This is also a strategy for keeping active rights in bush land, especially if the house is built on a **fuag ri** to which bush land is attached.

[11] The six individuals in this third category were counted for purposes of determining household size, but not household structure.

[12] In our survey we asked when household members who are away left. We were able to obtain dates for 141 of the 173 leavers. Of these, 17 (12.1%) left between 1950-59, 34 (24.1%) between 1960-69, 39 (27.7%) between 1970-79, 35 (24.8%) between 1980-87, and 16 (11.3%) in 1988 (during the six month period prior to the interview).

[13] The more recently formed Raho Co-operative, and several small shops are currently offering a challenge to RCA's control.

[14] It was acknowledged by some of these critics that the RCA was in something of a bind resulting from Rotuma's isolation. When receiving damaged or shoddy merchandise the store managers are faced with a dilemma. If they send it back, it may take weeks, or even months, to replace it and there still would be no guarantee that the replacements will be of better quality. They therefore generally accept such goods, which may lead suppliers in Fiji to use Rotuma as a dumping ground for inferior or damaged merchandise. Critics say, however, that the RCA should have better representation in Fiji and that the problem could be alleviated if larger stocks were maintained (so that store managers would not be forced to accept shoddy merchandise).

[15] Our data on copra earnings come from RCA records, but we only have the report for the Oinafa Co-op. Since one part of Oinafa District (Lopta) has a separate Co-operative, we do not have data for households in that part of the district.

[16] While such counts must always be viewed with caution, the differences are so drastic, and the pattern over the years is so clear, that I feel they provide a valid, even if not numerically accurate, indicator of change over the period.

[17] These observations are only impressions and cannot be verified by hard data. I, too, have changed over the years, and I cannot be certain whether it is the way I see the world, and not Rotumans, that is different.

[18] One chief, in a conversation we were having about the difference between Rotuma in 1960 and 1988, complained that the main problem with Rotuma now is "too much education." He said that when people complete school they are often "without direction and do not appreciate the importance of following Rotuman custom" (which includes, of course, deference to chiefly authority).