Diaspora No More? The Role of Facebook in the Development of a Global Rotuman Community

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This article is the product of nearly sixty years of ethnographic research among people from the island of Rotuma in the South Pacific, during which time the population has developed into a distinctive ethnic group that has scattered around the world. The processes by which a relatively isolated island-bound people transformed to a culturally conscious diasporic population are documented. Of special concern are the ways in which the Internet has been instrumental in producing a now-global Rotuman community via a Web site I created in 1996 and the introduction of Facebook a decade later. Data from my participation with a number of Rotuman Facebook groups and the results of an online survey concerning Rotumans' experiences with Facebook are presented to illustrate the impact of social media on the processes of community formation. The changes that have taken place as a result of Internet participation raise questions about the relationship between the concepts of community and diaspora, which are explored in the light of debated definitions of each.

Keywords: *diaspora, cultural community, cultural identity, Facebook, ethnic consciousness*

I first went to the island of Rotuma in December 1959 to conduct dissertation research in cultural anthropology. The island is located approximately 465 kilometers north of the Fiji archipelago in the South Pacific. It was administered as part of the colony of Fiji following cession to Great Britain in 1881 and became an integral part of the country when Fiji was granted independence in 1970. However, the Rotuman language is distinctive and the culture more closely resembles that of the Polynesian Islands to the east, most noticeably Tonga, Samoa, Futuna, and Uvea.

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Rotuma's association with Fiji has played a significant role in the population dynamics that lie at the heart of what I have labeled the Rotuman diaspora in several publications (Howard 1999, 2017; Howard and Rensel 2001). In this paper, I present a history of Rotuman out-migration and reflect on the terminology that I have used to describe it in three narrative contexts: accounts based on my initial research in Rotuma and Fiji; accounts based on research in Rotuma and Fiji, and among Rotumans in transnational settings following a return to the field in 1987; and accounts based on research into Rotuman participation on the Internet, and particularly on their use of social media.

Although my main concern in this paper is the role that social media, and Facebook in particular, have played in the formation of a global Rotuman community, upon reflection I raise the question of how appropriate it is to use the concept of diaspora in the current context. While social media has facilitated the role of Rotumans abroad in the political arena of Fijian politics, which resonates with discussions of diasporic participation in the politics of nation-states, the same discussion could be framed in terms of participation within a global Rotuman community that is glued together via communication channels provided by the Internet. The question then becomes, in this case at least, whether the concept of diaspora is superfluous at best, misleading or inappropriate at worst. Can we say that in the Rotuman case we have an instance of diaspora no more? Can the same be said of other groups?

Implicit in these questions is the notion that the processes associated with the concept of diaspora are best understood in historical context insofar as contingencies affecting migrants continue to change, dissolving old issues and creating new ones. In my view, the emergence of social media is of profound significance and has been radically transforming the context within which all social, cultural, and political activity take place, including contexts affecting what we have been referring to as diasporic populations.

Background to Rotuman Outmigration[1]

The historical record of Rotuman out-migration began soon after European intrusion in the early nineteenth century.[2] Many early commentators reported that Rotuman men were eager to leave Rotuma aboard European vessels and took every opportunity to do so (e.g., Bennett 1831, 480). Some forty years later Litton Forbes wrote, "Scarcely a man on the island but has been more or less of a traveller. It is no rare thing to find men who have visited [Le] Harve, or New York, or Calcutta" (1875, 226). Commenting on the extent of emigration in 1867, Rev. William Fletcher, the first European Methodist missionary stationed on Rotuma, wrote that upwards of seven hundred young men were known to have left the island in recent memory (Fletcher 1870).

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While most of the men who left the island—either as sailors or as workers abroad (for example, pearl diving in the Torres Strait)— returned home after some time away, a significant number did not. They left their ships in Australia, New Zealand, England, and elsewhere and took employment, married local women, and settled into a new life. Rotuma's isolation made it difficult for emigrants to keep in contact with their home island, and most of them more or less disappeared as far as their homebound relatives were concerned. For whatever reasons—limited literacy curtailing letter writing; transportation into the Pacific being too complicated, sporadic, and unpredictable; Rotumans being extraordinarily adaptive to and successful in new environments; or a combination of factors—communication was extremely limited.

Anxiety over unimpeded emigration of young men was one of the first issues raised by the chiefs of Rotuma in their negotiations with British authorities before cession in 1881. Thus, Arthur Gordon reported in 1879 that the chiefs desired regulations to check wholesale emigration. The concern for controlling emigration eventually led to the passage of Rotuma Regulation Number 3 in 1939, stating that "no native may leave Rotuma without the permission of the District Officer" (Rotuma Regulations 1939, 457).

Nevertheless, a substantial number of Rotumans to Fiji, establishing an enclave there. The outbreak of World War II accelerated Rotuman emigration to Fiji, and by 1946 approximately 17% of all Rotumans were residing there. The flow of this migration path accelerated markedly during the last half of the twentieth century as young Rotumans moved to Fiji's urban centers to pursue education and employment opportunities. Also stimulating out-migration was a rapid increase in the population of Rotumans resulting from a dramatic decrease in the death rate following World War II while the birth rate remained high, which strained the island's carrying capacity. Thus, whereas the 1956 Fiji census found 68% of Rotumans in the country living on their home island, by 2007 the figure had dropped to 19%. The overall number of Rotumans in Fiji as a whole (including Rotuma) increased during this time span from 4,422 to 10,137.

During the first year I spent in Rotuma (December 1959 to December 1960), the number of Rotumans on the island was about 3,000, while about 1,400 were elsewhere in Fiji. In an article I published shortly after returning from the field (Howard 1961), I referred to "the flow of population" from Rotuma to Fiji, while also acknowledging a return flow, mostly for temporary or limited term visits. I also used the terminology in vogue at the time—emigration, emigrants, out-migration, migrants— to refer to the process and to the population involved.

Dispersion of the Rotuman People

In addition to the year I spent doing ethnographic research on Rotuma, I spent a year in Fiji collecting data on Rotumans in Fiji. The

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focus of my study there was on how Rotumans as migrants were adapting to new, mostly urban environments. An important consequence of migration was the genesis of an ethnic consciousness among Rotumans. As they increasingly came into regularized contact with others (Fijians, Fiji Indians, Europeans, and so on), Rotumans were transformed from an ethnic aggregate to an ethnic community, that is, an interactive network based on their common heritage. This shift was accompanied by the development of ethnic consciousness—a recognition that one's ethnicity is a significant factor in ordering social relations within the broader society. As described in an early publication:

> Ethnic consciousness may develop on an individual level in response to a number of circumstances: these include overt discrimination by others, a sense of superiority or inferiority, or status ambiguities that can be resolved by giving primacy to ethnicity. Collectively, ethnic consciousness emerges as a result of repeated messages circulated throughout networks of kinsmen, friends, and neighbors to the effect that other identity criteria are less significant for structuring interpersonal relations than ethnic differences. The redundancy of these messages serves to structure both social interaction among ethnic cohorts and an ideology of "we-ness," the sharing of a common social fate. The structural manifestations of these messages are the extension of close personal bonds characteristic of kinship and friendship to all who are members of the same ethnic category and the restricting of one's personal relationships to people within that category. That one member of the category is shamed, offended, or honored implies shame, anger, and honor for all vis-à-vis nonmembers. To the extent that nonmembers of an ethnic category view members as interchangeable, the redundancy of the relevance of ethnicity is likely to be reinforced. For example, when the message that an individual lost his job or was abused because of his ethnicity circulates through a network of people of the same category, indignation and emotional solidarity are more likely to be engendered than if other identity variables are acknowledged to have played a part. The notion of sharing a common fate, if accepted by members of an ethnic category, takes on the character of an ideology by which people interpret their relationships within and without the network of ethnic cohorts. (Howard and Howard 1977, 165–6)

Ethnic consciousness varied markedly in four Rotuman enclaves in Fiji (Levuka, Lautoka, Suva, and Vatukoula) and could be accounted for by three types of variables: demographic, social structural, and cultural. A critical mass had to be present for Rotuman ethnicity to become salient, and the larger the size of the enclave in relation to the overall population, the more visible the group became. Residence patterns also affected ethnic consciousness insofar as scattered housing resulted in less visibility than concentrated housing. Growth in numbers through immigration from the home island tended to increase ethnic

consciousness because of the continual need to socialize newcomers, a process that encouraged the explication of cultural boundaries.

As Rotumans were exposed to higher forms of Western education, they learned to think about their heritage in abstract terms (in terms of laws, social organization, beliefs, and so forth). "Rotuman culture" thus became an object of thought, analysis, discussion, and debate. This new phenomenon required both the ability to distance oneself from one's cultural experience and the ability to make meaningful comparisons with other cultures. The result was the development of a cultural consciousness that paralleled ethnic consciousness. Cultural consciousness, in turn, is a significant component of cultural identity, that is, thinking about oneself as a member of a category (or community) based on shared cultural attributes.

Fiji has been a way station for many Rotumans who have emigrated elsewhere, including Australia and New Zealand, where substantial identifiable communities have developed. Rotuman communities of lesser size and varying cohesion have developed elsewhere, including Hawai'i, the San Francisco Bay Area, Vancouver in British Columbia, and Fort McMurray in Alberta, Canada. In addition, a substantial number of Rotumans to England, and a few families with Rotuman members settled in other places, including Sweden and Norway, for example. While no figures are available for Rotumans outside of Fiji, I estimate the current number of Rotuman migrants abroad to be around 3,000 to 4,000 while the home island population hovers around 1,800.

It is also important to note that Rotumans abroad have exceptionally high rates of intermarriage, mostly with Caucasians, leading to generations of offspring who are only partly Rotuman in terms of genealogy.[3] However, Rotumans are inclusive with regard to ethnicity so that anyone with a Rotuman ancestor, no matter how remote, can legitimately claim Rotuman identity and is accorded rights in land on the island that were associated with that ancestor, or ancestors. When this is taken into account, the number of transnational Rotumans is much higher, perhaps in the vicinity of 10,000 to 12,000.

Furthermore, a distinction needs to be made between the concepts of *ethnicity* and *community*. While all the offspring of Rotumans and part-Rotumans can be considered members of a Rotuman ethnic group, some dissociate themselves from other Rotumans and do not participate in Rotuman-centered activities. In effect, they are not members of Rotuman communities, wherever they exist, while non-Rotuman spouses and others (like inquisitive anthropologists, for example) can be considered members of Rotuman communities to the extent that they commit to relationships with ethnic Rotumans and are willing to participate in Rotuman cultural activities. As far as I can tell from multiple sources of data, the size of Rotuman communities abroad well exceeds the number of ethnic Rotumans.

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Researching the Diaspora

After leaving Rotuma in 1960, I did not return till 1987, in order to introduce my wife, Jan Rensel, to the island that had played such a major role in my earlier professional career. She had recently earned an MA degree in anthropology and became excited about the possibility of doing her doctoral research on the island. As a result we returned to Rotuma for extended periods in 1988, 1989, and 1990. We have since visited the island, and engaged Rotumans in Fiji, numerous times for briefer periods in 1991, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2008, 2009, and 2012. In 1998 we initiated research among Rotumans in Australia and New Zealand, and have since visited and participated in Rotuman-centered events in Hawai'i, the mainland United States, Canada, and England. Our main concerns in this research have been with the formation and functioning of diasporic communities, the preservation of and transmission of Rotuman language and culture, and issues of identity.

It was this engagement with Rotumans in transnational settings that led me to begin using the concept of diaspora, beginning in 1999, in reference to the now considerably dispersed Rotuman population. The term was attractive both because it implicated the historical processes of dispersion and because it was a convenient way of referring to the dispersed communities of Rotumans that had formed abroad or were in the process of formation. By that time the concept was general currency in the migration literature, although its precise meanings were being vigorously debated. On the one hand, the concept of diaspora had been accepted as a substitute for an array of terms describing the dispersion of ethnic or national populations—migration, immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community—as well as with all the "forces and phenomena that constitute the transnational moment" (Tölölyan 1991, 3, 5); on the other hand, Tölölyan subsequently expresses concern that there is a danger of the concept becoming "a promiscuously capacious category that is taken to include all the adjacent phenomena to which it is linked but from which it actually differs in ways that are constitutive, that in fact make a viable definition of diaspora possible" (1996, 8). In an effort to distinguish discourse that conforms to prevailing notions of diaspora from overlapping concepts such as ethnicity, Tölölyan presents a historically structured discussion of material, demographic, administrative, discursive, and ideological factors that can be used to distinguish diasporas from other forms of population dispersion. Of special significance for the concerns in this paper is the affirmation of a collective subject—the requirement that migrants come to recognize themselves as a collectivity. Furthermore:

> To participate in a community, diasporic individuals must not only have identities that differ from those prescribed by the dominant hostland culture, but also diaspora-specific social identities that are

constructed through interaction with the norms, values, discourses and practices of that diaspora's communal institutions, honoring some and transgressing others. (Tölölyan 1996, 29)

In concluding his overview with a reaction to Walter Conner's all-encompassing definition of diaspora as "that segment of a people that lives outside the homeland" (1986), Tölölyan remarks:

A diaspora is never merely an accident of birth, a clump of individuals living outside their ancestral homeland, each with a hybrid subjectivity, lacking collective practices that underscore (not just) their difference from others, but also their similarity to each other, and their links to the people on the homeland. (1996, 30)

A number of other commentators have wrestled with the problem of defining diaspora. For the most part, they differ with regard to the factors they consider to be central to the concept. For example, William Safran defines diasporas as expatriate minority communities that share several of the following characteristics:

1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship. (Safran 1991, 83–4)

As a required combination of characteristics we might call this a "restrictive" definition of diaspora, which Safran acknowledges only conforms to the ideal type of the Jewish diaspora, although he acknowledges that the Armenian, Maghrebi, Turkish, Palestinian, Cuban, Greek, Chinese, and Polish diasporas can legitimately be spoken of in terms of that definition. It should be made clear at the outset that the Rotuman case falls well short of Safran's definition, conforming to only four of his conditions (items 1, 2, 5, and 6).

In response to Safran, James Clifford, while applauding his emphasis on comparative analysis as a means of moving the field of study forward, argues, "Rather than locating essential features, we might focus on diaspora's borders, on what it defines itself against." He states that the relational positioning at issue is not a process of absolute othering

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but of entangled tension and asserts that "diasporas are caught up with and defined against (1) the norms of nation-states and (2) indigenous, and especially autochthonous, claims by 'tribal' peoples" (Clifford 1994, 307). By shifting the conceptualization of diaspora away from essential characteristics to an emphasis on discourse, Clifford opens the door to a much wider inclusion of dispersed populations. The conditions he proposes are much less restrictive than those proposed by Safran:

> The language of diaspora is increasingly invoked by displaced peoples who feel (maintain, revive, invent) a connection with a prior home. This sense of connection must be strong enough to resist erasure through the normalizing processes of forgetting, assimilating, and distancing. Many minority groups that have not previously identified in this way are now reclaiming diasporic origins and affiliations. (Clifford 1994, 310)

The key issue for Clifford is "the currency, the value and the contemporaneity, of diaspora discourse" (1994, 310). Clifford's approach clearly draws the Rotuman case into the orbit of diasporic discussions, as we will see, not only from my studies of identity and concerns for linguistic and cultural preservation among transnational Rotumans, but because Rotumans themselves have adopted the term in reference to the worldwide dispersion of their population.

Another approach to the denotation of diaspora is Steven Vertovec's (1997) "three meanings of diaspora," which he exemplifies among South Asian religious groups. Vertovec detected variations in the meanings attributed to the term within a variety of academic disciplines, and labeled them "social form," "type of consciousness," and "mode of cultural production." The prototype of diaspora as social form is the Jewish diaspora, with its negative connotations associated with forced displacement, victimization, alienation, and loss—characteristics that have been attributed to the dispersion of Armenians and Africans among others. As a type of consciousness, diasporas are marked by a "dual or paradoxical nature": negatively by experiences of discrimination and exclusion, positively by identification with an historical heritage or a contemporary political force such as Islam. The third category of meaning, diaspora as a mode of cultural production, Vertovec associates with discussions of globalization that draw attention to "the world-wide flow of cultural objects, images and meanings resulting in variegated process of creolisation, back-and-forth transferences, mutual influences, new contestations, negotiations and constant transformations" (Vertovec 1997, 289). The focus here is on cultural identity and social relationships as they play out in various transnational contexts.

Lacking significant negative experiences of displacement, discrimination, alienation, or loss, *the dispersion of Rotumans conforms to Vertovec's third type of diaspora as a mode of cultural production.*[4] People left the island in pursuit of educational and occupational opportunities,

and there is little evidence that they have experienced either discrimination or any other negative effects in their adaptation to new environments. In fact, Rotumans have been extraordinarily successful both educationally and occupationally wherever they have gone, with disproportionate numbers achieving advanced degrees and positions in medicine, the law, business management, and other professions, while those with less education have established reputations for hard work, diligence, and reliability at blue-collar occupations, often rising to positions of management (see Howard 1966 for a discussion of the factors that may have led to this level of adaptability).

One of the consequences of educational and occupational success abroad is that Rotuman migrants have never formed ghettoized enclaves. Being readily employable, they have had multiple options, not only in places to work but also in places to live. This dispersion means that they have generally interacted more with others than with Rotumans, both as workmates and as neighbors. Not surprisingly, therefore, there are no indications of Rotumans forming any kind of political pressure group within the nations to which they have emigrated. Rather, the focus has been on matters of cultural identity, preservation and perpetuation of the Rotuman language, and the like—matters internal to the Rotuman community.

It is also the case that outside of Fiji the ethnic category *Rotuman* is virtually unknown. Most people in foreign countries where Rotumans have settled have never heard of Rotuma. When asked where they are from, migrants often answer "from Fiji," or simply identify themselves as "Polynesian," rather than go through the lengthy process of explaining where Rotuma is, how Rotumans differ from Fijians, etc. The overall tendency, in fact, has been to avoid questions of ethnicity entirely and simply blend into the general population wherever possible. This was especially true in earlier periods, before it became chic and politically advantageous to belong to an ethnic group other than white Australian, New Zealander, and so on. (For a discussion of the problems of community formation among Rotumans abroad, see Rensel and Howard 2014.)

It has therefore been relatively easy for Rotuman migrants to dissociate themselves from their cultural heritage and to assume an identity that is more convenient for part, if not most, of the time. Given these centrifugal tendencies, we (Jan and I) were motivated to study the contingencies that facilitated the formation of Rotuman communities abroad, and that led to the celebration of Rotuman identity along with attempts to preserve their cultural heritage. Based on our research among Rotumans in Fiji, Australia, New Zealand, and Hawai'i, in an article entitled "Where Has Rotuman Culture Gone? And What Is It Doing There?" (Howard and Rensel 2001), we drew attention to the historical uniqueness of the processes that shaped the expressions of Rotuman identity in each location. However, given these variations, we were also able to discern commonalities associated with a desire among a core group in each

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venue to perpetuate the culture, and indeed, at times, to re-create it. This involved the objectification of culture as a set of customs, attitudes, beliefs, etc., making it possible to disassemble it into component parts, into modules like language, dance, food preparation, customs related to weddings, etc., and confined in action to special time frames (such as Saturdays, when people are not at work, or Sunday church services). We also identified a phenomenon we termed "cultural bonding":

> We conceive of cultural bonding as a communicative process whereby individuals reinforce notions of sameness (we-ness) by choosing to stress certain cultural attributes from a broader array. Such shared attributes might include talking the same language (sharing an accent, using the same metaphors, and so on), mimicking one another's body language, agreeing with one another's opinions (or negotiating the bases for disagreement on a common foundation of agreement), or mutually choosing to participate in specific ceremonies or dance forms. (Howard and Rensel 2001, 83)

Whereas the processes of cultural bonding in so-called traditional communities (the island of Rotuma, for example) are largely unconsciously patterned, in heterogeneous settings they are more a matter of conscious choice. Formation of an ethnic community in such an environment involves the conscious selection of cultural attributes perceived as unique to the ethnic group, elements that distinguish it from other ethnic groups. In cities like Sydney, Melbourne, Auckland, and Honolulu, people consciously choose to associate with others as Rotumans and consciously select objectified cultural aspects they identify as Rotuman—aspects that reinforce their social bonds.[5]

In the light of these observations we suggested a modification of the notion of "culture" as it appears in many discussions of diaspora:

> we prefer to think of people as "*doing* culture" rather than "*having* culture." Metaphorically speaking, this conception suggests a notion of culture as an activity rather than as a thing or a patterned repertoire of things. People form communities by doing culture, that is, by agreeing, overtly or tacitly, to emphasize a selected segment of their total personal repertoires of models for acting and communicating. They maintain communities through cultural bonding and by filtering out cultural materials that they experience as disruptive. (Howard and Rensel 2001, 84)

We concluded our article with the following answer to the question posed by our title:

> Rotuman culture has been reconstituted in a number of places where communities, formed through the process of cultural bonding, have come into being. The communities have evolved differently in different contexts, but they all have been formed on the basis of a commitment to conscious, objectified notions of Rotuman language,

customs, and beliefs—modules they identify as distinctively Rotuman. The island of Rotuma remains central for all emigrant enclaves precisely because it is the one place where the doing of Rotuman culture is continuous. (Howard and Rensel 2001, 85)

Insofar as cultural identity is deemed to be central to most definitions of diasporic populations, the matter of cultural identity among migrant Rotumans requires further consideration. In the words of Stuart Hall, we should think of identity "as a 'production,' which is never complete, always in process" (Hall 1990, 222). One way of conceptualizing identity formation in diaspora is by referring to it as "hybrid" or "hybridized" (Smith and Leavy 2008; Marotta 2011), but I am dissatisfied with such concepts, perhaps because of their metaphorical roots in biology and their earlier application to "racial" interbreeding. I much prefer the concept "multicultural" when applied to the cultural identity of Rotumans in diaspora. The notion of multiculturalism and its application to identity has been well defined by Peter Adler:

the multicultural individual is propelled from identity to identity through a process of both cultural learning and cultural un-learning. The multicultural person . . . is always recreating his or her identity. He or she moves through one experience of self to another, incorporating here, discarding there, responding dynamically and situationally. The multicultural person is always in flux, the configuration of loyalties and identifications changing, the overall image of self perpetually being reformulated through experience and contact with the world. (1998, 234)

In the perspective of Joseph Straubhaar (2008), Rotuman cultural selves in diaspora become "layered" and constantly change over time as individuals are exposed to new cultural experiences through personal interactions or by exposure to various kinds of media.

Still, although Rotuman identity was alive and well in most diasporic contexts before the advent of the Internet, communities were isolated from one another, and in some places people were unaware of other Rotumans residing in the same vicinity. The advent of the Internet changed all that, beginning with the Rotuma Website, which I created in 1996, and followed by the arrival of social media, and particularly Facebook, which became available to the general public in 2006.

The Rotuma Website[6]

Not long after getting wired for e-mail myself, I began to share news concerning Rotuma with a few colleagues who had also done research on the island. The network expanded through firsthand contact with Rotumans, or spouses of Rotumans, who were online. In 1995 I started ROTUMANET, a list of interested parties with whom I shared news from any of the scattered Rotuman communities. Items were sent to me

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via e-mail, fax, or regular mail, and I relayed them to everyone on the list, which grew to more than sixty e-mail addresses. The population served by ROTUMANET was considerably larger, however, since many of the recipients printed out copies of the news they received for friends, relatives, church groups, and Rotuman organizations.

When, toward the end of 1996, technological developments reached the stage where relatively unsophisticated computer addicts like myself could put together a Web site, the temptation was too great to resist. My motivation was two-fold: to facilitate the preservation and generational transmission of a cultural legacy that I had come to greatly admire, and to make available to Rotumans everywhere publications and archival materials that had been written about them and the island.[7] The mission statement on the home page declares twin purposes: to provide information about Rotuman history, language, population, and culture; and to provide visitors to the site with news from Rotuman communities around the world.

Over the years the site, which I continue to manage, has grown to over 15,000 files of texts, photos, and videos. It includes sections on Rotuman history, geography, archaeology, language, culture, population, arts and crafts, economy, religion, political organization, music, myths, and legends drawn from my own and Jan's research, archival documents from a wide variety of sources, and publications dating back to the mid-nineteenth century. These sections now compose only a small portion of the total site, but for the concerns of this paper I will focus on four additional sections: the News Page, Bulletin Board, Rotuman Forum, and the Rotuman Register.

The News Page (http://www.rotuma.net/os/News.html) was a natural development from ROTUMANET. Rotumans from around the world, including Rotuma, have sent me news by post or e-mail, which I upload to the News Page. While they continue to do so, in more recent times I am also alerted by Google of any mention on the Internet of items mentioning *Rotuma* or *Rotumans*. Often these are from newspaper or magazine Web sites containing news stories, which I then upload to the News Page. Feedback concerning the news postings has been extremely gratifying. Rotumans in several different locations have reported that they visit the Web site frequently, print out the news, and circulate it to other Rotumans in their area. A number of individuals have become regular correspondents, sending news periodically from their communities for posting. Past news is accessible in a News Archive, organized by month, dating back to 1996.

The Bulletin Board (http://www.rotuma.net/os/bulletboard.htm) began as an open Message Board, on which visitors could post their own messages and respond to previous postings. It was well used for a number of purposes, including locating friends and relatives, announcing upcoming events, expressing views on various issues, and engaging in humorous banter reminiscent of family gatherings on Rotuma. Individuals and

groups made their presence known from such faraway places as Hong Kong, Laos, Sweden, and Nanaimo (Canada), as well as from places with well-established Rotuman communities. It was heartwarming to see friends and relatives who had been out of touch discover one another and exchange messages. In a few poignant instances individuals requesting help in locating long-lost relatives were duly rewarded. In other cases web contact led to actual reunions or attendance at cultural events. Messages were mostly in English, although many contained a mix of Rotuman and English, and some were exclusively in Rotuman.[8]

The influence of cyberculture was apparent on the Message Board; for instance, most participants used aliases instead of their actual names. While the majority of the interactions were benign and bore the unmistakable stamp of Rotuman cultural patterns, especially in the role that humor plays, the venue came to be dominated by a small group of users who posted a series of offensive messages marked by foul language, nasty personal attacks, and disrespect for Rotuman customs. When repeated pleas for civility failed to have an effect, and in response to complaints from a number of regular visitors, I reluctantly decided to remove the Message Board and replace it with a managed Bulletin Board that requires users to send messages directly to me for posting. Users are required to reveal their full names and where they live, and I exercise the right to edit or reject items containing offensive materials. For the most part, however, the Bulletin Board is used to announce forthcoming events, propose reunions, make requests for information, etc.

The Rotuman Forum (http://www.rotuma.net/os/Forum/Forum1.html) was established as a place on the Web site where people could express their views on matters of concern to Rotumans. As with the bulletin board, the Rotuman Forum requires users to send messages directly to me for posting and to provide their actual names and place of residence. Jan and I take an active role in screening messages for unsuitable language and personal attacks but have otherwise posted messages without regard to the opinions expressed or to biased information. And although we edit every submission for grammar, spelling, and clarity, we check with authors to make sure we have not distorted their meaning before posting.

The Rotuman Forum (RF) differs from sites based on message boards or blogs. For one, postings tend to be much less frequent. Weeks may go by without a submission. Also, the section is divided into individual forums, which, though topically coherent, are not the precise equivalent of "threads" in open postings. In some cases, we allocate submissions to a particular category even though the author may not be responding directly to any previous posting. In short, the Rotuman Forum has more in common with letters to a newspaper editor than with the spontaneous conversations that characterize most message boards and blogs.

Submitters have ranged from professionals and office workers to housewives and students. And although a significant proportion of

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contributions are from first-generation expatriates, their children and grandchildren have freely contributed to the forum, sometimes based on visits to Rotuma, sometimes in response to issues that bear on their identity as Rotumans. For many of these second-and third-generation individuals, the Internet has provided an opportunity to explore their cultural roots in ways denied them by parents and grandparents who made no effort to transmit Rotuman cultural knowledge. In general, we have not detected any particular biases distinguishing submitters by gender, age, occupation, or place of residence.

To date, fifty-two topical forums have been generated. They can be roughly grouped into four major categories: (1) political issues, (2) aspects of Rotuman identity, (3) the development of Rotuma, and (4) problems confronting Rotumans on the island.

Twenty-one of the topical forums (40.4%) concerned political issues. The majority of these discussions (14) concern Rotuma's relationship with Fiji, with opinions ranging from a call for Rotuma's independence to increased political and economic autonomy within Fiji to expressions of satisfaction with the current arrangement. In general, reactions to arguments for secession were overwhelmingly negative, with numerous commentators pointing to the economic benefits of Rotuma's inclusion in the Fiji polity. Of particular interest for our concerns was a subsidiary argument regarding the right of expatriates to express opinions on the matter. As one critic put it:

> It is truly amazing how so many folks who are unwilling to live the hard life of Rotuma think that they know what is best for Rotuma. What I am saying is without any particular opinion either way—whether Rotuma should have independence or not. It is not that I don't care what happens to my family, BUT as THEY have to live there—NOT me—it is for THEM to decide what they want. And contrary to the pedantic attitude of "more highly educated" individuals, regardless of lack of "formal" education, people living in Rotuma are very aware of what they want and need—it is NOT for those of us who are not willing to live there and be there to decide! (RF: Rotuman Independence, 28 January 1998)

A Rotuman residing in Australia responded, defending the right of expatriates to have a say in such matters:

> To suggest that this is solely the prerogative of those who live at home is, in my view, a very blinkered and destructive outlook on how we could work together. Rotumans who live abroad have a very worthwhile contribution to make. Don't forget many if not all of us abroad have legal as well as social rights and obligations in respect of land and other matters in Rotuma. Let us not stifle healthy, well-meaning and constructive discussion.

> Finally, I for one sought refuge overseas . . . to give my children the opportunities that I never had. Out of sight but certainly not out of

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mind. I believe I speak for most of the Rotumans overseas on this point. Hopefully, our children will continue our contributions to our home island in a bigger and better way. So please do not shut us out. We can make a real and valuable difference. (RF: The Coup in Fiji, ca. April 2002)

And, after an extensive commentary on the governance of Rotuma, a Rotuman woman who worked for an agency concerned with developing entrepreneurial skills and funded by the United Nations and International Labour Organization commented:

I certainly believe that Rotumans on the island know what's best for them, on how they decide to live their day-to-day lives . . . however, they need to accept the fact that we now live in a global village economy and not in isolation from the rest of the world, so they may need to allow good ideas from their "refugee" children and *kainaga* [relatives] living in Fiji or abroad to make Rotuma a thriving island that can be enjoyed by all, including present and future generations. (RF: On the Governance of Rotuma, ca. July 2004)

The remainder of the political forums mostly had to do with governance issues on the island, including matters of political structure (the role of chiefs, elected district representatives, and the district officer who is appointed by the governor of Fiji) and the role of customary principles and procedures. These issues recently came to a head when the Fiji government, after a couple of years of consultation with Rotuman groups on the island and in other parts of Fiji, drafted two legislative bills in 2015, one replacing the Rotuma Act of 1978, the other replacing the Rotuma Land Act of 1959. The reactions on the Internet (including social media) of expatriate Rotumans when drafts of the bills were circulated were passionately critical. They flooded the government with petitions in opposition to the bills and organized informational meetings in Fiji and Rotuma to make the reasons for their objections clear, while pointing out how both bills violated traditional Rotuman customary laws and procedures in multiple ways. Their efforts have thus far been successful, resulting in the bills being temporarily withdrawn from Parliament and a new round of consultations beginning (for a selection of commentaries in the Rotuma Forum go to http://www.rotuma.net/os/Forum/Forum56.html; for a more extensive discussion of the Rotuma Forum, see Howard and Rensel 2012).

Ten of the forums concern aspects of Rotuman identity, with two themes emerging. One focuses on the authenticity, or lack of it, in representations of Rotuman culture abroad, whether in dance performances, movie documentaries, or traditional artifacts. Laments over the relative absence of the Rotuman language in favor of English on the Internet (including the Rotuma Website) are also present. The second theme in this category is a great pride in Rotuman identity, expressed in rapturous reminiscences of time spent on the island, extolling the beauty of the

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island in prose and poetry, and acclaiming the accomplishments of the Rotuman people.

Development issues account for nine forums, including such topics as a need for electrification, which is associated with the problem of providing the island with a regular supply of fuel; with the pros and cons of tourism; and the advantages of developing cottage industries on Rotuma.

The problems emerging from social and economic changes on the island have drawn commentaries in twelve forums regarding environmental degradation, a proliferation of land disputes, shipping and air service irregularities, a lack of markets for produce, drinking among youths, and excessive kava drinking.

What is clear from these postings is that the island of Rotuma has been brought into much sharper focus for a significant segment of Rotumans abroad as a result of the possibilities for communication between expatriates presented by the Internet.

The fourth section of the Web site of relevance to our concerns was an interactive database that allowed users to fill out a form providing information about themselves so that friends and relatives who have lost track of one another could get back in contact. Users were able to provide information about their home district and village on Rotuma, their gender and age, and their parent's names, in addition to current location, and mailing and e-mail addresses. The option of providing additional information about oneself or one's family was also available. The format allowed individuals to modify and update data, and to search for others by using several different criteria. I recently deleted the register from the Web site because Facebook now fulfills the same function more extensively.

The Rotuman case is perhaps unique insofar as no Web sites were created by Rotumans dedicated to promoting discussions or expressing viewpoints, in contrast to other diasporic groups (for examples, see Bernal 2006; Brinkerhoff 2012; Sökefeld 2002). The Rotuma Website therefore served as the sole Internet venue for these purposes until the advent of popular social media.

In an online survey of Rotumans who visited the Web site, Caroline Clark (whose master's thesis, completed in 2005, is titled "The Rotuma Website: Transnational Relations and the Articulation of Cultural Identity") reported:

> 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. (Clark 2005, 36)

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As one respondent to Clark's survey put it:

The website helps us stay connected with our communities every-where, and by that we are continually sharing and revisiting the un-ique 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 ex-periences and celebrate and acknowledge that. (Clark 2005, 28)

Clark reported that 90% of her 151 respondents "believe that the web-site works to preserve Rotuman culture," and that 100% "believe that the website creates and maintains a sense of community among the global Rotuman diaspora" (Clark 2005, 27).

Yet the venue provided by the Rotuma Website has limitations as a vehicle for consolidating grounds for the formation of a global commu-nity. Although the Web site has been popular for news and bulletin board messages—getting an average of 300+ visitors a day at its peak—relatively few individuals have been regular contributors. The great majority of visitors to the site have been passive participants, and op-portunities for interactions between them have been limited. But these limitations were rapidly overcome with the advent of social media.

Facebook

Research about Facebook usage is a growing specialization in social science, fueled by the worldwide involvement of a broad band of demo-graphic groups around the globe.[9] Relatively easy access to this wealth of data has already stimulated studies of the online behavior of a wide variety of socially defined categories of Facebook users, including gen-der (García-Gómez 2013); queers (Atay 2015); teenagers (Boyd 2014); race (Grasmuck, Martin, and Zhao 2009); nationalities (Miller and Slater 2000); and ethnic groups (Boupha et al. 2013). The arena of Internet communication engaged in by immigrant groups has been labeled the "digital diaspora" (Brinkerhoff 2009; Laguerre 2010), in recognition of the fact that people now are able to actively maintain relationships across geographical boundaries on a daily basis, whereas in the past this was not possible.

Soon after Facebook became available to the general public in 2006, Rotumans began signing on, and in the process they formed groups devoted to various purposes (see Howard 2017). This allowed them to make "friends" with individuals around the world without regard for geographical boundaries, and to keep in virtual daily contact. And by joining Rotuman-oriented groups (easily found by doing a search since most such groups included "Rotuma" or "Rotuman" in their group names), individuals were able to affiliate with pre-formed virtual com-munities of compatriots, depending on common interests, home village or district on Rotuma, schools attended (e.g., Rotuma High School),

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religious affiliation, or other criteria. Such virtual communities vary in size from only a few individuals to the most inclusive group, "Rotumans on Facebook," which as of 2 September 2017 had 9,787 members. Although this surely includes a significant number of non-Rotumans, it nevertheless suggests that an amazing proportion of the total Rotuman population is involved. In response to a question in an online survey (see below) regarding how many Rotuman groups they belonged to, respondents were offered four choices: none, 1–5, 6–10, and more than 10. The great majority (94%, N = 185) answered 1–5; of the remainder, only 4% answered none and 2% answered 6–10.

As a member of multiple Rotuman groups, most of which are public (open membership), some of which are closed (restricted membership, requiring formal acceptance), and with over 500 Rotuman "friends," I have been following postings, and occasionally posting items myself, for several years now. I have been greatly impressed with the frequency, intensity, and quality of interaction between Rotumans scattered around the globe, in postings, comments to posts, and other indicators of intimacy and sharing that are the hallmark of well-functioning, grounded communities (see Howard 2017, for an analysis of the ways and degrees to which Rotumans express their cultural identity in different Facebook contexts).

To explore the significance of the Facebook experience for Rotumans, I initiated an online survey, announced in "Rotumans on Facebook" and on the Rotuma Website, inviting Rotumans to participate. The survey was online for July 2016 and yielded 186 responses. That well over half (66%) of the sample was over age thirty-five suggests to me that older Rotumans have been highly motivated to participate in Facebook because it provides a means otherwise unavailable to them of keeping in regular contact with geographically scattered friends and relatives, a conclusion supported by my experience with their Facebook postings and comments.

Most of the respondents were born either on Rotuma (40%) or in Fiji (49%), with only 11% born elsewhere. Not surprisingly then, the majority of them reported that they were either fluent in the Rotuman language (57%) or could converse in Rotuman moderately well (23%), with the remainder claiming to mostly understand spoken Rotuman (6%) or to know some words and songs in Rotuman (12%). Only two individuals reported not knowing the language at all.

The countries in which individuals answered the survey were not reported by the respondents but were included in the database (a spreadsheet) supplied by the survey provider. It gives a pretty good idea of the distribution of Rotumans around the world. Given the 179 records for which there were data, the distribution is as follows: Fiji, 55; Australia, 45; New Zealand, 26; United States, 21; Japan, 11; Canada, 8; Great Britain, 7; United Arab Emirates, 2; Brazil, 1; Vietnam, 1; Western Samoa, 1; and South Africa, 1.

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The number of "friends" reported ranged from 12 to 4,000, with a median of around 265 (based on 137 reports; others didn't offer figures but gave answers like "many," "lots," "tons," and "not sure.") In a separate study of Rotuman Facebook usage in which I gleaned friendship data from individual Facebook profiles, the median number of friends was a much higher 593 (Howard 2017). Asked what proportion of their friends on Facebook were Rotuman, 35% answered "most of my friends"; 33%, "about half of my friends"; and 32%, "fewer than half of my friends."

To gain an idea of respondents' levels of engagement, I posed a set of questions. To the question "How often do you post something on Facebook?" five alternatives were offered: almost every day (11%), several times a week (19%), about once a week (22%), a few times a month (30%), and hardly ever (18%), $N = 184$. With regard to comments on other people's Facebook postings, the frequency was somewhat greater, with 24% answering almost every day; 31%, several times a week; 16%, about once a week; 16%, a few times a month; and 13%, hardly ever. And when asked how often they "liked" a posting on Facebook, the frequency not surprisingly (because it is a more passive form of participation) was greater still, with 45% answering almost every day; 33%, several times a week; 6%, about once a week; 11%, a few times a month; and 5%, hardly ever. See Table 1 for a summary.

To gain a sense of how participation in Facebook has affected the networks of friends and relatives of respondents, I posed the following two questions: "How much would you say your participation in Facebook has affected the size of your network of relatives (kainaga)?" and "How much would you say your participation in Facebook has affected the size of your network of friends (kaumane'aga)?" The term *kaumane'aga* refers specifically to friends, or more literally to "playmates" as opposed to relatives. The responses to these questions are in Table 2.

Clearly then, the great majority of respondents felt that their networks of both friends and relatives had been expanded by their participation in Facebook, and although there's no way of knowing from these data what proportion of their co-members were in countries other than their own, we can safely surmise that these networks were largely transnational.

The final item in my survey asked, "In your own words, in what ways would you say being on Facebook has affected your life?" Of the 186

Table 1. Frequency of Facebook Participation

	Almost Every Day	Several Times a Week	About Once a Week	A Few Times a Month	Hardly Ever	Totals
Postings	20 (11%)	35 (19%)	40 (22%)	55 (30%)	34 (18%)	184 (100%)
Comments	43 (24%)	56 (31%)	29 (16%)	30 (16%)	24 (13%)	182 (100%)
Likes	83 (45%)	60 (33%)	11 (6%)	21 (11%)	9 (5%)	184 (100%)

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Table 2. Effect of Facebook Participation on Size of Personal Networks

	Increased It Greatly	Increased It Somewhat	Not Much Effect	Totals
Friends	72 (40%)	71 (39%))	37 (21%)	180 (100%)
Relatives	84 (46%)	68 (37%)	30 (16%)	182 (99%)

respondents, 157 offered comments, which I have categorized for analysis in Table 3. Many of the comments bridged two or more categories so the totals in Table 3 add up to more than the number of commenters.

Keeping in touch with friends and relatives is the dominant effect alluded to by respondents. They often added remarks concerning the ability to keep up with news of Rotumans around the world and the ability to share photos and videos. Some characteristic examples follow (copied verbatim, including spellings and capitalization):

1. Being on Facebook gives me a chance to be connected daily to my kainaga [relatives] all around the world. I get to see my nieces and nephews grow up through pictures and videos which I would not get to see otherwise unless visiting Fiji/rotuma. The access to language, music, dance, and current events has blown up with social media as well where I can not only see these things on my page but easily connect with others through comments. I've befriended disconnected family and friends from my childhood in rotuma and met them years later when I visited Fiji all thanks to Facebook. It broadens my rotuman community by taking away the limitations of location.

2. Facebook lets me connect with friends and family but especially cousins and relatives who are staying abroad. Rather than having to wait for the next family function or a reunion (which happens in

Table 3. Effects of Facebook on Lives of Respondents

Comment	Number of Comments
Keeping in touch with friends and relatives	105
Keeping up with news	39
Sharing photos and videos	19
Sharing cultural knowledge	15
Being informed of Rotuman issues	11
Reinforcing Rotuman identity	10
Using Rotuman language	6
Useful in planning events	5
Entertainment, relaxation	3
Value for business	1
No or not much effect on life	13
Big impact	5
Positive impact	6
Negative aspect (gossip, nasty comments)	8
Time consuming	15
No comment	29

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years), one can just chat with a relative or a cousin on Facebook and update each other on whats happening. FB is also a great place to be in a forum of discussion on issues that affect our island and its people.

3. It has allowed me to connect with other Rotumans around the world and stay connected to their daily lives. It has brought a closer sense of identity and had been a great way to educate my friends on where I come from.

4. In a more exciting way I would say FB has made my life more con-nected with friends, relatives, and the wider Rotuman community, as well as the current affairs of other places worldwide. FB has enabled me to reach out to the world of people especially friends almost daily. It has somewhat become almost like a new essential element to my life where it has kept your network of friends and re-latives close by and closer to you on a daily basis.

In addition to keeping in touch with friends and relatives, 15 respon-dents mentioned the importance of Facebook for keeping informed about issues of concern to the Rotuman people. As one respondent put it:

5. I didn't really have much to do with or cared much about Facebook until the conversations regarding the "extinct and dying" (urrgh hate these words) status of the Rotuman language and the Rotuma Land Bills 6 and 7 [sic] surfaced. These conversations and events were catalytically responsible for my increased participation on FB. I suddenly found myself paying more attention to Rotuman issues—reading more about Rotuma, reading more about Rotuman language issues, reading more about indigenous issues and research, writing more, studying how people were using written Ro-tuman on the net and yes, on more than one occasion, voicing strong opinions and arguing with others about the Bills and other is-sues about Rotuma that I felt and continue to feel very passionately about. I was suddenly thrust into this heightened awareness of "Ro-tumaness." Often, I have wondered if "living overseas" has played a part too. Would my participation on FB and interest in Rotuman is-sues have been different, i.e. lesser, if I were living in Rotuma or Fiji instead?
   The conversations around the status of the Rotuman language on RoFB [Rotumans on Facebook] has created new conversations about Rotuman language learning in our home. It has pushed us to be proactive. This has got to be a good thing.

Pride in Rotuman identity and being informed about issues of con-cern to the Rotuman people was the theme of some comments:

6. Being proud of who I am. My culture is my identity
   Reading the achievements of my people—fellow rotumans makes me proud

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  7. Confirms my identity as a rotuman . . . and feels proud about it

However, ambivalence was present in eight of the comments, with the negative aspects of unfettered communication highlighted:

  8. The great thing about Facebook is that being away from Fiji, I find that keeping up with events back home is much easier and up to date through facebook. Through the message App on facebook which allows facetime calls, you can participate in events within the kainaga in real time. Unfortunately there is also a downside to it. Being easy to contact however far away you are, and being abroad you are constantly asked to send money back home. Another downside is the gossiping becomes more wide spread and nasty as the gossip can remain anonymous.

  9. I think that being linked with other Rotumans on facebook allows me to truly appreciate the uniqueness of our culture. It also makes me want to visit Rotuma as I have not been before. However it does have some negative effects—some Rotumans are quite vocal about other Rotumans who do not speak the language. I am very proud of my Rotuman culture and although I do not speak it fluently, I class myself as a Rotuman. Others do not feel the same which can make people like myself feel disconnected or classed as a "second-rate Rotuman."

Another negative, mentioned by 15 respondents, was the time spent on Facebook. For example:

10. It has enabled me to converse and keep in touch with my friends and family abroad, thus it has helped ease my homesickness. I am also able to write in Rotuman and that makes me really happy! :) On the bad side, I think I spent too much time on facebook and need to limit myself.

11. Positive and negative.

     You keep in touch with family when you need to but then you get drawn to other people's page for no particular reason and you eventually waste time. The human aspect or factor is totally removed be coz you can only bring yourself to communicate on a device and not in person.

Only 13 of the 157 respondents who commented stated that Facebook either had no or little effect on their lives.

To be sure, Facebook is not the only medium by which friends and relatives communicate with one another. In response to a question concerning what other media they used to keep in touch, all but five respondents mentioned such additional media as telephone calls (82%), e-mail (76%), Skype (51%), Twitter (10%), and other (21%). Among the "other" media were Instagram, Messenger (texting), Facetime, LinkedIn, and Viber.

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Conclusion

From a conceptual standpoint, the current Rotuman situation has much in common with that of the Alevis, a persecuted religious group that originated in Anatolia (now Turkey), as presented by Martin Sökefeld (2002). Following an illuminating discussion of the concepts of "virtual community" and "virtual diaspora," Sökefeld concludes that:

> at the level of online representation, Alevism appears rather as a non-diaspora—a virtual non-diaspora—of a cultural/religious community that in virtual space is not fractured, divided, and constrained by physical distance and separation, by diverse political contexts, by not being there. The technical universe of cyberspace creates an illusion of oneness . . . the Alevi community is certainly recreated or reimagined in cyberspace as a unified community that is anchored in physical space in Turkey. (113)

Likewise, Facebook has provided Rotumans scattered around the world the wherewithal to communicate on a regular basis with one another, to share news and visuals, to express opinions on issues of common concern, and to enhance their sense of Rotumanness, which is the hallmark of grounded communities. Furthermore, enhanced communication has increased visits, reunions (often on the island of Rotuma), and the sharing and exchanging of physical resources transnationally.

If we define *community* as a body of persons who share a common history and have common social, economic, and political interests, then it is fair to say that a transnational Rotuman community has come into existence. It is a community whose focal point is the island itself, in which membership depends on, to some extent at least, an interest in Rotuman history, language, and culture. More importantly, it is a community defined by a common interest in one another's lives by virtue of kinship, marriage, friendship, or shared experience. Most people with attachments to the island want to stay in touch with friends and relatives; they want to share news and stay informed of what's going on in Rotuma and in overseas enclaves where they have kin, schoolmates, or friends.

As a result I now find myself referring to *the global Rotuman community*, rather than to *diasporic Rotumans*. It is an "imagined community" in Benedict Anderson's (1983) sense to be sure, but as Etienne Balibar has cogently argued, "*Every social community reproduced by the functioning of institutions is imaginary*, that is to say, it is based on the projection of individual existence into the weft of a collective narrative, on the recognition of a common name and on traditions lived as the trace of an immemorial past (even when they have been fabricated and inculcated in the recent past)" (1990, 346; original emphasis).

So, although in one sense—that of the dispersion process itself—I can still comfortably use the phrase *Rotuman diaspora*, I am much less comfortable using the term in reference to the dispersed transnational

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population of Rotumans, especially given much of the denotative and connotative baggage associated with the concept. Instead, I am inclined to argue that what once could plausibly be considered a diasporic Rotuman population is now, in large measure because of Facebook, a diaspora no more.[10]

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Notes

1. This section draws heavily on previously published articles dealing with a history of Rotuman out-migration, including Howard (1961, 1995).

2. There is compelling evidence that Rotumans were sailing all over and thus were involved in a de facto migration before European intrusion.

3. For example, in a study of Rotuman migrants in the Sydney area, Seferosa Michael estimated that "70–80% of all migration to Australia has been the result of marriage to non-Rotuman spouses, most of whom were Australian citizens" (1991, 8–9). And in a survey we conducted among Rotumans in New Zealand in 1994, we found that of the seventy-four Rotuman women for whom we had marital information, forty were married to or had been married to European New Zealanders (Pakeha); fifteen, to Rotuman or part-Rotuman men; sixteen, to other Polynesians (including Fijians or part-Fijians); two, to Indians; and one, to a Chinese man. Of the thirty-six Rotuman men in our survey, fourteen were married to Pakeha women; ten, to Rotumans; and twelve, to other Islanders. Rotumans who were married to Rotumans or part-Rotumans accounted for only 23% of the New Zealand couples we identified (Rensel and Howard 2014).

4. Insofar as the concept of diaspora applies to the Rotuman case, it also corresponds to the "atopic mode," as defined by Stéphane Dufoix:

> This is a transstate mode, but it does not seek to acquire a physical territory. It refers to a way of being in the world between states that is built around a common origin, ethnicity, or religion that does not reduce one to being a subject of a host country. This identity is best expressed in dispersion itself. It presents two aspects that Emmanuel Ma Mung considers to be the main criteria of a "diaspora": multipolarity—a presence in several countries—and interpolarity, the existence of links between the poles. This is a space of more than a place, a geography with no other territory than the space described by the networks. It is a territory without terrain. (2008, 63)

5. One does not have to be ethnically Rotuman to participate in—to be a member of—a Rotuman community. Indeed, some of the most active members of Rotuman communities abroad are the Caucasian and Hawaiian spouses of Rotumans. As long as they engage in the process of cultural bonding by participating in prescribed activities (e.g., dances, feasts, meetings), they are welcomed. It is the commitment to cultural sharing rather than ethnicity that determines membership.

6. Portions of this section draw on an earlier account in Howard (1999).

7. I thought of this as a kind of repatriation project, since most of what had been written about Rotuma was relatively inaccessible, stashed away in remote libraries and archives.

8. Rotuman has been written in three different orthographies: one devised by early English Methodist missionaries, one by French Roman Catholics, and one by Churchward. The early Methodist

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orthography is rarely used nowadays. Most Methodists use the Churchward orthography, which is taught in schools. Catholics still use the French-based orthography primarily, although Churchward's orthography has gained increased acceptance, albeit in a modified form. In addition to umlauts over *a*, *o*, and *u*, Churchward uses a single dot under the *a* to designate a sound between *a* and *o*, and a single dot over the *a* to designate a sound between *a* and *e*. He also uses macrons (dashes) over vowels to indicate lengthening. Rotumans generally omit these diacritics in informal writing and on Internet postings.

9.   In their comprehensive review of Facebook research in the social sciences, published in 2012, Wilson, Gosling, and Graham identified 412 relevant articles, which they sorted into five categories corresponding to five broad questions: (a) Who is using Facebook and what are users doing while on Facebook? (b) Why do people use Facebook? (c) How are people presenting themselves on Facebook? (d) How is Facebook affecting relationships among groups and individuals? And (e) why are people disclosing personal information on Facebook despite potential risks?

10.   In writing this paper I have assumed that readers of this journal are generally unfamiliar with the Rotuman case and am therefore taking the liberty of including information and analyses I have presented in several previous publications that are relevant to the conversations that have taken place in the journal since its inception.

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