

THE ROTUMA WEBSITE: TRANSNATIONAL RELATIONS AND THE ARTICULATION
OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

by

CAROLINE ANNE CLARK

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Abstract

As in other parts of the world, multimedia technology and the Internet have changed the ways that people in the Pacific interact. Although multimedia technology is a relatively recent addition to the Pacific, Islanders recognize the potential that it holds and are working to define how it should be used within their communities. The use of multimedia technology to bring together geographically dispersed people is of particular interest. At the same time, the number of Pacific Islanders migrating both throughout the region and abroad continues to increase. Over time, transnational migration can lead to a weakened sense of cultural identity. Given the importance of kin relations and cultural identity, many Pacific Islanders are utilizing multimedia technology and the Internet to remain connected.

This thesis explores a resource that uses contemporary multimedia technology to preserve cultural identity in the context of global migration: the Rotuma website. Rotuma is an island located 465 km north of Fiji. As a small island society, Rotumans historically have not developed a strong sense of cultural identity. In the last century, Rotumans have migrated in large numbers to Fiji and abroad. A weak sense of cultural identity coupled with excellent success abroad in education and employment opportunities could have disastrous consequences for the long-term preservation of this island's heritage. However, the Rotuma website harnesses the power of multimedia technology to both preserve existing kin relations and develop new social networks not feasible in the physical world.

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*“Before the pen there was music and dance to transcribe but now there is this website.”
- Rotuman community member*

Introduction

As in other parts of the world, multimedia technology and the Internet have changed the ways that Pacific Islanders interact with each other and the speed with which such interactions take place. At the same time, increasing numbers of Islanders are migrating both throughout and beyond the geographical boundaries of Oceania. The process of migration is complex. In addition to the challenges associated with moving to a new place and settling, migrants also experience pressure to remain connected to their home islands. Given the importance of kin relations and cultural identity in Oceania, many migrants are using multimedia technology to maintain links to their home.

Although more isolated than some other Pacific islands, Rotuma has spent over two hundred years adapting to outside global forces and the expansion of European authority. The culmination of the resulting change has created a contemporary island society that is a mix of Western cultural influences and Pacific traditions. This thesis explores a resource that has been developed for the Rotuman community that also mixes traditional and contemporary elements: the Rotuma website.

The purpose of the thesis is to examine the history, content and usage of the Rotuma website with a focus on how the website works to create and maintain social connections in the face of increasing fragmentation caused by migration. I will look at how Rotumans now living abroad use the Rotuma website to connect to events, people and traditional heritage; to determine the ways in which Rotuman people are using the website to preserve culture, identity, and transnational social relations; to understand how the website works in relation to the development of a global Rotuman community; and to study how websites and Internet technology are being used to create new forms of social relationships throughout the Pacific and abroad, realized in the form of virtual communities.

I will begin with an overview of the implications of the Internet for Pacific Island communities. Here, I will discuss Pacific migration, the formation of transmigratory networks, and

the erosion of cultural and kinship ties over time. Next, I will provide a brief introduction to the emergence of electronic initiatives within the Pacific and show how such technology is currently being used. The body of the thesis presents background on the island of Rotuma, a history of the Rotuma website, and results from research conducted on the website. A discussion following will demonstrate how the website serves the community and examine its role in the articulation of cultural identity. At the same time, I will present some challenges associated with the website that the community may need to face in the future. This is followed by an overview of the concept of “virtual community”, leading to a comparison between the Rotuma website and a Tongan online resource. Finally, I will provide some lessons learned from the Rotuma website that may assist other individuals or organizations wishing to establish similar initiatives.

Pacific Islands Diaspora & the Internet

Migration Abroad, Transmigratory Networks & the Erosion of Cultural Ties

Pacific Islanders are well known for their propensity to travel. These voyages began as far back as 40,000 years ago when the first wave of settlers moved from Southeast Asian into New Guinea. Migratory settlement eventually spread into the eastern most reaches of the region and diversity began to flourish. Some islands like Tahiti, Tonga and Hawaii grew into large, complex societies while others like Rotuma remained relatively small. This variation was linked primarily to the size of an island and the extent of natural resources that could lead to inequalities of wealth.

When Western explorers began regular travel through the Pacific in the 18th century, the Islander’s individual worlds began to open up. Contact with Western culture brought many changes to the Pacific, initially realized through the introduction of new goods. Items like axes, knives, tobacco, alcohol, feathers and beads were traded with the native Islanders in return for food and fresh water supplies. As colonial power began to take hold in the 1800’s, Pacific Island societies began to

change as a result of missionary power, the growing whaling industry, western disease, newly established plantations, and increasing violence associated with alcohol and firearms.

Another result of western expansion was that Islanders started to travel for new reasons. The main impetus for leaving home was employment opportunities, and many Pacific men initially joined the western ships as sailors and labourers in the whaling industry. In the late 1800's, when colonial powers were firmly established, there was a large wave of migration to Samoa, Fiji, Tahiti and Queensland, Australia to fulfill the need for labourers in the plantations. It is important to note that in some cases this migration was voluntary, related to a desire for European goods, while in other cases it was forced by colonial officials, a practice also known as "blackbirding". (The term originates from the derogatory association of Australian Aboriginals and Africans with the black thrush bird and the notoriously brutal white settler hunting parties that went out in the bush to kill native Australians as a kind of sporting activity).

As Western culture began to penetrate island culture, some Pacific Islanders moved as a response to new authority. Such authority included the church and associated missionaries, colonial officials, and in some cases ambitious chiefs who used colonial expansion as a means of exercising power beyond the accepted realm (Ward 1997: 188).

The most extensive wave of contemporary migration in the Pacific has taken place since World War II. In the last sixty years, there have been many changes in the Pacific including decolonization, the advance of new technologies that made it easier and more affordable to travel, and the proliferation of a worldwide global economic system. In Polynesia and Micronesia, contemporary migration has tended to occur in an international context and is generally associated with a permanent move. The permanency of an overseas move can be attributed to the relative high cost of migration, a greater number of education and employment opportunities in large nations like the United States and Australia, and the process of acculturation whereby over time a return to a rural community may become less appealing. For the most part, migration patterns are linked to an

island's colonial history. For example, people from the Cook Islands and Samoa (formally Western Samoa) tend to migrate to New Zealand while people from American Samoa, Guam and Palau move to the United States. The main western nations that accept Pacific Island migrants are the United States (190,000 in 1996), New Zealand (170,000) and Australia (80,000). Of this 430,000 total, 260,000 are from Polynesia, 100,000 are from Micronesia (90,000 from Guam), and 70,000 are from Melanesia (40,000 Indo-Fijians) (Sudo 1997: 1).

In the contemporary Pacific, there are several key reasons for migration. One is related to overpopulation and a lack of opportunity on home islands. Many Pacific islands are simply too small to support their growing populations and have difficulty organizing their industrial infrastructure. As island populations grow beyond the carrying capacity of the environment, residents begin to look beyond the shores of their home for education and employment prospects. There are a few islands that are the exception, however, owing to an ability to depend on natural resource extraction and tourism.

Another reason for migration is related to a desire for the amenities and lifestyle afforded by Western countries. There can be no doubt that colonialism and the worldwide expansion of western culture have impelled Pacific Islanders to migrate. While many Pacific Islanders leave home in search of individual opportunity, migration is also perceived as a life strategy to allow extended kin at home to attain an improved standard of living. This is achieved via remittances sent back home from migrant workers. In addition to remittances that are sent back to the Pacific, family at home will send gifts abroad. Similarly, it is also common for families at home to send younger members abroad to live with kin while attending school. The process of migration is hardly a one-way street for most Pacific Islanders and as Sudo states, "migrants hope to maintain 'socio-cultural continuity' through various means of communication with their home island communities" (Sudo 1997: 6). It is important to note that sending remittances home works not only to increase the standard of living for kin at home; it also ensures the maintenance of migrants' land rights and personal investments should

there ever be a desire or need to return home. Remittances have been well documented and recognized for the substantial role they play in Pacific culture and economy (Munro 1990; Loomis 1990; Sato 1997; Bertram 1999; Poirine 1998), essentially allowing many smaller island economies to be more sustainable than they would otherwise be in the absence of such trade.

Contemporary migration in the Pacific is interesting because movement is usually not usually related to war, forced expulsion or famine¹. Further, Pacific migration involves the maintenance of social ties, which are kept in place by both migrants living abroad and those who remain at home. According to Helen Morton, transnationalism refers to the multiple ties migrants create and maintain with their home society (Morton 2004: 133). The key to these transnational linkages is communication. Migrants in the Pacific maintain frequent communication via telephone, letter writing, visits, and more recently email and websites. The ties that reach across the Pacific diaspora have resulted in new types of social relations that emerge on the basis of the international dispersal of family and kin groups. This international network not only supports everyday life; it also maintains Pacific Island culture.

However, the global nature of these transnational relations also presents new challenges for migrant communities. In her study of Tongan transnationalism, Morton argues that global kin relations and ethnic identity tend to weaken in the face of long-term transnationalism. The reasons for this include a decline in the knowledge of the local language and culture within the overseas population, the increasingly ambivalent relationship between migrants and those at home, the high cost of traveling home, fewer remittances sent home by the younger migrants, and a high rate of intermarriage with non-native Islanders. Additionally, the governments within the countries accepting migrants tend to use pan-ethnic terms like “Asian American”, “Latino” and “Pacific

¹ Although most contemporary migration in the Pacific is not related to warfare, there are cases of forced expulsion for military or government purposes. The residents of Nauru, Banaba and Bikini Island are such an example, having been relocated so the land could be used for natural resource extraction and nuclear testing. Additionally, there have been waves of migration from Fiji through the late 1980's and 1990's as a result of the coups.

Islander” to describe migrant groups. For some younger Pacific migrants who are unfamiliar with their specific island language and culture, pan-ethnic groups are attractive because they provide a sense of security within a larger group (Morton 2004: 145). For others, this homogenization has negative implications.

In *Globalization and Culture Change in the Pacific Islands*, Victoria Lockwood also discusses the challenges facing migrants and their communities at home. Migrants abroad can experience racism as they are slotted into pan-ethnic minority groups that may be associated with a negative connotation. For individuals, this can lead to a weakening of cultural identity, an important point to be discussed below. At home, migrants’ families can become increasingly dependent on remittances and support from extended family (Lockwood 2004: 26-27). In a book titled *Voyages*, Cathy Small discusses the tensions that are created between Tongan migrants and their families that remain on the island. She states, tensions “surfaced as interpersonal problems, taking the form of everyday disappointments, resentments, misunderstandings, annoyances, betrayals, and anger. They were evident in the look on the face of a returned migrant who discovered the misuse of his village house and in the tone of village women who complained how migration was leaving the village unkempt and untended. Tensions appeared again in the cool distance between American-born Tongans and Tongan islanders of their own generation (Small 1997: 197). Often, these rifts go publicly unrecognized and are downplayed, although they can eventually lead to a deterioration of family ties. Small illustrates this in the Tongan context. When she asked migrants why they left the island, the response was for “opportunities”, but when asking Islanders why their relatives leave, the response was “for their families” (Small 1997: 197). Given the different versions of what the migration process is about, it is inevitable that a rift will form.

As noted above, transnational migration tends to heighten awareness of ethnic identity. Alan Howard and Jan Rensel call this awareness “ethnic consciousness” (Howard and Rensel 2001: 66). They believe that this consciousness is formed as a response to a number of factors including

discrimination, status ambiguity and repeated messages that work to establish an ideology of “we-ness” or the sharing of a common social fate that extends well beyond the boundaries of the original homeland (Howard and Rensel 2001: 67). Initially, this ethnic consciousness will strengthen ties between migrants and their home communities. The first few months, even years, abroad can be extremely challenging and most Pacific Islanders experience homesickness and longing for the familiar. During this time, migrants will work to maintain ties to their home through personal contact via telephone, letters, remittances, email and the Internet. Over time, however, ties tend to weaken as migrants become settled in their host countries and a divide is formed between those at home and those abroad. This split increases with the next generation of children, who are usually foreign-born and do not speak their home language or know their culture well. The break down in social ties can eventually result in weaker cultural identity and fewer remittances sent home, both of which have serious consequences for Pacific culture and economy. It is during this time that transnationalism comes to the forefront of Pacific social relations as migrants find themselves in the midst of a global community, defined by both Pacific tradition and contemporary western culture. Thus, within the context of international migration the boundaries of island societies extend, flex, and intersperse to accommodate change, conflict and growth.

Barbara McGrath illustrates this process in a paper discussing how Samoan migrants living in Seattle define themselves. Here, the boundaries of the Samoan community are described as “surrounded by margins that provide a space defining the insider and the outsider” (McGrath 2002: 307). McGrath links her notion of community to Stuart Hall’s concept of articulation, where connections are made and unmade through a fluid process consisting of experiences, narratives, the formation of identity, and social consciousness. Contemporary community for McGrath is something that one experiences and membership in a community is “akin to ‘being there’ with those who have a shared consciousness” (McGrath 2002: 311). McGrath also makes use of Benedict Anderson’s (1983) well-known concept of an “imagined community”, a notion that is particularly

relevant for the contemporary Pacific migrant community since this image “transcends boundary, is not limited to a specific geographic locale or a single community, and functions to highlight the connections migrants maintain with their home communities while forging links in their new homes” (McGrath 2002: 312).

In a paper titled, “Rotuman Identity in the Electronic Age” (2004), Howard and Rensel discuss the experience of the Rotuman global community and the resulting weakened cultural identity. They draw the root of the problem for this specific community back to the relative isolation of the island prior to European contact and subsequent migration. Due to its small size and geographical isolation, Rotumans did not have extensive opportunity to gain a clear sense of their overall cultural distinctiveness. Rather, they formulated difference based on districts and family lineages (Howard and Rensel 2004: 219). It was not until Rotumans began to migrate abroad that Rotuman national identity emerged. Once abroad, Rotumans have achieved great success in both education and employment opportunities. Additionally, migrants separated from both their home island and each other will develop different conceptions of their cultural identity. Howard and Rensel argue that it is the extraordinary ability of Rotumans to adapt to modern cosmopolitan culture and the world capitalist system that has led to today’s weakening sense of cultural identity (Howard and Rensel 2004: 221). Thus the relative ease with which Rotumans find success abroad also has unfortunate negative consequences for cultural identity.

Hence, as migrants adapt to life overseas, they alter their traditional practices to fit into their new homes. Some practices are altered consciously while others evolve naturally as they are infused with the culture of the host country as well as cultural practices belonging to migrants from other parts of the world. Lockwood calls this new form of culture “deterritorialized global island culture” (Lockwood 2004: 27). Despite changes in cultural practice, family relations remain an important aspect of Pacific Island culture. Although some ties in the Pacific are renewed and revitalized with subsequent generations, in the case of islands like Rotuma where very few migrants return on a

permanent basis the ability to connect in an imagined venue is important. In recent years, the preservation of these ties has been assisted by multimedia technology such as the Internet and websites.

IT and the Emergence of Electronic Communities in the Pacific

Information Technology (IT) has affected the basis of world trade, global development, international communication and social relations. IT is defined as “the study or use of processes (especially computers, telecommunications, etc) for storing retrieving, and sending information” (Thompson 1998: 454). Although computer networking and the Internet were developed in the United States to connect national governmental, academic and research institutions, their use quickly spread around the world. Computers in particular have penetrated all aspects of modern life from banking to education, health care to industry, public sector to the private home.

However, the majority of IT development is based in wealthy, industrialized nations, leaving remaining areas of the world struggling to get a grasp on emerging technology and adequate training. Like infrastructure, knowledge has become a commodity and many non-western countries are increasingly “information poor” (Ogden 1995: 19). According to Michael Ogden, those in the West -the information rich- “have determined and prioritized issues according to their own visions and realities” (Ogden 1995: 20). He notes that this is a concern for Pacific Islanders, who fall into the information poor group, since the geographical isolation of the islands and limited access to resources impede Islanders from articulating how they want to use the information superhighway. Ogden believes that technological advances in IT are an imperative aspect of Pacific development; however, they must be instigated by means of a “full package deal” that includes infrastructure, resources, training and support (Ogden 1995: 22). This will ensure that IT is harnessed in a way that works to preserve Pacific culture rather than undermining it.

IT is a relatively recent development in the Pacific and most islands still do not have the level of telecommunications and IT services available elsewhere in the world. Initially, the introduction of IT was facilitated by organizations from outside the Pacific, although Pacific Island governments, businesses and individuals are now taking more control, redefining its use to fit local goals. Recently, websites in the Pacific have flourished as IT has been incorporated into various aspects of island life – work, travel, finance and interpersonal relations. Islanders are also using Internet technology to keep in touch. Connections are maintained through news bulletins, chat rooms, websites with live coverage of events, and email.

The purpose of early projects instigated by outside aid organizations was to introduce IT to Pacific Islanders and to provide access to resources. For example, the Pacific ICT (Information Communications and Technology) Portal is a site that provides links to information and communications technology resources that specifically relate to Pacific Islanders. The site was developed between 2002 and 2004 as part of the ePasifika Project, supported by UNESCO. Resources on the website are posted according to topics such as Access, Capacity Building, Culture, Policy Issues, e-Commerce and Regional Initiatives. Each section contains additional information delivered in the form of articles, links to other websites and multimedia project descriptions. It appears that content has not been updated or added for over a year now, although it is not clear whether this is related to a planned project end or a lack of resources (<http://www.pacificforum.com/ict/index.shtml>).

Building on these information-based initiatives, Pacific island governments were next to note the importance of getting on the information superhighway. Embracing IT in some cases allows smaller Pacific countries to more easily participate in the global economic system. For example, some Pacific countries have used international web standards to their advantage by selling the rights to their Internet domain names. Perhaps the most well known example of this is Tuvalu. The island of Tuvalu has a Country Code Top Level Domain name of “.tv”. Domain names pertain to the suffix

on an Internet IP or email address that directs users to the appropriate place on the Internet. Each country in the world has its own domain name, which is assigned by an international organization called the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority. Given the high commercial value of their domain name, in 2000 the government of Tuvalu leased the exclusive rights for .tv to the California-based company Idealab. Except for reserved names like .com.tv, .net.tv and .org.tv, any person in the world can register a .tv domain for a licence, which currently sits anywhere between \$1,000 and \$1M USD, plus an annual fee. The government states that revenue from the sale of the domain name is used to improve the welfare and education of Tuvaluse. The venture has created controversy within the country; however, as a significant portion of websites with .tv URLs are pornographic or sexually explicit. Such uses conflict with the strongly Christian ethos of the county. Conversely, the agreement, which brings approximately \$4M annually to Tuvalu, allowed the government to earmark funds to join the United Nations in 2000. This will grant the small island access to the UN's education, health, technology and development programs.

Recently, Pacific businesses have started to embrace IT as a means of marketing their products globally. Websites and e-commerce now allow small Pacific entrepreneurs to reach an international clientele. An example of a commercially based Internet venture is the website www.pasifika.com. This website sells Pacific media material such as music, photographs, graphic design, animation and film. The website is an extension of the company Pasifika Communications, based in Fiji.

Another type of Pacific website are those promoting academic associations focusing on Oceanic art and culture. The purpose of these websites is to disseminate information about the Pacific, and they are usually developed and maintained by non-Pacific Islanders. The Pacific Arts Association (<http://www.pacificarts.org>) and the Oceanic Art Society (<http://www.oceanicartsociety.org.au>) are two such examples. These websites work to connect individuals who share a common interest in Oceanic art by posting information on upcoming

conferences and meetings, publications, employment opportunities, announcements and exhibitions. Although Pacific islanders are welcome to join such associations and contribute content to their websites, these websites are not resources developed for and run by Pacific island community members.

Lately, interactive websites created by institutions like museums, galleries and cultural centres have also become quite popular. These are ventures that contain elements of Oceanic culture projected in a non-commercial manner. The purpose of these websites is to connect visitors to institutions or organizations. Institutes like the Fiji Museum, the Pacific Islands Museums Association, the Bishop Museum, the Tjibaou Cultural Centre and the Vanuatu Cultural Centre all now have websites. These sites are similar to institutional websites found in other parts of the world in the sense that they are developed and maintained primarily as marketing tools. Although the websites may be presented as portals to Pacific Island culture, their purpose is to promote, support and create awareness of the institutions that are the actual portals.

Another kind of website that has emerged in the Pacific are those with a focus on culture and community, but that are not commercially or institutionally based. The purpose of these websites is to facilitate connections between visitors and communities. These are less common. Reasons for this are not clear, although it might be fair to assume that this is due to the fact that for hundreds of years Pacific culture and community have been enacted naturally in the everyday, not in a virtual realm. This may change in coming years though as chat rooms and online electronic communities become more prevalent among the migrant diaspora and access to adequate technology on the islands increases. These initiatives function primarily as a means of communication, although they also work to disseminate information, allow access to cultural heritage and facilitate connections across the transmigratory networks. Examples of this type of initiative include Samoalive (<http://www.samoalive.com/>), the Kava Bowl (<http://www.pacificforum.com/kavabowl/fiji/>), the Wantok Forum (<http://www.niugini.com/wwwboard/>), and Tumunu (<http://www.ck/tumunu.htm>).

Samoalive is intended for Samoans, the Kava Bowl for the Tongan community, the Wantok Forum for the Papuan, and Tumunu for the Cook Islanders. Towards the end of this thesis, I compare the Kava Bowl to the Rotuma website.

The effects and successes of websites that facilitate connections between geographically dispersed people are little understood in the absence of empirical study. Such studies are difficult to conduct, given the short lifespan of these kinds of websites. The limited lifespan of these initiatives is related to a number of issues, including technical challenges, continually changing leadership, low community engagement and meagre funding. The Rotuma website though, having been online for over nine years now, is an exception and thus an excellent place to assess the potential of culture and communication centred websites.

Rotuma

Historic Background

The island of Rotuma is located 465 km to the north of Fiji. It is located a similar distance south of Tuvalu, 350 km to the west of Futuna, and over 700 km to the east of Vanuatu. As such, Rotuma is somewhat isolated, sitting near the intersection of Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia. Rotuma itself is 43 km² large, divided into two sections joined by a small isthmus. The island is of volcanic origin and has been described as the “garden of the Pacific” (Allen 1895: 2). European travel accounts and trading journals are filled with descriptions of the island’s luxuriance of vegetation, including coconuts, oranges, taro, bananas, sweet potato, sugar cane, sago, breadfruit and cocoa (Allen 1895: 1; Forbes 1875: 222; and Jarman 1832: 1). According to archival and contemporary reports, Rotumans exhibit a Polynesian cultural character although linguists do not consider the Rotuman language to be of Polynesian origin (Howard 1998: 1).

Prior to contact with western explorers, Rotuma was divided into seven political districts, each headed by a District Chief, with the overall island governed by three pan-Rotuman chiefs called

the Fakpure, the Mua and the Sau. The Fakpure was both a convener and a presiding officer over the Council of District Chiefs. He also appointed the Sau and ensured his care. The Fakpure was selected from the strongest district, which was generally the most recently victorious in a war. The Sau's role was to take part in the island's ceremonial feasts and ensure the island's prosperity (Howard 1997: 7). In some accounts he is referred to as "king", making it uncertain whether the Fakpure or the Sau held more power. The Mua was associated with spiritual power and has been called the "high priest of the island" (Histoire de la Station in Howard 1997: 8). He worked to capture the power of supernatural beings to exert control over factors like drought, famine and a good harvest. Traditionally, Rotuman districts were divided into sub-areas organized by kinship household units called *ho'aga*, each headed by a titled male. The titles were ranked and District Chiefs were selected from the *ho'aga* holding the highest-ranking title. Choosing the successor to a title was the right of the cognatic group tracing ancestry to the *ho'aga* that owned the title. Kinship seniority was key but consideration was also given to personal characteristics such as generosity, knowledge and an ability to command respect (Howard 1966: 64). Rotuman membership to a particular group was linked closely to the land, articulated through the division of districts and households. Myths and spirituality also played a role since membership to a particular group was traced through ancestral relations to mythical figures. The chiefly Mua position was deserted around the time of European contact in 1791 and the Sua position many years later in 1873. This was perhaps partly due to an increased burden of care or a decline in the Fakpure's ability to exert power over the general population, but certainly as a result of missionary pressure (Howard Rensel 1997: 8). Missionary pressure to forsake traditional chiefly positions was related to both a desire that the Rotumans accept the Christian God as a leader and an understanding that the abandonment of traditional leaders would make the task of conversion less challenging.

The island's first contact with European explorers was in 1791 when Captain Edward Edwards' ship the HMS *Pandora* landed for a brief stay to restock supplies. Although at first

Rotumans were hesitant to begin trade relations, the island quickly became a popular port of stop for those engaged in the whaling industry and soon Western material goods became integrated into island life. This period marked the beginning of international relations for the people of Rotuma, with numerous European beachcombers settling on the island. At the same time, many young Rotuman men joined the ship's crews to voyage to other parts of the Pacific and abroad. European contact with the island also brought missionaries and new communities were formed as some Rotumans joined the Catholic mission and others joined the Wesleyan mission. By the end of the 19th century the majority of the island's population had converted to Christianity.

Eventually, rivalries between the Catholics and Wesleyans led to open warfare. Seeking a solution, Rotuman chiefs in 1880 requested that the island be ceded to Britain. Not wanting to create a separate colony, British officials placed Rotuma under the administration of Fiji. Rotuma has been politically and socially linked to Fiji ever since. In the 1950's the island's population began to reach beyond the carrying capacity of the land. A near absence of commercial activity with a dependence on copra and subsistence agriculture made the problem even worse. Political affiliation with Fiji had opened up the possibility of migration and Rotumans began leaving the island in increasing numbers to pursue education and employment opportunities abroad.

Today, the number of Rotumans who choose to travel to Fiji for post-secondary education and employment opportunities continues to increase. Western influences have also encouraged many to emigrate abroad. Today, Rotuman communities can be found in Fiji, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. Howard and Rensel have conducted extensive studies of Rotuman demographics. Using Fijian census reports, they note that in 1921 there were 2,112 Rotumans living on the island and 123 Rotumans living in Fiji; or, 94% of the population on the island and 6% on Fiji. By 1986 the ratio had changed to 2,554 Rotumans on the island and 6,098 living on Fiji; or, 30% of the population on the island and 70% on Fiji (Howard and Rensel 1997: 2). Today, they estimate that approximately three-fourths of the total Rotuman population lives abroad

in Fiji, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States and Europe (Howard and Rensel 2001: 63). While Rotumans living abroad adapt quickly into their new homes, they do not easily forget their island community and make an effort to stay connected to their cultural heritage.

Alan Howard, Jan Rensel & the Development of the Rotuma Website

The Rotuma website was developed by Alan Howard in 1996 and is currently hosted on the University of Hawaii's Internet server. Howard has been working with the Rotuman community since he first visited the island in 1959 to undertake ethnographic research for his PhD thesis. At that time, Rotuma was still very isolated, accessed only by ship every three months. After the completion of his research, Howard did not return to the island for 27 years, although he kept in touch with Rotumans via mail. During that time, Howard built upon his original PhD work, publishing numerous books and articles on topics of land tenure, leadership, chieftainship, adoption, youth culture, myth, ethnicity and social change. Since his return to the island in 1987, he has collaborated with his wife, Jan Rensel, to publish additional articles on subjects of political status, ritual status, disabled persons, adoption, migration, seafaring, discourse and belief, housing and national sovereignty. Rensel also conducted PhD research in Rotuma, focusing on the role of money in the social life of the Rotuman people (Rensel 1994). In addition to frequent visits to the island, the pair travels regularly to Rotuman communities in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the US Mainland and Europe.

The Rotuma website evolved from Howard's desire to use technology to keep in touch with Rotumans around the world from his base in Hawaii. This began in 1995 with the establishment ROTUMANET, a list-serv type communication system in which community news was circulated via fax, email, or post mail to academic scholars and a small number of Rotumans. As technology progressed and website development became accessible to amateurs, Howard took on the task of creating a versatile site where additional forms of information such as photographs, maps and

publications could be shared with a wider audience. The Rotuma website was officially launched in November 1996.

Although the website was designed and constructed by Howard, he is quick to point out that he consults constantly with Rensel and as such, it represents a joint initiative (Howard and Rensel 2004: 236). While Howard takes care of the website development, design, weekly updates and collecting correspondence, Rensel contributes content and assists with editing materials. The hosting of the website on the University of Hawaii's Internet server is a service that is provided free to the Rotuman community since Howard and Rensel are both affiliated with the University. Howard and Rensel use their own computer hardware and software for updates, conducted from their home office in Honolulu. Although the development of the website initially required a substantial investment of time in its design and construction, Howard estimates that he now spends only five to ten hours per week updating the site. Occasionally, he will spend significantly more time adding new sections such as the recent photo essays from his trip in 1959 through 1961, or the revision and expansion of the music section. Howard is not a professionally trained web developer and believes that the continued development and maintenance of the site could be continued by somebody with intermediate computer skills who is either a Rotuman or closely connected to the Rotuman community (personal communication: 01/30/2005). He believes that a connection to the Rotuman community is important so the Webmaster is able to understand and incorporate the nuances of Rotuman culture into the website.

An interesting point to note is that the website is not used extensively by Rotumans living on Rotuma itself since access to multimedia technology and the Internet is limited on the island. Although there are a number of computers on the island, accessing the Internet is costly, done either via a long distance call to Fiji, satellite or subscribing through a different server in another country. Howard has sent copies of the website on CD to the government station, the high school and several individuals, although these fixed copies do not allow for updates and additions to content. The fact

that the website is not used primarily by Rotumans living on the island proper lends an interesting dynamic to this community resource. In effect, the users of the Rotuma website form a global network linked to but not situated on the island itself. Transnationalism is usually studied in terms of the linkages between migrants abroad and those back at home. However, the Rotuma website is a resource that creates linkages across the transmigratory diaspora, which in turn work to strengthen cultural identity linked directly back to the island proper.

The Rotuma Website²

Description of the contents and layout

The Rotuma website is different in structure and content from most other Pacific websites in the sense that it has been developed by an adopted community member as a community resource. According to Howard, the purpose of the Rotuman website is twofold. Firstly, it serves to provide information about Rotuman people and culture for those who are interested in learning more about this Pacific island. It is important to note that this information is not intended to be academic in nature, although some of the included content has been attained through scholarly research. The second purpose is to preserve cultural heritage by facilitating cultural bonding (Howard and Rensel 2004: 226). Although the website is over nine years old, Howard maintains that this dual purpose has not changed (personal communication: 01/30/2005).

The website is divided into sections based on subjects such as History, Culture, Language, Maps, Population, and Photographs. It also includes sections on the creative or social aspects of Rotuman life such as Humour, Recipes, Contemporary Artists, Proverbs and Music. A number of the sections are structured in an interactive format to allow users to contribute material. For example, in the News section, Rotumans or others interested in Rotuman community can send announcements and reports to be posted online. In the Register section, Rotumans can add contact details and family

² <http://www.hawaii.edu/oceanic/rotuma/os/hanua.html>

relations. The Forum is a place for Rotumans to engage in dialogue, debate and discussion on topics of concern to the community. There is also a Bulletin Board, where community members can post requests for information, make announcements, share information or ideas, and search for lost friends or relatives. This section originally began as a Message Board where site visitors could post their own messages. However, the Board was soon overrun with inappropriate postings that included profanity and individual attacks. Since the postings were anonymous, it was not possible to tell if the offenders were even Rotuman. Howard received several complaints from the Rotuman community and the Message Board was taken down and replaced with the Bulletin Board. Now, those wanting to post a message must email, fax or mail it to Howard. Howard checks that the content is appropriate, edits the content for spelling and grammatical errors, and posts the message himself. The Board is updated regularly and older messages are removed from the site. Recently, Howard has started creating a copy of the website on a monthly basis for archival purposes.

None of the survey respondents indicated that they find the editing and mediation completed by Howard as Webmaster to be problematic. Although such mediation involves an assumption of authority on the part of the Webmaster, Howard does not see this as an issue since he positions himself (as apparently do users of the site) within the community at large. He states, "I do not like to say that I take a neutral stance... I consider myself a legitimate member of the Rotuman community and as a member of the community I am prepared to take responsibility and express my views when I feel that it is appropriate. I don't do it a lot actually. I certainly don't want to impose my views where it is fortuitous, but I certainly express my views at times. So it's not being neutral, but I think that people see it in the spirit that I am offering it – which is that I am trying to provide a service" (personal communication: 01/30/2005).

The website also contains a number of academic papers, excerpts from historical documents, missionary accounts and archival reports written by westerners who visited the island between 1824 and the early 1920's. Howard has attained permission to post these archival records from various

libraries and institutions around the world. Some of these accounts have been previously published; some not. All would be difficult for community members or researchers to access independently. In addition to these scholarly resources, there is a section with a descriptive overview of the language, a bibliography of Rotuman language studies, and a Rotuman-English dictionary. The website also contains information on Rotuman linguistics by Hans Schmidt and two language lessons developed by linguist Marit Vamarasi. The lessons can be downloaded from the website or Vamarasi can be contacted via email. Although the content on the website is not enough to become fluent in Rotuman, it is an excellent place to begin learning or to brush up on skills that are no longer used on a regular basis.

In addition to the above resources, the website has a significant number of photographs posted in a “Photo Album”. Here, images are organized according to topic (Scenery, Social Events, Interesting Things), photographer (Rocky John Peters, Seth Pershan, Nancy Smith, Ian Osborne, Natasha David, A M Hocart, and Dr. H.S. Evans), or into various contemporary community montages created by Howard and Rensel. Howard has also added a series of photo essays from his time on Fiji and Rotuma between 1959 and 1961. The images by A M Hocart are from 1913 and those by Dr. H.S. Evans are from 1940. During Howard and Rensel’s most recent trip (summer 2005) to Europe to visit Rotuman community members, they were thrilled to discover photographs of Rotuma dating back to the 1920’s in the Marist Archives in Rome. They now have digitized copies of these images available for viewing online. These archival photographs are a rare visual record of Rotuman history. For much of the community, the images on the website are the only ones they have of friends and family members, both from the past and more recent times.

Given the importance of Rotuman music and dance, Howard has also added Rotuman song recordings as well as the lyrics to 116 songs. There are over 20 songs available for download in MP3 format and a number of sample tracks, including a rap song by Vancouver area musicians Aaron Valera, Isaac Titifanua, and Gordon Wesley. The addition of the music provides the website

with an intangible sensory experience that does not come from looking at text and photos alone. To build on this sensory experience, the design of the website, including the background graphics and colour scheme, have been created in a manner intended to reflect Rotuman character. At the time of this study, the Home page includes a photograph of the island and the phrase “*Noa’ia ‘e Mauri*”, which is a welcoming statement. The background design is based on a digitized photograph of a traditional Rotuman mat, for which the island is well known.

The Rotuma website is the most comprehensive resource on Rotuma and its people. As such, it is the premiere place to visit if one is looking for information about Rotuma or to connect with community members. In essence, the website is a place where knowledge is gathered, stored, transferred between community members and made available for future generations.

Research Methodology

The purpose of the research project was to study the history, content and usage of the Rotuma website with a focus on how the website works to create and maintain social connections in the face of increasing fragmentation caused by migration. In order to gain an understanding of the Rotuma website itself, the research methodology involved gathering quantitative and qualitative data on how the website was developed, how current visitors use the website, and the overall community response to the website.

The first step was to conduct an in-depth interview with the website developer and current Webmaster Alan Howard. This interview took place on January 30, 2005 at his Honolulu home office. The purpose of the meeting was to gather background information on the history and development of the site, its progression and growth over the last nine years, and prospective direction for the future. The interview was also an opportunity to learn more about the content of the site, design process, previous evaluative measures and practical barriers that Howard has encountered while working on this initiative. We also discussed the feedback that he and Rensel have received

through their personal interactions with Rotuman community members around the world. This interview was informally continued over subsequent months via email.

Next, it was important to solicit feedback from website visitors. Although Howard gathers web statistics from Ned Stat (<http://www.nedstat.com/uk/>) the specific objectives of this project required additional quantitative and qualitative data. Hence, I developed a standardized survey that was divided into three sections (see Appendix I). The first section focused on demographics and technology. Through fifteen questions, it worked to gather general information about website visitors such as country of birth, country of residence, age, sex, how often they access the website, how long they spend on average at the site per visit, the kind of technology they use (i.e. operating system and Internet access speed), how they learned about the website, their preferred language of communication, and their overall response to design elements like the font and colour scheme.

The second section focused on content. Through twelve questions, I worked to discover what visitors saw as the main purpose of the site, their personal reasons for visiting the site, which sections they found the most and least interesting, if they ever contributed to the interactive sections of the website, and if they would prefer to have a larger percentage of the content offered in the Rotuman language.

The third section of the survey focused on connecting to the community. These final seven questions probed other ways website visitors stay in touch with family and friends, if they felt the website worked to preserve Rotuman culture, if the website is a good representation of Rotuman culture, if the website works to maintain a sense of community, additional features they would like to see added to the website in the future, and any other general comments.

To ensure that the survey was culturally relevant, Howard was invited to participate in its development and dissemination. During our meeting in Honolulu, he reviewed a draft questionnaire and provided feedback that resulted in a survey that was shorter and essentially more enticing to Rotuman website visitors. It was important to have Howard endorse the content and structure of the

survey as one of my goals was to structure the research methodology in such a way that it would generate feedback for the Webmaster that could be incorporated into the website, essentially allowing the project to also benefit the wider Rotuman community with the potential for an improved community resource. For many years, researchers have worked with community groups on the development of scholarly resources. Today, it is expected that the results of a study will be made available to the source community, ensuring that they too can benefit from the research.

Once the content and format of the survey had been finalized, I worked with a website developer to post the survey online. One of the most important features of the survey was that it be structured in such a way that the identity of the respondents remained completely anonymous. Thus, the technical infrastructure of the online survey was designed so that completed questionnaires were automatically submitted to an independent email account, anonymous@somewhere.com, rather than directly to me. From there, the responses were forwarded to my own email account without the originating email address. This ensured the complete anonymity of project participants, a crucial element of a study in a small community. The survey was hosted on an external server, but advertised to the community through a link on the Bulletin Board section of the Rotuma website where Howard posted background information on the project and an invitation to website visitors to participate in the study.

It is important to recognize that while the study worked to encourage members of the Rotuma online community to participate, the anonymity of survey participants also created a potential weakness in the survey sample as I was unable to confirm participant identities or their linkage to the Rotuma community, nor verify that participants did not submit more than one survey each. As I show below, however, the qualitative responses in the surveys indicated knowledge of and membership within the global Rotuman community on the part of participants. Similarly, it is also important to recognize that the generally positive response to the website may not reflect the sentiment of the entire Rotuman global community. It may be a response to the survey or reflect the

possibility that those who do not view the website positively do not visit the website, and hence have not had a chance to participate in the study.

Quantitative Findings of Research

The response to the survey is a credit to the popularity of the website. I originally hoped to receive between 20 and 40 surveys, an estimate that was difficult to articulate due to the nebulous identity and size of an online community. The survey was posted on March 19th, 2005 and within less than three weeks I had received 171 surveys. In the end, 151 surveys were usable. The remaining twenty were either incomplete or duplicates.

Of the total respondents, 97% consider themselves to be Rotuman community members. Most respondents were born in either Fiji (47%) or Rotuma (37%), with the remaining born in countries around the world including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Norway, Tonga, South Africa, Samoa, Scotland and Guyana. Respondents accessed the website mainly from Australia (33%), Fiji (23%) or the United States (16%) but other countries of access included New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom, England, Norway, Sierra Leone, Egypt, Bahrain, Tonga, Scotland and Jamaica. Most respondents fell into age brackets of 26 to 34 (25%) or 35 to 49 (39%), but a good percentage were also 50 years or older (24%). Some 13% of respondents did not reveal their age in the survey. Howard suggests that a reluctance to reveal one's age is a cultural trait that he has also noted in during his research with the Rotuman community (personal communication: 05/03/2005). In regards to frequency of use, the majority of visitors go to the website either once a day (34%) or once a week (53%). The average time spent at the website per visit is between six and thirty minutes, although 7% of visitors will stay an hour or longer. The preferred language of communication for Rotuma website visitors is English, although 47% of respondents would like to have more content offered in Rotuman.

The vast majority of survey respondents cited “news” as the main reason that they visit the site. As such, some 95% of visitors go directly to the “News” (50%) or “What’s New” (45%) pages when they visit the website. In terms of interactivity, less than 20% of visitors contribute content to the website. If inclined to contribute, the sections that they contribute to are the News, Community Bulletin Board, Forum and Photo Album. Not a single respondent had ever contributed to the “Recipe” or “Humour” sections. On the other hand, 64% of respondents had added their contact details to the Register and 66% have used the Registrar to find or contact people. The Registrar section is slightly different from other interactive sections since contributed content is limited to personal contact details, information that is essentially non-contentious in nature.

In regards to connecting with the community, respondents use the website to keep up with the news (97%), find out about events, meetings and announcements (84%); view photographs (83%); learn about their cultural heritage (68%); find friends and relatives (66%); and learn or use the Rotuman language (48%). Given the high percentages, it is fair to assume that the website is used as a tool to maintain and perhaps develop social relations. In addition to the website, visitors stay in touch using the telephone (85%), email (85%), mail (54%), visits to Rotuma proper (46%), visits to other Rotuman communities around the world (40%), and other websites (13%). Virtually all respondents agreed that the website works to preserve Rotuman culture (90%) and that it creates and maintains a sense of community among the global Rotuman community (100%).

Table 1.1 – Quantitative Survey Results

Respondents that consider themselves members of Rotuman community	97%
Respondents place of birth:	
▪ Fiji	47%
▪ Rotuma	37%
▪ Australia	7%
▪ New Zealand	5%
▪ Other (0.6% each – Canada, Guyana, Norway, Samoa, Scotland, South Africa, Tonga)	4%
Country accessing the website from:	
▪ Australia	33%
▪ Fiji	23%
▪ United States	16%

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ New Zealand ▪ Canada ▪ United Kingdom ▪ Sierra Leone ▪ Egypt ▪ Other (0.6% each - Bahrain, Jamaica, Norway, Scotland, Tonga) 	11% 7% 5% 1% 1% 3%
Respondents' Age <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 35-49 years ▪ 26-34 years ▪ 50-64 years ▪ 65 + years ▪ 19 - years ▪ No answer 	39% 25% 17% 5% 1% 13%
How often visit the site: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Once per week ▪ Once per day ▪ Once per month ▪ Once every few months ▪ Once per year ▪ No answer 	53% 34% 7% 3% 2% 1%
Average length of stay per visit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 6-15 minutes ▪ 16-30 minutes ▪ 31-59 minutes ▪ 1 hour or longer ▪ Less than five minutes ▪ No answer 	38% 34% 15% 7% 5% 1%
Preferred language of communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ English ▪ Rotuman ▪ Fijian ▪ Tongan ▪ Other (not specified) 	70% 24% 4% 1% 1%
Prefer to have more content offered in Rotuman	47%
First page viewed each visit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ News ▪ What's New ▪ Bulletin Board ▪ Photographs 	50% 45% 4% 1%
Contribute to website	20%
Use the Registrar	65%
Use the website to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Keep up with the news ▪ Find out about meetings, events and announcements ▪ View photographs ▪ Learn about Rotuman cultural heritage ▪ Find friends / relatives ▪ Learn or use the Rotuman language 	97% 84% 83% 68% 66% 48%
Means of keeping in touch with community (other than website) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Telephone ▪ Email ▪ Mail ▪ Visits to Rotuma ▪ Visits to other Rotuman communities ▪ Other websites 	85% 85% 54% 46% 40% 13%

Believe that the website works to preserve Rotuman culture	90%
Believe that the website creates and maintains a sense of community among the global Rotuman diaspora	100%

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative findings of the research suggest some of the ways the Rotuma website serves the global Rotuman diaspora. The purpose of the website was articulated as follows:

- Facilitate connections / communication between Rotumans
- Allow Rotumans to be informed / keep up with news
- Allow Rotumans to maintain / showcase / demonstrate / learn about / keep in touch with Rotuman culture and identity
- Share information and ideas

Respondents also gave several personal reasons for visiting the website.

- For news updates
- To connect with home / friends / family
- To learn history / language / culture
- To see photographs

Apart from the desire to see photographs, which could be thought of as visual news, the formal purpose of the website as articulated by users seems to match the personal reasons that they visit the website.

The website also works to serve the Rotuman community in that it acts as a place for learning and a source for knowledge. The following comments demonstrate the role that the website plays in the education of Rotumans and in its ability to connect community members located in geographically separate areas of the world (the comments presented in this thesis have been edited for spelling and grammatical errors, but the content and context were not changed):

- “Because most Rotumans are migrating overseas in search of greener pastures the website is a good tool for communication and keeping touch with friends and families. Moreover, not all Rotumans are born knowing their cultural values and traditions; therefore the website helps in educating particular users on Rotuman culture.”
- [I visit the website] so I myself can learn the language, culture and news of Rotuma. [And] so that sometime I can share with my children.”
- “I believe we are blessed to be such a small community in terms of population and to have the good fortune of this website to keep us informed of our heritage. I have been schooling in the UK since high school so I do feel there was a gap in my culture know-how, and just being able to access the website has definitely increased my knowledge of home.”
- “The website helps us stay connected with our communities everywhere, and by that we are continually sharing and revisiting the unique experiences that each of us can identify with as being inherently Rotuman. We are able to maintain links with each other through this website, and so are able to feel that we are part of each other’s experiences and celebrate and acknowledge that.”

Hence we see that the Rotuma website can fill a void in the lives of Rotuman migrants. This void might be articulated as an ability to connect with other community members, knowledge of cultural practices, or as a means of linking to cultural identity. For some migrants, the website represents the only Rotuma they are able to know. Its value cannot be underestimated.

The structure and the content of the website demonstrate that it serves the community in facilitating communication between visitors. The News, Bulletin Board and Forum sections are designed specifically for the purpose of communication between members. The News section is a place for people to share announcements, successes and other updates. The Bulletin Board is where people solicit requests for information from other community members. There are many different kinds of requests such as invitations to social functions, calls for submissions to competitions or

scholarships, enquiries regarding lost family members, and appeals for background information on photographs and songs. These requests naturally encourage communication between website visitors, although such communication may take place outside the realm of the website via email, telephone conversations, letters or even face-to-face meetings. As an example, Howard described a recent request by a Rotuman to find information on a lost relative. The request was posted on the Bulletin Board. Howard received word from another community member who had such details and placed the two parties into contact via email (personal communication: 1/30/2005).

In addition to facilitating communication between website visitors, the website contains a section on Rotuman language and as mentioned earlier, communication is key in maintaining transnational linkages. The inclusion of the Rotuman language on the website illustrates the importance of preserving a means of communication in a transnational context. As migrants settle abroad, they generally begin to communicate in a language other than Rotuman, usually English. Although Rotuman may be spoken among family members, its use becomes associated with cultural practices back home. The following two comments demonstrate the importance of the use of Rotuman among the global diaspora: “I think a lot of Rotumans living outside the island have learned quite a lot from this website. The use of the Rotuman language is great, as many Rotumans out there need to learn the language. It is definitely a way to preserve the Rotuman culture”; and “[The website] acts as a reserve of information about how things were and if more articles were published in both English and Rotuman it may aid in the continuation of language skills amongst the diasporic Rotumans, especially the younger generations”. Thus, the preservation and use of Rotuman becomes key in the articulation of both cultural identity and cultural heritage.

The inclusion of archival and academic papers at first appears odd in a resource that is not intended to be academic in nature. According to the Webmaster, their inclusion reflects a virtual form of repatriation of Rotuman cultural material (Howard 1999: 163). For centuries around the globe, explorers and academics alike have been studying the lifestyles and cultures of the world’s

peoples. Most often, these reports, recordings and observations are written up in scholarly journals and books, never to be viewed or used by the originating community. Today, the nature of academic research has changed and it is expected that ethical researchers will make the results of their work available to their subjects. In the past, the return and provision for access to this material was both logistically challenging and costly. Fortunately, multimedia technology is working to change this. Although the survey indicated that website visitors do not access this material on a regular basis they are appreciative of its inclusion, as noted by the following respondent; “I am thankful for the existence of this site. I marvel at the information contained therein and am always grateful for the photos that are included in some of the articles. I find the website very informative on whatever subject it covers and I must commend at this point the research done on the subjects”.

When asked what they would like to have added to the website in the future, respondents indicated that there are several areas of the website that could be improved or expanded upon. Naturally, these are the sections that visitors seem to use or depend upon the most. For example, although Howard has recently updated the music section, ten respondents requested that additional music be made available to download for free from the website. It is important to note that the feasibility of adding more music to the website will depend on copyright law and gaining permission from owners. Through the comments, it became evident that the purpose of having music available on the website is not restricted to personal enjoyment alone. Rather, community members want to learn the lyrics of the songs and be able to acknowledge the original composers. An example of how the music is used was illustrated this past year when I attended dance rehearsals hosted by the Vancouver area Rotuman community. They were practicing for an annual festival and wanted to ensure that their music was accurate, so as to honour tradition. Through my experience with the Vancouver community, it became clear that Rotuman music and dance play an integral role in the articulation of cultural identity. Like language, Rotuman music is unique to the island and is a means

by which community members celebrate and connect to their culture. Hence, its inclusion in the website works to facilitate connections to cultural heritage.

Even more so than the music, over half of the respondents indicated a desire for more photographs. Numerous respondents commented on the fact that the website contained images of family members that they themselves did not own and had never seen before. The ability to connect with kin and heritage in a visual way via the photographs has much meaning for the Rotuman community. As one community member stated, “For me personally I think that the website helps me to not forget my culture and to always have a reason to be proud of where I'm from. Sometimes I tend to be too absorbed in the American culture but when I visit the website I bring myself back to what and who I'm supposed to be representing. I'm very proud to be Rotuman and I hope that this website will provide the same benefits to other Rotuman youths who live far away from home”. In addition to archival photographs, many requested that more photographs of current global Rotuman communities be posted so they could connect names to faces. Similarly, many visitors expressed a desire for film and video to be added to the website. These could be archival segments that Howard and Rensel have collected in their research or contemporary clips from community events both on the island and abroad.

There were also requests for the addition of new material. When asked what they would like to see added to the website in the future, Rotuman community members provided many excellent suggestions. There were too many suggestions to detail in this thesis; however, the comments can be classified into the following categories: sections that address practical community needs, sections that address community interests, and additional information pertaining to Rotuman identity.

Suggestions pertaining to practical community needs centered around travel information, a calendar of events, and a venue for meeting people. One respondent commented on the fact that traveling to Rotuma can be difficult to organize and expensive, particularly for community members living outside the Pacific. As such, it would be useful to add a travel section that could contain

special airfare deals, boat schedules and other pertinent details, although this would be a challenge to keep current. Other respondents articulated a practical need for a Calendar of Events for the global community. The calendar could work to increase awareness of community events and also allow community members to adjust their travel and vacation schedules accordingly should they want to attend any of these events. A global calendar of events would serve to unite geographically separate groups. It may also encourage groups to learn from each other and develop new events in their community that have been successful elsewhere. Five respondents also requested that a chat room or dating section be added to the website. Although a chat room is not likely viable due to the same reasons that the original Message Board was removed, it would be interesting to explore how a personals section could be incorporated without the need for much mediation from the Webmaster. Perhaps a new method of communication with less structure would entice younger members of the community to engage with the website.

Topics of community interest that are not currently included in the website pertained mainly to sports and healthcare. Keeping up with sports is a popular pastime in many cultures around the world and it would seem that Rotumans are no exception. Although the only Rotuma-specific sports leagues are on the island itself, respondents expressed an interest in learning more about the success of Rotuman athletes or team members around the world as well as on the island. Suggestions relating to health care related mainly to increasing Rotumans' awareness of health issues that they may face. As such, six respondents suggested that a health page on current concerns for those living on Rotuma and Fiji be added. Specific topics to be included were the spread of AIDS and other diseases, the occurrence of STD's, and general information on healthy island lifestyles. For example, how much do people know about AIDS? How prevalent is it on the island and how can its spread be avoided? One individual also commented on the fact that as the Rotuman community becomes increasingly globally mobile, the number of illnesses and diseases that are circulated through the community and brought back to the island will also increase.

The suggestions relating to Rotuman identity focused around youth needs or a desire to hear the voices of the next generation. The fact that less than 1% of the survey respondents were younger than 25, indicates that the website currently does not appeal to a younger audience, that youth do not access the website, or that youth were not inclined to participate in the survey study. Given its current content and design elements, the website is targeted primarily to an age demographic beginning in the late teens and continuing upwards. Specific feedback demonstrated a desire for a place where senior community members can pass cultural knowledge on to the next generation and youth are able express their views. Over ten respondents addressed the need for a section dedicated to youth, with one respondent describing a “Children’s Corner” that could be added to the website so knowledge, stories, music and memories could be shared in a way that would appeal to young Rotumans.

Along a similar line, some respondents requested that information pertaining to opportunities for Rotumans in regards to education, employment, scholarships and other related prospects be shared via the website. Although the current Webmaster does post such information on the Bulletin Board when it is submitted, these respondents would like to have this information posted in a more permanent section. Building on that suggestion, respondents also requested that Rotuman “Stories of Success” be posted online. These could be in the form of monthly or weekly profiles of community members who have done well either at home on the island or abroad in other countries. Rotumans are very proud of their successes and as one respondent noted, “this would help guide our younger generation of Rotumans to always reach for the stars”. Many participants in the survey requested additional genealogical information, an indication of the importance they see in maintaining cultural identity through family ties. This would be a challenging addition to the website due to the sheer extent of such information and the fact that it is not held in a central repository but passed on through individual kin networks.

Discussion

Meeting Community Needs

To determine how well the Rotuma website serves the community, it is useful to return to the purpose of the website as stated by Howard. According to Howard, the purpose of the Rotuman website is to provide information about Rotuman people and culture for those who are interested in learning more about this Pacific island, and to preserve cultural heritage by facilitating cultural bonding (Howard and Rensel 2004: 226). In regards to the first purpose, it is clear that the amount of information about Rotuma posted on the website would allow even the most seasoned Rotuman to learn about the island. As two survey participants commented, “There are a lot of things about Rotuman culture that I did not know until I visited the Rotuman website” and “Everything you need to know is on the web from weddings to funerals step by step”. The success of preserving culture and facilitating cultural bonding is difficult to measure, however, the fact that 90% of survey participants indicated that the website works to preserve Rotuman culture and 100% responded that the website works to create and maintain a sense of community among the global Rotuman community, indicates a high level of satisfaction with the website in this purpose.

Nonetheless, communities are fluid entities that continually grow and change with time. The factors that make the Rotuma website successful today may not meet the needs of tomorrow’s global membership. Based on my discussions with the Webmaster and the feedback from users, there are elements of the website that may be problematic in the future. These elements include increased engagement and contribution of new material, content management, archiving materials, and succession of leadership.

Currently the website contains more than enough information to meet community needs. However, this content is contributed by a relatively small number of people – Howard, Rensel, academic researchers, and a selection of community members from around the world. Approximately 30% of survey respondents indicated that they would like to see content posted from

more varied sources within the community. It is important that new contributors be solicited on a regular basis to ensure that the content of the website does not become static. If the website is not able to grow and change with its membership it will cease to be relevant. The history of other websites indicates that in this case, members will eventually stop coming back and the website will lose its relevance for the larger Rotuman diasporic community.

The sheer magnitude of material creates major management and archiving issues. As both the website and the community continue to grow, it will become more difficult for the Webmaster to manage the content in an efficient manner and meet community expectations. On a similar line, two respondents requested that a replacement Webmaster to be found when Howard and Rensel take extended holidays, since the community depends on the website for updates and news. Further, when Howard updates the Bulletin Board section of the website he removes dated postings to make room for the new. Although such information is no longer current, those postings are important archival records for the community and as such, could prove of significant research value in the future. Dated postings in the News section are archived on a monthly basis and available at the bottom of the same page. Howard stores any downloaded material on his personal computer, but there may come a time when there is too much material to store efficiently. Some of these challenges might be mitigated through the addition of an automated content management system, although these backend packages tend to be quite costly and may not be within the fundraising abilities or priorities of the community.

Another challenge that will face the Rotuman community in the future is leadership succession, or finding a new Webmaster when Howard and Rensel retire. At this time, there is no process in place to identify such a person, nor a specific criterion to determine what qualities and commitments such an individual or group would need to entail beyond the fact that they would need to be a member of the Rotuman community. In my discussion with Howard, he commented that while he knows of several Rotuman community members with the appropriate multimedia skills,

nobody has volunteered to assist him in the role of Webmaster. He also indicated his hope that a new leader will emerge before there is a vital need in order that both he and Rensel will have the time to share their wisdom and experience (personal communication: 01/30/2005).

Overall, the response to the website, as articulated through the survey, is positive. Community members that access the website use it as a tool for learning about Rotuman culture and connecting to cultural identity. For some migrant Rotumans, the website is the only form of Pacific Island culture that they know. While the website itself is not a form of culture, it serves a dialogic purpose. There is a circular relationship between the website and the community in that each contributes to the other. As a result, the Rotuma website reflects and recreates Rotuman culture and is thus both conservative and transformative.

Virtual Communities: The Rotuma Website and the Kava Bowl

Just as Pacific islanders traditionally used cultural knowledge to navigate the seas, they now navigate the World Wide Web. Although IT is used for many different purposes in the Pacific, it makes its most significant contribution in its potential to bring together geographically dispersed communities. Members of these communities connect and learn from each other in the virtual realm. Within the context of transnationalism, these connections work in ways that extend, preserve and transform the characteristics of Pacific cultural identity.

In one of the few studies studying the impact of IT in the Pacific-- "Islanders in Space: Tongans Online"-- Helen Morton discusses how the Pacific-based chat room "Kava Bowl" has allowed Tongans to remain connected with their traditional heritage. The Kava Bowl has been hosted in the past by the Tongan web server Kalia.net (it is now off-line for technical reasons). "Kalia" refers to the two-hulled sail canoes that the Tongan people used to navigate the Pacific Ocean. Thus the name Kalia.net implies that by surfing the Web, modern Tongans are continuing an ancient tradition. Kalia.net is operated by the Tonga Communications Corporation, a public island

telecommunications company that provides Tongans with email addresses, Internet service, website hosting, domain names, cell phone plans, and a service in which email messages can be sent to anyone in Tonga via a central address and relayed to the recipient via telephone for a fee (Morton 1999: 239). According to Morton, the Kava Bowl seeks to emulate the informal kava circles encountered in many Pacific societies, at which men gossip, argue and talk over issues while drinking the ground, dried root of the kava plant mixed with water, a traditional mild stimulant (Merlin and Lindstrom 1992; Morton 1999: 239). In the virtual version, however, women are welcome, as are males who would traditionally be considered too young to drink kava. When online, the forum contained a directory to other pages with humorous stories written by Tongans describing life abroad, a weekly discussion theme, and four chat rooms where participants could engage in discussion on topics of their choice. Morton argues that the forum constitutes a virtual community, as it maintains a social network, facilitates discussion in a safe space, and provides information via the Internet (*ibid.*: 242). Like Morton, Howard classifies the Rotuma website as a virtual community. Howard defines a virtual community as “a core group of participants who engage in frequent exchange of news and information (in addition to exchanging goods and services when called for), and a sense of collective history built from continual exposure to common lore and shared interests” (Howard 1999: 160).

Virtual communities are a relatively new form of social organization that have resulted from the development of information technology over the last two decades. According to Ann Renninger and Wesley Shumar, there are currently two schools of thought about virtual communities. The first is based in the disciplines of education and computer sciences, and focuses on community design and the learning process associated with participating in an online community. The second is based in the disciplines of sociology, anthropology and linguistics. It focuses on collective imagination, identity, communication and sociability (Renninger and Shumar 2002: xviii). Defining exactly what

constitutes a virtual community has become a challenge because the term is used often, frequently without clear meaning.

Harold Rheingold, a media communications theorist, is credited with coining the term “virtual community”. Rheingold is the author of The Virtual Community, Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier. In the first edition of this book (1993), Rheingold defined virtual communities as “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyber-space” (Rheingold 2000: xx). His definition set off a storm of debate as between sociologists and Website developers working to define the parameters of new social aggregations facilitated by the Internet. In 2000, a second edition of the book was published. In this edition, Rheingold added an Afterword titled, “Rethinking Virtual Communities”. Here, he comments that he could have saved a decade of debate by defining cyber-space cultures as “online social networks” instead of virtual communities. Why the change of definition? Rheingold states that the problem associated with defining “virtual community” is the fact that the term “community” has so many different meanings. He believes that the use of the term “virtual community” became so entangled in debate that his original intent was buried. Rheingold comments that his original intent was to focus on online social networks, which he argues have been the basis of community long before the advent of the computer. (Rheingold 2002: 363). Hence, when studying social relations facilitated by the Internet, it is important to recognize that there are many different kinds of social networks and thus, many different forms of virtual communities. Rheingold’s clarification of the term “virtual community” acknowledges this complexity.

While the Kava Bowl and the Rotuma website have both been classified as virtual communities, there are some clear differences between the two initiatives. Mainly, the Kava Bowl is different from the Rotuma website in design and content. The Kava Bowl has been designed as a chat room and as such, has unpredictable content that brings community members together through

spontaneous conversations. A Webmaster does not mediate the conversations in the Kava Bowl, although visitors are encouraged to adhere to Tongan values. Additionally, as a chat room, the content within the Kava Bowl changes with the visitors and is not archived for long-term community use. The Rotuma website, on the other hand, has been built upon the pre-existing foundations of a traditional Pacific community. The website has a specific structure that has been developed over time by the Webmaster. On the Rotuma website, some materials like the news and announcements change on a regular basis but the majority of the content on the website remains constant. Unlike the Kava Bowl, contributions to the Rotuma website are vetted by the Webmaster and are posted with the contributor's real-life name. In the Kava Bowl, the identity of participants is anonymous.

At the same time, the two initiatives share similarities. For users of the Kava Bowl and the Rotuma website, the virtual community is one that is imagined. Here, it is useful to return to McGrath's (2002) notion of an imagined community that transcends physical boundaries. With the transformation of both the Rotuman and the Tongan community from one centered on the island to a transnational diaspora, the ability to connect with a community, albeit in an imagined or virtual realm, becomes crucial. Within these imagined communities, social networks are formed across the diaspora. What is interesting about both the Kava Bowl and Rotuma website is that they are an example of how a community resource not tied to the source community can work to strengthen relations with those at home. Both websites are a means for migrants to connect to each other and their cultural heritage. This in turn strengthens cultural identity and maintains the kinship relations that are a part of Pacific island culture.

Similarly, the Kava Bowl and the Rotuma website both enhance the quality of users' lives. In a paper on the Tongan online experience, Morton concludes that although it is difficult to measure the difference that the Kava Bowl makes in Tongan community members' lives, "the messages on the forum demonstrate that it is significant. Apart from facilitating easier communication with people who are geographically dispersed, the forum can have a profound effect on participants, who

can have their voices heard, their isolation broken, their values challenged, and their problems shared. Diasporic Tongans use the KB to explore their identities, question the status quo and establish themselves more firmly within the international Tongan community” (Morton 1999: 249). Likewise, the participants in my survey research indicated that the Rotuma website plays a decisive role in the preservation and celebration of Rotuman culture. As one community member noted, “For Rotumans who either have some Rotuman blood or are raised away from Rotuma, this [website] provides a form of identity not found where they are living. So yes, I believe this [website] has done profound work that is probably not mentioned enough”. The website also allows Rotumans to be proud of their culture and to pass this pride on to their children; “Living so far away from home and being married to a non-Rotuman, this is one way I tell my children about my "heritage" - something they can be proud of because of the uniqueness of the Rotuman culture. Also, when I read of the "Rotuman Happenings" around the Globe and on Rotuma, it makes me proud to know that whichever part of the world Rotumans live, the Rotuman-ness in all of us still lives on!”

Concluding Remarks

Research on the website has demonstrated that it brings people together, facilitates communication, works towards the preservation of culture, and exists as a resource from which future generations can learn. I believe the most significant aspects of this form of community are that it creates connections and enables virtual repatriation of cultural material. Such material might include objects removed during colonization, knowledge dispersed through migration, information not preserved by past generations, or material collected by researchers. As such, this type of initiative has potential applications for other geographically dispersed communities around the world.

The Rotuma website can also be used as a model by museums looking to establish connections between collections and source communities, and education institutions working to teach and learn about culture and community. The Museum of Anthropology’s (MOA) planned Reciprocal

Research Network (RRN) initiative is an example of how the power of IT can be harnessed to link community knowledge, museum collections and academic research. This ambitious project, based on a partnership between three BC First Nations, twelve premiere museum research institutions and MOA, aims to integrate academic aspirations with community development. The RRN will be a combination of both virtual and real worlds, where students, researchers and community members alike can gather to share knowledge. In the virtual realm, visitors will be able to view digitized reproductions of objects in museum collections, manage information, and connect with other visitors sharing similar interests. In the real world, an Ethnology Research Suite located at MOA, visitors will be able to examine and discuss artifacts, meet with community elders, and conduct research in the associated library and archives. Although the RRN will initially focus on BC First Nations, the project will look to expand to additional community groups in the future. In the past, many source communities have regarded museums with an air of suspicion and unease, given the fact that most museum collections have an inherent link to a colonial history that is still relatively fresh. However, the experience of the global Rotuman community and their willingness to utilize technology as a means of connecting to cultural identity in a medium that incorporates community knowledge with academic resources indicates that IT can work to bridge source communities and museum collections. Although the RRN will be very different in design and content from the Rotuma website, the experience of Howard, Rensel and the Rotuman community may provide developers at MOA with some valuable lessons. These lessons are transferable to other similar initiatives.

Firstly, the Rotuma website indicates that when establishing a similar virtual community, consultation is key. An online initiative must work to meet an existing community need, rather than impose an unwanted resource. Similarly, such an initiative must have clear goals and objectives, and set parameters by which participants must adhere in order to maintain a sense of stability and social respect. Consultation with the community will assist in defining goals as well as the most suitable process for achieving those goals.

Secondly, leadership is also important in such ventures. Research on the importance of leadership in a community has shown that “Successful efforts more likely occur in communities with existing, identifiable leadership. That is, they tend to occur in communities containing at least some residents who most community members will follow and listen to, who can motivate and act as spokespersons, and who can assume leadership roles in a community building initiative” (Matterssich et al 1997: 25). In the case of the Rotuma website, leadership is key. Chiefs are the heart and soul of Rotuman culture. Since time immemorial, they have been revered, respected and esteemed as the basis of Rotuman society. Although the role of Rotuman chiefs has been challenged in recent years by missionary influence, colonial power, overseas migration and the permeation of Western culture on the island, it is not an office that the people are willing to give up. Although Howard and Rensel are not Rotuman chiefs in the traditional sense of the position, they are clearly the leaders in the Rotuman virtual world. Howard and Rensel have articulated a vision for a community resource that brings people together, connects community members to their traditional heritage, and works to pass cultural knowledge to future generations. Leaders like Howard and Rensel are required to begin an initiative, consult with the community, select the most appropriate form of technology to construct the resource, oversee the development of the resource, and then work to ensure that the community takes ownership for the resource. This last challenge, having the community take ownership for the resource, is critical to the long-term sustainability of such an initiative. If a community does not feel responsible for a resource, they will not invest in it nor will they dedicate their own resources to ensure its success. It is necessary for a community to own an initiative, both legally and philosophically, so they have control over the initiative. This is imperative to the long-term sustainability of an initiative. The Kava Bowl, owned by Kalianet, is an example where the community does not have control of the initiative, and as such have limited ability to get the website back online. Ownership can make or break a community resource.

Thirdly, engagement is an essential element of successful online communities. The engagement that is facilitated by the Rotuma website is rooted in the fact that the website is closely linked with the real-world global Rotuman community. I believe it is the link between the physical and virtual worlds that is a key to the success of the Rotuma website because it ensures that visitors experience the same social responsibilities that they would in a physical community on Rotuma. It is these social responsibilities that encourage visitors to engage in reciprocal exchange. Through the infrastructure of the website, their knowledge of Rotuman custom and culture, and the trust that they have earned from the community, Howard and Rensel have created a place where the virtual policies, procedures and tacit assumptions reflect what would be accepted in a physical Rotuman community. This ensures that users have the ability to interact in a virtual space, which makes them feel comfortable and at home. This leads to long-term engagement, which leads to sustainability.

Although the initiative will need to remain dynamic, feedback from respondents has demonstrated that the Rotuma website currently plays an important role in the lives of migrants. As a small, Pacific island community, Rotumans continue to migrate abroad in increasing numbers in search of education and employment opportunities not available at home. As Rotumans settle into their new lives abroad, their cultural identity is marked by their transnational experience. Harnessing the power of multimedia technology, the Rotuma website is able to circumnavigate the geographical dispersion of this island society and the high cost of travel home to connect migrants to their cultural identity. This is achieved by providing access to a wealth of information about Rotuma, facilitating contact between community members, offering a space for dialogue, and assisting with the education of the younger generation and extended family members. As the Pacific diaspora becomes progressively more complex, initiatives like the Rotuma website will become increasingly important for their ability to maintain connections and preserve cultural identity.

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Appendix I - Survey Questionnaire
Virtual Communities in the South Pacific: Rotuman Web Culture

Part 1 / 3 – Demographics and Technology (15 short questions)

1. Do you consider yourself to be a member of the Rotuman community?
 - Yes
 - No

2. Where were you born?

3. What country are you accessing the website from?

4. Please select your age group:
 - 19 – 25 years
 - 26 – 34 years
 - 35 – 49 years
 - 50 – 64 years
 - 65 years +

5. Please select your gender:
 - Male
 - Female

6. How often do you visit the Rotuman website?
 - Once a day
 - Once a week
 - Once a month
 - Once every few months
 - Once a year

7. On average, how long do you spend at the website per visit?
 - Less than 5 minutes
 - 6 to 15 minutes
 - 16 – 30 minutes
 - 31 – 59 minutes
 - 1 hour or longer

8. What is your preferred language of communication?
 - Rotuman
 - English
 - Fijian
 - Other (please list)

9. How did you first learn about the Rotuma website?
 - Friend
 - Family member
 - Business / work
 - Online search
 - Link from other website

- Other (please list)
10. What speed is your Internet connection?
- Dial up 56K (low speed)
 - Broadband (high speed)
11. Which browser do you use to access the Internet?
- Microsoft Internet Explorer
 - Netscape Navigator
 - Firefox Mozilla
 - Other (please list)
12. Do you find that the pages download fast enough?
- Yes – the pages always download quickly
 - Sometimes the pages download quickly; other times it is slow
 - No – it takes a long time for the pages to download
13. How easy it is to find what you are looking for on the site?
- Very easy
 - Somewhat easy
 - Somewhat difficult
 - Difficult
14. Do you find the font (text style and size)
- Easy to read
 - Somewhat easy to read
 - Somewhat difficult to read
 - Difficult to read
 - Please list any comments you have regarding font style and size
15. Do you have any comments about the colour, background, graphics and overall design of the site?

Part 2 / 3 – Website Contents (12 short questions)

16. Please state what you believe is the main purpose of the website:
17. What is the main reason that you visit the Rotuman website?
18. Please rate the following sections of the website on a scale of 1 to 10 where 10 is “most interesting” and 1 is “not of interest at all”:
- | | |
|---|----------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> History | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Culture – Political Economy | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Culture – Expressive Culture | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Culture – Mythology | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Language – Overview | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Language – Online Dictionary | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Maps | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Population | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |

<input type="checkbox"/> Archive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/> News	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/> Community Bulletin Board	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/> Archives	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/> Humour	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/> Register – to search	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/> Register – to include your details	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/> Forum	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/> Photo Album	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/> Contemporary Rotuman Artists	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/> Recipes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/> Music	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

19. What page do you usually go to first when you visit the website?

- News
- Bulletin Board
- What's New
- Other (please list)

20. Have you filled out a contact form in the Rotuman Register for either yourself or your family?

- Yes
- No

21. Have you ever used the Register to find / contact people?

- Yes
- No

22. Have you ever visited the Forum section of the website?

- Yes
- No

23. Have you ever been inclined to contribute your opinion to one or more of the Forum topics?

- Yes
- No

24. There are several sections of the website where visitors are able to contribute content. Have you ever contributed content to the following (please check those sections that apply):

- Photo Album
- Forum
- Community Bulletin Board
- News
- Humour
- Recipes

25. If you answered "yes" to any of the above sections, was your contribution processed in a timely manner and posted online in a format that met your expectations?

- Yes
- No

26. Do you ever print out sections of the website?

- Yes
- No

Do you share these printed copies with other Rotumans?

- Yes
- No

27. Would you prefer to have more of the website's content offered in Rotuman?

- Yes
- No

Part 3 / 3 – Connecting to the Community (7 questions)
--

28. In what ways does the website allow you to stay connected to members of the Rotuman community (please check those that apply)?

- Keeping up with news
- Finding friends and relatives
- Learning more about my cultural heritage
- Learning / using the Rotuman language
- Finding out about events, meetings and announcements
- Viewing photographs
- Other (please list)

29. In what other ways do you keep in touch with Rotuman relatives and friends?

- Visits to Rotuma
- Visits to other Rotuman communities in the world
- Mail
- Telephone
- Other websites
- Email
- Other (please list)

30. Do you believe that the website works to preserve Rotuman culture?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Please explain why or why not:

31. How well does the website represent Rotuman culture?

- Extremely well
- Adequately
- Not well at all

32. Do you believe that the website works to create and maintain a sense of community among the Rotuman global community?

- Yes
- No

33. What would you like to see added to the website in the future?