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# Voices of Rotuma: Enduring Refrain

JUDITH A. BENNETT

## ABSTRACT

Polynesian Rotuma was blessed by its large coconuts and became an early focus for foreigners seeking trade in coconut oil and copra. Once the island became part of British Fiji in 1881, Rotumans voiced their concerns about increased shipping costs when going via Fiji as the port of entry. From the early 20th century they had visions of owning their own ship and thus greater control over prices for exported copra and imported goods. This article seeks to examine their constant efforts to make traders deal more fairly while seeking to manage their own shipping. Though they had some success, particularly when they formed a cooperative after World War Two, their goal largely proved unattainable but the vision and the voices have endured.

Key words: Rotuma, coconuts, copra, resistance, trade, shipping, cooperatives

In 1906, a letter addressed to ‘Misi [Mr] Lever, Sunlight Soap in Sitne [Sydney]’ made its way via Sydney to Lever Brothers’ soap factory at Port Sunlight, England. It was dated 4 September:

Misi—Do you want buy plentee Copra. How much you pay one ton.  
Brittania man say you pay very good price. You got stemah, and pay  
money, no give paper on store. When you [your] boss come look out  
Copra.

Nathaniel Mou

Native Chief of Pepsie [Pepjei]

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## Rotuma Island

Oceania<sup>1</sup>

Mou's letter has many references to Rotuma's involvement in the coconut industry: the supply of copra, William Lever, price, the medium of exchange, the store, chiefly structure and districts of the island, its Oceanian location, and shipping. It also raises questions at the centre of Rotuma's relationship to the wider world. This paper explores Mou's concerns to see how these were addressed, and the centrality of the indigenous voices across time to articulate a vision of Rotuma's participation in the copra industry.

In the 19th century, Rotuma, a fertile island of volcanic origin, about 530 kilometres (330 miles) north of Fiji, had its share of visitors: shipwrecked sailors, deserters and escaped convicts, as well as whaling and labour recruiting vessels calling for fresh supplies, perhaps as many as one a month.<sup>2</sup> This island of 43 square kilometres had an abundance of particularly large coconuts, which supplied food but also liquid for drinking in an island where, without surface water, the well water was brackish.<sup>3</sup> Coconuts attracted trading schooners and resident traders who sought coconut oil<sup>4</sup> to about 1870, then copra, introducing a range of goods, so that even without a resident European missionary in the 1860s, the art of making tapa cloth (*uha*) and fibre girdles atrophied, with 'flaming-gaudy-cotton' taking their place.<sup>5</sup>

## TOWARDS CESSION

Missionaries had worked on Rotuma since the late 1830s. The Wesleyans, entrenched by the 1840s, faced competition from the Catholic priests. Both sets of White missionaries were forced out in the 1850s, but returned and won followers, some by the power of literacy. The denominational division culminated in religious wars in the 1870s, ending in the death of the leading chief of the Catholic party in 1878, the intervention by French warships and the cessation of violence.<sup>6</sup>

Chiefs were involved in the copra trade, receiving various fees and 'royalties' of six shillings for every ton sold, so a trader might increase a payment to obtain

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Adam Macqueen, *The King of Sunlight: How William Lever Cleaned Up the World* (London: Corgi Books, 2005), 191. Mou Nataniela (Nathaniel) is listed on a monument, see Alan Howard and Jan Rensel, *Island Legacy: A History of the Rotuman People* (Victoria, British Columbia: Trafford, 2007), 370.

<sup>2</sup> Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 119–26.

<sup>3</sup> Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 5–6, 35, 123–4.

<sup>4</sup> H. E. Maude, *Slavers in Paradise* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1981), 81; *Sydney Mail*, 3 March 1866, 10.

<sup>5</sup> John B. Thurston, cited in Deryck Scarr, *The Majesty of Colour: I, the Very Bayonet* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1977), 31. See also Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 86–7.

<sup>6</sup> Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 125, 139–80.

further consideration in his deals.<sup>7</sup> Soon after the last war, Maraf, a Wesleyan, in Noa'tau district appealed to the governor of British Fiji to take over the island.<sup>8</sup> Maraf remarked that there was renewed 'dissatisfaction' because of his 'receiving certain money from a Mr Weber, a German residing in Samoa', heading Godeffroy and Sons. It seems Maraf was taking money to further the business of the company's manager and bolster his own political eminence.<sup>9</sup>

Whether encouraged by the resident traders, the Wesleyan missionaries or their own agenda, all the chiefs supported Maraf travelling to Fiji to reinforce their request. Wary of expansion of French and German influence, the British needed little convincing. Cession followed with the chiefs' agreement to pay taxes for an administration.<sup>10</sup> A council of the leading chiefs from each of the seven districts was to 'advise' the resident commissioner. Like the Fijians, the Rotumans paid their taxes in copra, which was then put out to tender to traders for the best price. The governor, to save salaries for customs and a medical officer to grant pratique on Rotuma, decided the island was not to be a port of entry to Fiji.<sup>11</sup> Goods now had to come and go via Fiji. This drove out the German company.<sup>12</sup> Another change was that no Rotuman could be recruited to work anywhere but Fiji, a restriction on men who before cession had worked on whaling and trading ships and pearl-shelling in Australia's Torres Strait.<sup>13</sup>

By the close of the 19th century, Rotuman society had changed. Pre-European patterns that supported redistribution of produce declined as coconuts assumed a monetary equivalent. Almost all land remained under Rotuman control, but many now claimed ownership of specific coconut palms and the lands on which they grew, which formerly were for the use of the extended kin group.<sup>14</sup> Though the chiefs ruled in their own districts with a council of heads of chiefly families, these and the people expected a chief to look after their interests. District chiefs did not have absolute power and did not control landowning. By the time the British

<sup>7</sup> *Auckland Star*, 7 November 1877; Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 221, 236n20.

<sup>8</sup> The chiefs of Noa'tau district were known as 'Maraf' or 'Marafu', a title, not a personal name.

<sup>9</sup> Maraf, cited in Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 185–6; Alan Howard and Eric Kjellgren, 'Martyrs, Progress and Political Ambition', *Journal of Pacific History* 29:2 (1994): 138.

<sup>10</sup> Stuebel, Memoir on the German Trading and Plantation Company of the South Seas (DHPG), 18 September 1883, Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives (AJHR) R 1885, A0 4d, New Zealand government, Wellington; Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 189, 221; Howard and Kjellgren, 'Martyrs', 150; Stuebel, Memoir.

<sup>11</sup> Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 203.

<sup>12</sup> Stewart Firth, 'German Firms in the Western Pacific Islands, 1857–1914', *Journal of Pacific History* 8 (1973): 10–28.

<sup>13</sup> Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 129–30, 202; Dorothy Shineberg, *They Came for Sandalwood* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1967), 21–2. In the 1890s men were allowed to crew on inter-colonial ships. 'Rotuma', *Star*, 2 September 1899; Frances Steel, *Oceania under Steam: Sea Transport and the Cultures of Colonialism, c. 1870–1914* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2011), 180–1, 191n32, 209–10.

<sup>14</sup> Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 241–2.

were in control, the people already displayed a certain independence of mind and action in regard to their district chiefs who were losing power and had their own rivalries, not helped by the new restrictions on trade.<sup>15</sup> This is evident in a popular song, reflecting the misgivings of a chief and his western district regarding cession, construction of the commissioner's house, and coconut planting:

The chiefs are all jealous of each other  
 They went to Fiji and brought back bags for us to put copra into  
 This is the chiefs' time to make the people work  
 The whole of Itumutu has built the Government House  
 The chiefs went to Fiji but they do not know what they went for  
 They wrote a letter and brought a white man to rule  
 Besides him they brought shovels and American axes to cut all the  
 woods down.<sup>16</sup>

### COPRA'S ECONOMY

In Fiji, crops for taxes in kind was the policy of the governor, Arthur Gordon to give the people a gradual introduction to the capitalist economy. In the 1880s–1890s, the government encouraged competition among districts resulting in the planting of thousands of coconuts.<sup>17</sup> From existing palms, five traders on Rotuma were exporting 250 tons of copra yearly.<sup>18</sup> Captain Kaad whose wife, Sarote, was Rotuman, dominated the shipping into Fiji from Rotuma and usually tendered successfully for the annual tax copra while he and other traders bought whatever the Islanders produced.<sup>19</sup> The resident commissioner in 1889 reported optimistically that the people had a 'full understanding of fluctuations of the market' and realized that copra might not return as much as they had hoped.<sup>20</sup> The people could still live on the ample local produce, though the traders' stores offered 'what to them, a few years ago, were luxuries, but which are fast becoming necessities'.<sup>21</sup>

Rotuma's first resident commissioner understood that the port of entry requirement would increase the costs to traders and decrease returns to the

<sup>15</sup> *Auckland Star*, 21 September 1881.

<sup>16</sup> Translation of a song composed by Gagaj Manava of Itu'muta in c. 1880, cited in Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 213. Itumutu is Itu'muta in the west of the island. See also for chiefly rivalries, *Ibid.*, 223; Resident Commissioner (hereinafter RC) to Colonial Secretary (hereinafter CS), 13 October 1888, CSO 3370/1887, Fiji National Archives (hereinafter FNA), Suva.

<sup>17</sup> Thurston to Wilson, 23 November 1879, Set 13, Vol. 4, Outwards Correspondence 5, Colonial Secretary's Office (hereinafter CSO) [old files]; See files CSO 2030/1898; CSO 2561/1898; Return of coconuts, 1900, CSO 1712/1900, FNA.

<sup>18</sup> Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 241–2.

<sup>19</sup> CSO 1408/1896; CSO 87/848; CSO 87/834; CSO 1353/1897; CSO 848/1897; CSO 3125/07; CSO 2059/08; Annual Report (hereinafter AR) Rotuma, 1898, CSO 1219/1898, FNA.

<sup>20</sup> Report Rotuma, 10 November 1889, CSO 921/1889, FNA.

<sup>21</sup> RC, AR Rotuma, 2 February 1889, CSO 259/1889, FNA.

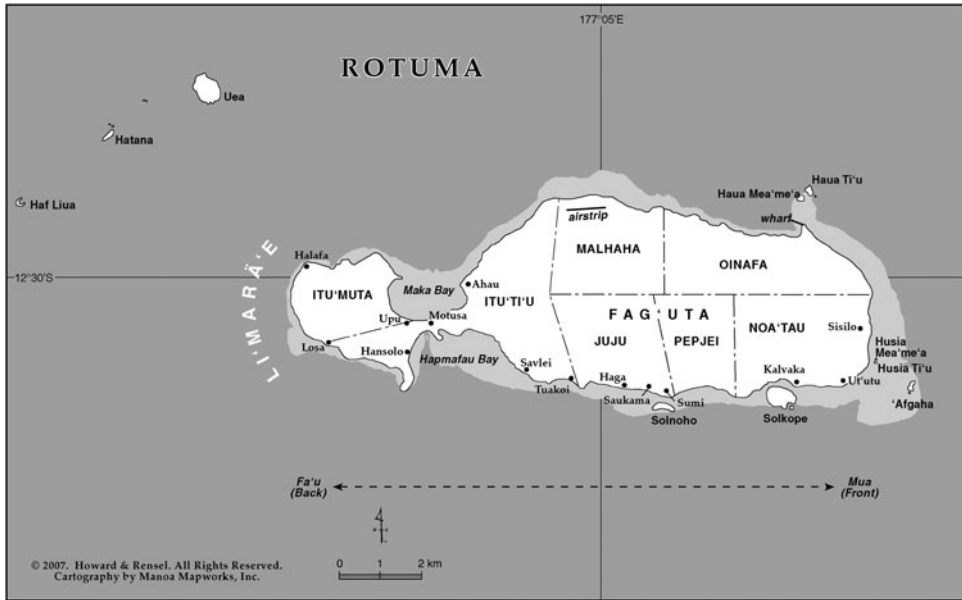


FIGURE 1: Rotuma Districts. (With kind permission of Alan Howard and Jan Rensel).

people.<sup>22</sup> Rotumans soon realized that their copra gave them a lower return than that sold in Fiji, as much as £3 a ton less in shipping. They had done better before cession because there were several competing traders, most with their own schooners and no restrictions on where they shipped. Traders in 1885 claimed that if they were allowed to ship directly to Sydney, they could deliver a better price than Fiji.<sup>23</sup>

In the early 1900s, the price of copra rose, helped by the developments in Europe to make margarine from coconut oil.<sup>24</sup> Traders looked with renewed interest to Rotuma, including Levers' Sydney representative, Arthur Meek, running a new factory about to produce soap as well as expanding Levers' Solomon Islands coconut lands. Lever company's 'Sunlight Soap' was not unheard of in Rotuma.

Wesleyan missionaries were propagandists for soap. As early as the 1860s they deplored the appearance of turmeric mixed with oil that Rotumans smeared on themselves to protect their physical and spiritual worth. Dirtiness and unwashed clothing were neither Christian nor civilized. By the 1870s, they had gained converts to the *lotu* (church) and thus, 'Hundreds *lotu'd*, and when they *lotu'd* they got rid of the turmeric. Then they purchased soap, and tried to make their scanty garments more presentable'.<sup>25</sup> In 1896, the resident commissioner endorsed Levers soap when *kepkap* or *karoriko* (scabies) became prevalent on the island, advising the council that

<sup>22</sup> Mitchell, cited in Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 210.

<sup>23</sup> RC to Secretary to Government, 22 February 1886, and enclosure, CSO 952/1886, FNA.

<sup>24</sup> K. Buckley and K. Klugman, *The History of Burns Philp: 'The Australian Company in the South Pacific'* (Sydney: Burns Philp and Co., 1981), 159–60.

<sup>25</sup> Osborne cited in Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 147, 148.



FIGURE 2: Mou, Pepjei, Rotuma. Hocart, Arthur Maurice, 1883–1939: Photographs of Solomon Islands, Rotuma and Fiji. Ref: PAColl–1914–366, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

‘the best cure for it is cleanliness, that is the use of warm water and soap, a soap called Sunlight Soap is the best of all’.<sup>26</sup>

### SHUTTING OFF POSSIBILITIES

A decade later in 1906, Nathaniel Mou, chief of Pepjei in Rotuma’s south, sent his letter to Sydney from where it travelled to England to the heart of Levers’ soap empire (Figure 2).<sup>27</sup> Levers in Sydney replied: ‘that they were prepared to call here on their way to Wallis Island and Samoa, if Rotuma was made a port of entry’.<sup>28</sup> Rotuman coconuts were highly prized for their oil content because their yield by weight and by palm was greater than Fiji coconuts and thus fewer were needed to make up equal weight of copra.<sup>29</sup> Meek, in 1907, twice appealed to Fijian authorities for permission to ship nuts direct from Rotuma to the Solomon Islands to plant in Levers’ land. Meek understood that ‘there was a large quantity of copra’ in

<sup>26</sup> Minutes of Council meeting, Rotuma, 4 June 1896, CSO 2156/1896, FNA.

<sup>27</sup> Cited in Macqueen, *The King*, 191.

<sup>28</sup> RC to CS, 15 December 1911, CSO 9886/1911, FNA.

<sup>29</sup> Agricultural Census Report 1968, 80, Legislative Council Papers, FNA.

Rotuma and, if their ship, the *Upolu* called there it would also be ‘to the advantage of the inhabitants’.<sup>30</sup> The governor in Fiji refused. Meek had to settle for seed nuts from German Samoa. One Suva official saw this as Levers’ scheme to get copra to compete with Captain Kaad ‘who has interests in Fiji and Rotuma and runs a subsidized steamer to Rotuma’; a mail subsidy paid by the Fiji government which wanted to keep Kaad’s ship to Rotuma a worthwhile proposition.<sup>31</sup>

The government relented with Burns Philp Co. Ltd (hereafter BP), an Australian mercantile and shipping company, however. In April 1908, they asked that their steamer, *Muniara* for Sydney from the Gilbert Islands, be allowed to call directly at Rotuma for copra. The government agreed because BP’s Levuka-based Fiji copra agent, Robbie and Co. weighed the tax copra in Rotuma. They made a similar request in 1909, but the government refused, given that the tender for tax copra that year went to resident Kaad. So again, the Islanders bore the consequences of the Fiji regulation. Just as the chiefs wanted a port of entry, so too did the traders and manufacturers, for Arthur Meek renewed his plea in 1910 to allow the *Upolu* to ship directly from Rotuma to Sydney, to no avail.<sup>32</sup>

## SINKING HOPE

Although Mou tried to attract Levers’ steamer, a Rotuman ship was already taking copra to Levuka. In about 1900, five of the seven districts contributed funds to buy a ship. The resident commissioner had arranged for the Native Office in Suva to contact Dalgety and Co. in Sydney to get a ship, the *Ujia*, a 66-ton schooner that cost £2000. It had arrived in 1902 and did the run until it hit the reef off Motusa and wrecked, uninsured in late 1903.<sup>33</sup> Resident commissioner Hugh Macdonald noted, ‘the management was left to the chiefs and the captain of the vessel, and these were incapable to undertake such work’. That not all district chiefs had been involved suggests the motivation for Mou in 1906 for seeking another way of getting his district’s copra a better price by avoiding the Levuka traders.

Whatever their motivations, the chiefs did not abandon their quest for better copra prices and cheaper goods. In 1911, Macdonald passed on to Fiji their petition, that Rotuma be made a port of entry. The chiefs had heard that two trading companies in the Fiji Islands, Morris, Hedstrom Ltd (hereinafter MH) and BP-controlled

<sup>30</sup> Meek to High Commissioner (hereinafter HC), 11 June 1907 and 25 July, CSO 3025/1907, FNA.

<sup>31</sup> Meek to HC, 11 June 1907, and enclosures, CSO 3025/1907, FNA. This mail subsidy went to the successful tax copra tenderer. RC to CS, 18 December 1911, CSO 9886/1911, FNA; Alastair Couper, *Sailors and Traders: A Maritime History of the Pacific Peoples* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 159–60.

<sup>32</sup> Meek to CS, 30 August 1910, CSO 7440/1910; Meek to HC, 11 June 1907, CSO 3125/1907, FNA.

<sup>33</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 January 1904.



Robbie, Kaad and Co. Ltd, were planning to amalgamate to form a new company, Rotuma Traders Ltd (hereinafter RTL). That would mean the end of competition. The chiefs were concerned that the new company would not bid for the mail subsidy and thus not supply a regular shipping service.<sup>34</sup> They knew BP had been doing very well out of Rotuma. The fact that Robbie, Kaad and Co. had tendered in 1910 for tax copra in Fiji at £18/17/6 a ton, while in Rotuma their tender at £18/7/6 was evidence that costs for the Rotuma trip came to only an extra 10/- a ton.<sup>35</sup> While this said much about BP's efficiency, it also revealed what they could pay for consignment copra, if they accepted this from the chiefs, rather than via traders with their profit margin or, as planned, via their own business on Rotuma.

Macdonald supported the Rotumans' petition, lobbying for a port of entry and pointing out to the colonial secretary in Suva that it 'showed what were their feelings to what was practically a monopoly'. The administrative costs amounted to £600 for staff per annum, capital expenditure of £1200 for buildings and an in-shore boat, with £146 annual depreciation. The recurrent expenditure would be £746 yearly. He was listening to economic concerns of the chiefs and people, just as Levers had heard Mou's voice for a fairer copra deal.<sup>36</sup>

## SEEKING A SHIP

The chiefs' intelligence about a new trading company proved accurate. By 1913, RTL was operating, a pairing of competitors for copra, BP and MH.<sup>37</sup> That combine cornered much of Rotuma's copra because it had a small steam ship, BP's *Motusa*, but it could carry only about 120 tons dead weight.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, RTL, based at Motusa in Itu'ti'u, shipped their copra first. The other traders, Fred Gibson (Noa'tau district) and George Missen (Itu'ti'u district), suffered when theirs was often left behind. Moreover, prices for freight had increased considerably once RTL operated. After discussion with the district chiefs in 1915, Gibson prepared a detailed proposal for the purchase of a 60-ton auxiliary schooner<sup>39</sup> for a company of directors: Chiefs Poara, Tevita, Apao, Uaafta, Turaga, Manava, as well as F. and C. Gibson, and Missen. A.M. Brodziak Ltd in Levuka was to be agent to arrange the purchase of

<sup>34</sup> RC to CS, 15 December 1911, CSO 9886/1911, FNA. This was a hard year when almost 13 per cent of Rotuman succumbed to measles. G. Dennis Shanks, Seung-Eun Lee, Alan Howard and John H. Brundage, 'Extreme Mortality after First Introduction of Measles Virus to the Polynesian Island of Rotuma, 1911', *American Journal of Epidemiology* 173:10 (2010): 1211–22.

<sup>35</sup> Buckley and Klugman, *The History*, 159–60.

<sup>36</sup> Mou was still chief in 1913. Minutes of a meeting of Council, Rotuma, 2 October 1913, CSO 8858/1913, FNA.

<sup>37</sup> K. Buckley and K. Klugman, *'The Australian Presence in the Pacific': Burns Philp 1914–1946* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1983), 115; Minutes of a meeting of Council, Rotuma, 2 October 1913, CSO 8858/1913, FNA.

<sup>38</sup> That is, in cargo exclusive of the weight of the ship.

<sup>39</sup> Documents describe him and Missen as 'half castes'.

the schooner.<sup>40</sup> Six districts had contributed a total of £850, with the traders planning to put in another £800–£850.

Even Suva acknowledged it was a reasonable plan though checked with the government's legal advisor that it was feasible. Macdonald, aware of the earlier problems with the ship for Rotuma in 1908, was cautious yet vouched that Gibson 'would deal fairly with the people'. He also pointed out, however, that if RTL provided a bigger vessel, there would be no necessity for another. Gibson negotiated with Brodziak who had no connections to the big companies, but got no further as the need soon passed.<sup>41</sup> With a Fiji subsidy, the Australasian United Steam Navigation Company ran a government subsidized ship between Levuka in Fiji, Rotuma and Wallis Islands, collecting much of the copra until 1920.<sup>42</sup> Because prices were good in 1920, the Rotumans successfully approached the Fiji Planters Cooperative Association with its hired shipping to set up in competition with RTL. Since Rotumans punted their copra across to the Association's ship anchored outside the reef, they were carrying some of the related costs. The commissioner later criticized this labour subsidy and other clauses in their 1921 contract.<sup>43</sup>

Fierce rivalry between RTL and the Association ensued. Gibson and Missen were beyond negotiating for the Rotumans because they contracted to sell their copra to RTL for five years from 1921.<sup>44</sup> RTL tried to outdo the Association at every turn, with higher prices and more copra collection points with five district stores covering all but Pepjei and Itu'muta. Gibson had two stores in Motusa and one in Noa'tau. There were seven other collection places around the island. The RTL and the Association were the sole shippers, except for the Catholic mission, with its own vessel.<sup>45</sup> The 'cut throat competition between RTL and Fiji Planters Assoc' with the price paid in Rotuma almost that in Levuka, compounded by the collapse of the Association's hired shipping company, forced it out, while severely reducing the profitability of RTL in 1921 and 1922, in a time of a sharp slump in London copra prices.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>40</sup> These appear to be district chiefs: Poara (Poar of Oinafa), Tevita (Teviat of Itu'ti'u), Apao (Han-fakag Apao of Malha'a), Uaafa ('Uafta of Juju), Turaga (Turag of Pepjei), and Manava (Manoa Semese of Itu'muta). Notably the chief of Noa'tau (Maraf, possibly Manuele?) is missing and his district probably the one not yet agreed to contribute money. For modern spellings, see Howard and Rensel, *Island*, Appendix D.

<sup>41</sup> Minutes, Macdonald to CS, April 1923 and enclosures, CSO 5641/21, FNA.

<sup>42</sup> Buckley and Klugman, *The Australian Presence*, 128–9.

<sup>43</sup> Macdonald to CS, 15 August 1921, CSO 5641/21, FNA; Cornish cited in Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 256; Manager, Suva to BP, Sydney, 9 May 1921, Suva letter book, N145, Box 349–350, BP records, Butlin Archives, Australian National University, Canberra (hereinafter BP); Bruce Knapman, *Fiji's economic history 1874–1939: Studies of Capitalist Colonial Development* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1987), 88–9.

<sup>44</sup> Quarterly Report to 30 June 1921, 5 July 1921, CSO 4067/21, FNA.

<sup>45</sup> Rotuma Traders Ltd, Report and Balance Sheet, 30 June 1922, N 115, Box 349, Vol. 5, BP; Buckley and Klugman, *The Australian Presence*, 115–6.

<sup>46</sup> Quarterly Report to 30 June 1921, CSO 4067/21; Macdonald to CS, April 1923, and enclosures, CSO 1637/23, FNA; Buckley and Klugman, *The Australian Presence*, 105–6, 125–9, 147–8. The tax copra ceased on Rotuma in 1922, replaced by a cash tax. Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 246.

## LIKE THE OLD DAYS?

With the exit of the Association, the main merchant and shipping service was now RTL, effectively run by BP. RTL had advanced credit to several Rotumans, a worry to the people and BP. Some had lost money supporting the Association's stores. They turned to W. Croker, 'a half-caste native of St Helena' of dubious reputation in Fiji and to a former manager of RTL, G.M. Ross. In March 1922, these proposed a scheme to raise £3300 to purchase a ship. The resident commissioner persuaded the chiefs to decline because of apparent risks. The chiefs told Macdonald that they still needed a vessel, so he devised a proposal with them to put to the governor. Again, he detailed the ways they would raise the cash needed for it, storage buildings and whaleboats. Macdonald believed that capable Rotumans could run several stores to buy copra and sell goods. All this would need an initial outlay of £6000. Thus, there would be 'an opportunity for the individual as opposed to the Company to do business again for themselves as in the old days'. Though the people would own the ship, Macdonald preferred the government manage its operation – to be a charge on the business. This would relieve the government of the need to send a vessel to bring people and mails to and from Fiji and free the people from BP's monopoly.<sup>47</sup>

The government listened because they feared Rotuma would be isolated when RTL left, as they were threatening to do because of heavy losses in 1921–22. BP stated that they would stay, if they could continue 'direct loading' of copra from Rotuma to the USA on their chartered auxiliary schooners, an arrangement in Fiji and elsewhere to market copra started during World War One when steamers to Europe were scarce. Such direct collection provided a considerable profit to the company and, so BP claimed, improved prices in Rotuma. This direct loading worked because a customs officer came from Fiji on board the BP's *Makoa*, or on the government's *Pioneer* that visited to Rotuma about three times a year.<sup>48</sup> Yet, with BP favouring 'direct loading' and thus fewer trips to Fiji, the people feared 'isolating this place'.

As Macdonald had predicted, having seen BP installing a jetty at Motusa, the company was bluffing about leaving, but used the bluff to advantage. Macdonald also had information that BP were soon to cease the direct loading to the USA, thus likely to resume more regular shipping to Fiji.<sup>49</sup> RTL's manager in 1923 urged BP to do this because, while the company's finances had a substantial boost from the direct loading of two US-bound ships that year, the advantage of strengthening the Fiji–Rotuma link was obvious in peacetime because 'the risk of loss is minimised through falling prices, provided frequent communication is maintained'. Time and distance to the USA could mean a loss on a cargo, if, when it arrived at San Francisco, the prices had fallen below those at shipment. The manager also

<sup>47</sup> Macdonald to CS, April 1923, CSO 1637/23, FNA.

<sup>48</sup> Mackenzie, BP to Macdonald, 6 January 1923; Harbour Master, Minute, 17 October 1923, CSO 1637/23, FNA; Buckley and Klugman, *The Australian Presence*, 128, 137.

<sup>49</sup> Macdonald to CS, 7 July 1923, CSO 1637/23, FNA.

feared that if BP did not return to regular shipping, ‘a movement is being fostered to induce the Government or any other firm to provide a suitable vessel. We should not leave an opening for a Government owned, subsidised, or any other vessel to enter this trade’.<sup>50</sup> In late 1923, the government noted that BP’s *Makoa* was calling regularly between Fiji and Rotuma, and so was the *Pioneer*, thus the idea of a ship for Rotuma was shelved.<sup>51</sup>

## STRIKE ACTION

Rotuman views on BP’s monopoly did not alter. All traders were either dependent on RTL or using the BP’s ship because the *Pioneer* was not suited to carrying copra.<sup>52</sup> In 1924, export copra of 2500 tons was the highest recorded, a result of a road building and traders’ motor vehicles transporting it to Motusa. Yet, as the commissioner noted, the *Makoa* ‘holds the Rotuma trade, without, I may say, the goodwill’. The people were still paying £3 a ton for freight to Levuka, in contrast to the BP’s schooner which in July 1924 had taken copra to San Francisco at £1/16/- a ton.<sup>53</sup> In addition to freight, there were associated costs: loading, insurance, shrinkage discount, costs of buildings, of traders’ dryers, the weighing of copra, wear on sacks, and transhipment that, so BP maintained, meant the price the Rotumans received was, for 1925–26, a startling total of about £9 less than paid at Levuka.

Consequently, two districts planned a strike, a boycott on production for at least three months. The resident commissioner pointed this out to RTL and Missen and Gibson but also tried to dissuade the potential strikers. He also did calculations of the relative costs based on the information they supplied, indicating freight increases disproportionate to the price of copra and freight in the past. Though he did not directly say so, the traders appeared to be trying to recover the losses of their earlier frenetic competition with the Association.<sup>54</sup>

From Levuka, W.R. Croker was in contact with the Marafu of Noa’tau to revive the ship project. Marafu, on behalf of all the chiefs, had replied in October 1924 stating they were, ‘very pleased to hear from you that you still think of poor old Rotuma, its [sic] true that the R.T.L here and M.G. and Co [Missen and Gibson] spoils the hole [sic] country’.<sup>55</sup> Croker seems to have abandoned the idea of ship buying but tried to get the Levuka merchants, Brown and Joske Ltd to find a shipper, but because BP and MH controlled most ships, that was unlikely.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Probert to BP Levuka, July 1923, AR, Rotuma, 30 June 1923, N 115/Box 347, Vol 5, BP.

<sup>51</sup> Minute 3 January 1924, [Illegible], April 1924, CSO 1637/23, FNA; Buckley and Klugman, *The Australian Presence*, 129.

<sup>52</sup> Colonial Treasurer to CS, 31 October 1923, CSO 1637/23, FNA.

<sup>53</sup> AR, Rotuma, 1924, CSO 780/1926, FNA.

<sup>54</sup> Russell to RTL, Missen and Gibson, 14 September 1926 and enclosures, BP, Rotuma Branch, 1925–6, N115, Box 349, Vol 5, BP.

<sup>55</sup> Marafu to Cocker, 24 October 1924, BP, Rotuma Branch, N115, Box 349, Vol 5, BP.

<sup>56</sup> Joske to Croker, 7 February 1925, BP, N115, Box 349, Vol 5, BP.

By 1926, Croker had died, but his ally, G.M. Ross was working among the chiefs to win support for another proposal by the Levuka merchant, Brodziak to buy a ship that the chiefs could pay off. Either they did not like Ross's plan or trader Gibson had some chiefs on side, because it was rejected. A disgruntled Ross complained: 'The Rotumans deserve to suffer. They are such fools', and some of the chiefs had been bribed.<sup>57</sup> Just how Ross fared is unclear but some 'natives' had proposed a 'Native Trading Company', to buy a vessel early in 1926 and were negotiating with Captain Allison of SS *Malinoa*, an employee of BP, until the powerful company persuaded him otherwise.<sup>58</sup>

A mix of contending interest groups soon emerged in response to the *tabu* on copra sales underway in early September 1926. Marafu, chief of Noa'tau, was deeply involved but not all the chiefs were with him. His and another district decided to cease producing, two others, to carry on for two weeks and three to carry on, though within the striking districts, a few wanted to pay off their debts first. Meetings between traders and chiefs brought little progress. The commissioner tried to avert the strike but did not invoke any sanctions, though this impartiality displeased the traders. They sought scapegoats, engaging in a duel of mutual recriminations. Some Rotumans sided with RTL, some with Missen and Gibson who were now consigning their copra on their own behalf, but still on BP's ship. Traders tried to fob off the striking Rotumans, blaming a price fall 'in the markets of the world' yet the export prices per ton from 1923 to 1926 were stable, with only a slight fall in mid-1923.<sup>59</sup>

In October 1926, with the strike still on, Marafu, after a council meeting, went to Fiji to 'make a contract for two years with any concern [...] for the purpose of buying their copra' for '60 tons a shipment divided amongst all the districts'. RTL even conspired to ask BP to keep Marafu in Fiji to give its manager, Parker time to persuade the Noa'tau people to 'break away' from the *tabu*.<sup>60</sup> Marafu did not immediately succeed, since in November another chief, Irataufu was off to Fiji on a similar mission.<sup>61</sup>

With the strike still underway in November, BP in Levuka advised the commissioner it was happy to ship consignment copra on behalf of Rotumans, but it was a hollow concession. Because Rotumans worked small lots they would have to bundle these together and keep their own tallies and respective payouts on consignments. BP's captain would refuse inferior copra and would not have time to sift through small lots to separate it from the good. To be a success would mean a considerable re-organisation of the copra production and collection process, unlikely without

<sup>57</sup> Ross to Croker, 19 July 1926, BP, N115, Box 349, Vol 5, BP.

<sup>58</sup> Russell to CS, 14 January 1926, CSO 366/1926; Manager, BP, Levuka, 18 November 1926, enclosure, CSO 5085/1926, FNA. See also Cornish, cited in Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 256. The Fijian radical, Apolosi Ranawai was exiled on Rotuma from 1917 to 1924 but there is no evidence that he influenced the Rotumans.

<sup>59</sup> Blue Books, Government of Fiji, Suva, 1923–1926; Missen and Gibson to RTL, 18 October 1926, and enclosures, BP, 1925–1926, N115, Box 349, Vol 5, BP.

<sup>60</sup> Parker to BP, Levuka, 12 October 1926, BP, N115, Box 349, Vol 5, BP.

<sup>61</sup> AR, Rotuma, 1926, CSO 698/27, FNA.

some centralized control. And if the strike did not cease, BP stated they would not send their ship to Rotuma, again putting the Fiji government in a difficult situation.<sup>62</sup> Yet again, a plan for a ship emerged in the local administration to assist the Rotumans. In early 1927, however, the government made arrangements for a subsidized inter-insular service for Fiji at an annual cost of £7500, 'in which the people of Rotuma will have special consideration', so the plan for purchase of a ship was again abandoned though Brodziak was still to be the Rotumans' Levuka agent.<sup>63</sup>

The strike ceased, so Brodziak opened a store on Rotuma, assuring the people he could get the highest price for their copra at Levuka, and seems to have won a contract with the chiefs.<sup>64</sup> His 'aggressive policy' in competing with the other traders including RTL, in 1928, however, so ate up his resources that he could not meet their prices. A year later his business went into liquidation, a victim of intense competition when the copra market fell dramatically in the 1929 Great Depression. His place was taken by BP's own independent store.<sup>65</sup> But Brodziak's competition plus poor management had cost RTL dearly. The company went into liquidation to be purchased by T.E. Page and Co. with W.R. Carpenters holding major shares. The competition between BP and Page led to losses for both. Added to that, MH set up independently so that, by 1930, the three major copra-dealing companies in Fiji were buying in Rotuma.

## ADJUSTING TO HARD TIMES

With competition, the Rotumans were not averse to passing off lower quality green copra. The administration in 1930 urged the people to improve quality by proper drying, but not with marked success. Ever pragmatic, BP negotiated with MH and they largely stopped outbidding one another. This seemed to lessen competition by W.R. Carpenter's Page and Co., but not entirely, as they wanted copra for San Francisco where Carpenter could get better prices. BP then arranged for some of its copra to go to the USA, but this option soon closed when prices also fell there. In BP's view, 'there was no alternative but to be satisfied with our share of the business [...] if the others are satisfied with a third of the business'. Greed, however, won in the early 1930s when companies again tried to outbid each other, resulting in some gain for the Rotumans.<sup>66</sup>

Yet with low returns, many had ceased making copra unless desperate for cash. In terms of subsistence, the Rotuman people were well supplied with their own foods. Cash, however, was needed from 1922 for the tax, yet, in the early

<sup>62</sup> Mackenzie to Acting CS, 18 November 1926, CSO 5085/26, FNA.

<sup>63</sup> CS to Acting RC, 26 February 1927, CSO 251/27, FNA.

<sup>64</sup> Cornish 1934, cited in Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 256.

<sup>65</sup> Buckley and Klugman, *The Australian Presence*, 141.

<sup>66</sup> Inspection Report, BP (SS), Rotumah Branch, 30 April 1931, N115/350, Vols 7–8, BP; Buckley and Klugman, *The Australian Presence*, 142, 284, 306.

1930s, many chose to work on the roads for tax credit.<sup>67</sup> Others went to work in the gold mine at Vatukoula, Viti Levu.<sup>68</sup> Throughout the 1930s, the government tried to improve the quality of copra above South Seas grade mainly used in soap, but even good copra for edible commodities fetched little compared to the years before 1929. Rotuma copra was considered to be good quality while the traders were drying it and not the growers.

Throughout Fiji, BP, Carpenters and MH competed for copra, but at various times these entered into combines to maximize their profit by an agreed price. They continued to absorb smaller competitors. Carpenters purchased a controlling interest in the Levuka merchants, Brown and Joske, which bought Rotuman copra and, by 1937, absorbed Page and Co. in Rotuma.<sup>69</sup> With hard times and Resident Commissioner, Carew who was also a doctor, as well as a local 'native medical practitioner', the Fiji port of entry requirement for Rotuma had gone, so copra could be exported directly.<sup>70</sup> A wireless station set up in 1933 aided communication, but with a depressed market, ships were rare callers, most still going via Fiji.

In the late 1930s, however, the three firms of BP, Carpenters and MH pooled their copra, thus killing competition and maximizing their returns for bulk shipments overseas about four times a year. As they could then import most trade goods directly from Australia and New Zealand, they could offer reduced prices on similar goods coming via Fiji.<sup>71</sup> Yet the Rotumans felt that the price they received for their copra was still low: £4 a ton in Rotuma while in Fiji it was £6/10/-. There was some justification in this, as the copra was still loaded from lighters into the ship beyond the reef; labour had to be paid; traders bought in small lots around the island's road; infrastructure had to be maintained and insurance and storage costs were high because shipping was infrequent. Government officials were expected to see that the price was fair. With some minor exceptions, they largely agreed with these costs, so plans were made to further improve the quality of 'native' (or green) copra and thus its value, but this did not lessen the power of the companies' combined pooling strategy.<sup>72</sup>

## CONFLICT, CO-OPERATIVES, AND COMPETITION

During World War Two, shipping was scarce. Copra from Fiji and Rotuma was consigned to the British Ministry of Food under contract and administered by the Fiji Copra Board but most from Rotuma from 1942–43 remained unshipped. The

<sup>67</sup> Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 247.

<sup>68</sup> Atu Emberson-Bain, *Labour and Gold in Fiji* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 51–2.

<sup>69</sup> Buckley and Klugman, *The Australian Presence*, 142, 305; AR, Rotuma, 1937, CSO F24/05/2, FNA.

<sup>70</sup> The first practitioner, a Rotuman, Jione Fatiaki arrived in 1932. Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 294.

<sup>71</sup> Inspection Report, BP (SS), Rotuma Branch, 30 April 1931, N115/350, Vols 7–8, Kerkham; Inspection Report 1, BP Rotuma, 8 September 1937, Z385/380, BP.

<sup>72</sup> Johnson to Acting Director of Agriculture, 26 May 1938, Director of Agriculture, 17 January 1940, and enclosures, CSO F2/182, FNA.

government hoped for assistance with the *Lansing* in 1943 to load for the US but its exposure outside the reef for a prolonged period loading 50 tons a day of the 2000 tons stored, was considered too risky because of potential enemy ships, so Rotumans sold little until the war ended.<sup>73</sup>

In Fiji, the war brought co-operatives formed to supply fresh food to US troops.<sup>74</sup> In 1947, the establishment of government sponsored co-operative stores was welcomed by the people but not the traders. Despite several teething pains re accounting and business practice, a migrant Rotuman school teacher, Wilson Inia, in the early 1950s, returned and set about teaching these skills. The Fiji Copra Board purchased all copra for either approved local crushers or to export to Britain's Ministry of Food. While firms, such as BP, collected the copra for the Board on a commission basis, the shipping of copra ex-Fiji was in the hands of the Ministry of Food. Such arrangements provided a stable milieu for co-operatives to function.<sup>75</sup>

Following the end of the Ministry's contract in 1957, Rotumans had to deal with a resurgent duopoly. BP and MH agreed to carry their own freight and that of others on their ships at the ostensible rate of £8 a ton. They would also share the shipping, alternating their vessels about every six weeks. They secretly colluded so that at the end of each quarter they each would pass on a credit for £3 per ton on all cargo between Suva and Rotuma on behalf of each other, but not other customers. This would apply too to the co-operatives, but only if they had sold their copra in Rotuma to either company. Should a co-operative consign its copra directly to Carpenter's Island Industries' mill in Suva, the full £8 would apply. This £3 differential would mean the companies had funds to increase their price paid to Rotumans for green copra and so outbid the co-operatives and capture Rotuman earnings in the companies' retail stores. In order to gain sufficient copra for Island Industries, W.R. Carpenter agreed to discourage direct trading with the co-operatives in favour of BP and MH, in return for copra supplied by these merchants from all Fiji.<sup>76</sup> Once again, without a ship, Rotuman copra was disadvantaged.

The co-operatives united under Inia's leadership in 1955 and were successful, beginning to outstrip the companies. In 1958, the Rotuman Co-operative Association (RCA), assisted by the Department of Co-operatives, chartered the *Kunimarau* to ship copra to Suva, cutting the usual freight charge of £8 per ton to £4 per ton, thus challenging shippers such as BP, which even for the duopoly, charged £5.<sup>77</sup> By 1963,

<sup>73</sup> Ransomer to Ministry of Food, 25 November 1943, District Officer to CS, 15 August 1945 and enclosures, CSO F2/45/15, Part 1; Ministry of Food to Governor, 24 May 1943 and enclosures, CSO F2/45/58, FNA.

<sup>74</sup> Judith A. Bennett, *Natives and Exotics: World War II and Environment in the Southern Pacific* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 78.

<sup>75</sup> Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 258–61; Harvey, Memo Copra Board Organisation, [1956] NA 3/2/1-pt 1, FNA.

<sup>76</sup> [Illegible], Shipping Dept, Suva to Manager, Rotuma, 5 December 1957, 27 December 1957, Agreement, 20–21 November 1957, Z385/386, BP.

<sup>77</sup> Registrar of Co-operatives, Report for 1958, Council Paper 3, Journal of the Legislative Council, Fiji, FNA.



RCA was selling most of its copra to the Island Industries factory in Suva. RCA's shareholders and other Rotumans benefited both in selling copra and buying goods through the co-operatives. As BP's inspector noted, 'the co-operatives are making inroads', to such an extent that BP considered selling its Rotuman interests to MH or buying up the latter's, since neither was making substantial profits on the trade side of the business, though BP ship's Suva run was quite profitable.<sup>78</sup> The RCA lacked a ship but in 1966 chartered the vessel of the Tonga Copra Board (*Aoniū*) to call every two months and, as the companies had done, charged outsiders a higher rate on freight and refused to carry any copra for BP. Though the major companies then reduced their freight rates, the RCA captured most cargoes.

In the mid 1960s, coconut palms covered 1317 hectares (3254 acres) with twice that area partly planted, almost the entire island. Copra production was around 4800 tons with about 40 tons a year being consumed locally, so the RCA did well. BP decided to pull out, admitting that the RCA had won.<sup>79</sup> MH soon followed. The co-operatives thrived, helped by a wharf and causeway installed on Oinafa in 1973 to make loading easier.<sup>80</sup> But then there was virtually no competition. The prices of goods sold in the co-operative stores were relatively low, though it meant little profit and thus little dividend on retail sales to members. More serious, however, in the mid 1970s was the more than 50 per cent price differential for copra between the Suva market and Rotuma, even with the annual bonus or dividend to members. Shipping, organized by the RCA, proved often irregular while copra offered remained 'green'.<sup>81</sup>

Wilson Inia had set up a fund for a ship but after his death in 1983 the RCA weakened and rival organizations sprang up. The most vibrant was the Raho Co-operative, which absorbed much of the copra trade in the early 1990s, with an expatriate advisor, John Bennett and support from Rotumans in business in Fiji.<sup>82</sup> Innovations, including a solar-powered copra drier, promised much. Thereafter, the co-operative faltered, because by the mid 1990s it was heavily indebted to the National Bank of Fiji which itself collapsed due to bad management. With the

<sup>78</sup> O'Connor, Inspection report, Suva, 12 August 1963, N115/359, Vols 25–6, BP.

<sup>79</sup> Miles to Baker, 20 December 1966, Baker to BP, Sydney, 21 December 1966, N115/360, Vol 27, BP; Gerhard Zieroth with Leba Gaunavinaka and Wolf Forstreuter, *Biofuel from Coconut Resources in Rotuma* (Suva: PIEPSAP, 2007); Paper 28 of 1929, Legislative Council, FNA.

<sup>80</sup> Alan Howard and Jan Rensel, 'Rotuma in the 1990s; From Hinterland to Neighbourhood', *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 103:3 (1994): 228; Brendan Holden, *Coastal Processes and the Rotuma Wharf* (Fiji: University of the South Pacific Press, 1992), 5. Available online at <http://ict.sopac.org/VirLib/TR0146.pdf> (12 December 2016).

<sup>81</sup> Chris Plant, 'The Development Dilemma', in *Rotuma: Hanua Pumue*, ed. J. Fatiaki et al. (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of South Pacific, 1991), 205–6, 212.

<sup>82</sup> Registrar of Co-operatives, Report for 1963, Council Paper 29, Journal of the Legislative Council, FNA; Jan Rensel, 'The Fiji Connection: Migrant Involvement in the Economy of Rotuma', *Pacific Viewpoint* 34:2 (1993): 215–40, 233–4; Plant, 'The Development Dilemma', 218; Rensel, 'Rotuma's Economy'. Available online at <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Economy.html> (accessed 12 December 2016); Henry Enasio, 'A Boat for Rotuma'. Available online at <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Forum/Forum33.html> (accessed 12 December 2016).

bank's Rotuma branch closed, what little business that remained was now in the hands of a few entrepreneurs. Overall, commerce suffered and was worse than when the companies dominated.<sup>83</sup> Copra, while still exported, fell in price, declining as a dominant money earner with the growth of the island's bureaucracy and remittances, particularly from Rotumans in Fiji. By 2007, only 860 hectares (2125 acres) of land were under productive coconuts, less than 20 per cent of the land, with only 772 tons (700 metric tonnes) exported in 2006.<sup>84</sup>

### TALKING AND TALKING ...

In 2000 and 2007, Rotumans tried yet again, even raising some funds to obtain a ship, but faltered. Overseas vessels again had to enter Rotuma via Fiji, since Fiji became independent in 1970 and Rotuma remained part of it. Rotumans complained of high prices and profiteering.<sup>85</sup> A ship was still important for coconuts and copra even though the bulk of household income consisted of remittances. From Fiji-based Rotumans alone, remittances amounted to a million Fiji dollars a year. The diaspora from Fiji to Australia and New Zealand outnumbered Rotuma's resident population by about three to one.<sup>86</sup> Those who often return to solidify family ties and land rights are pushing for comfortable and reliable vessels.

Every three years, shipping companies tender for the route to Rotuma and a subsidy from the government of Fiji. This vessel usually came monthly, but many complained it was not well set up for passengers – to some effect.<sup>87</sup> The cry in 2011 echoes that heard down the years:

[...] here we are, six [sic] years from 2003 and Rotumans are at the mercy of local shipping businesses [...] These businesses have not prioritised (and they will never do) the needs of Rotuma, a sad situation indeed, a situation Rotumans had a hand in the making, for delaying and postponing and talking and talking yet were not able to unite and commit to forming a company, buy a ship and operate it as a business.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Howard and Rensel, *Island*, 321–3; Rensel, 'Rotuma's Economy'; Roman Grynberg, Doug Munro and Michael White, *Crisis: The Collapse of the National Bank of Fiji* (Suva: University of the South Pacific Press, 2002) second impression, 31, 136–7.

<sup>84</sup> Howard and Rensel, 'Rotuma in the 1990s', 242–9; Zieroth with Gaunavinaka and Forstreuter, *Biofuel*, 18, 36, 44.

<sup>85</sup> Victor Lal, 'The Rotumans of Fiji, A Mockery of Indigenous Rights', *Pacific Islands Report*, 29 December 2000. Available online at <http://www.pireport.org/articles/2000/12/29/rotumans-fiji-mockery-indigenous-rights> (accessed 15 December 2016); *Fiji Times*, 14 May 2007.

<sup>86</sup> *Fiji Times*, 12 June 2007, cf. Zieroth with Gaunavinaka and Forstreuter, 22–3.

<sup>87</sup> *Fiji Times Online*, 24 October 2007; Fred Wesley, 'When a generation goes missing', *Fiji Times Online*, 15 June 2008; Enasio, 'A boat for Rotuma'.

<sup>88</sup> Parisio Kitione, 'Nadera', 10 February 2011; Enasio, 'A boat for Rotuma'. See also, Consumer Council of Fiji, submission, *Review of Shipping Fares and Freight Charges* (Suva: Consumer Council,

After almost two decades of low prices from the 1980s to about 2007, coconut (copra equivalent) production has had a recent rise due to good prices from 2008 to 2016.<sup>89</sup> The government abandoned the port of entry requirement in 2008 to assist the export of root crops from Rotuma to Tuvalu, but ships there and to Fiji have been irregular.<sup>90</sup> And again, the government in Suva in 2015 promised a faster ship and better service.<sup>91</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In colonial times, other than the shipwrecked schooner *Uija*, Rotumans' full participation in the copra industry via an essential ship failed to materialize. A cycle of seeking their own port of entry and/or a ship characterized the first phase of Rotuman petitions to the government to win better prices; a second phase of trying to break merchant monopolies with strike action along with the quest for their own ship or a compatible substitute with limited success by the 1930s, in the face of very low returns on copra; a third phase, post-war, of greater control of copra earnings and shipping via cooperatives and charters, and a final phase, post-independence of only a partial port of entry permit still with the quest for a Rotuman ship, but no longer motivated by the need to move copra. At each phase, when a partial solution was found, most commonly by some kind of government shipping subsidy or charter, Rotuman resistance lessened. At least until the 1950s, most Rotumans were unaware of the full expense of running a motorized vessel to their island, so distant from Fiji. Government subsidies come now for much the same reason as in the colonial period – the distance and the pressure to cover full costs on the shipping company's part along with the state's need to keep its citizens connected and at peace. Rotuma remains reliant on the ships of others, just as Mou indicated in 1906, and all the more so once fossil fuels replaced free wind to power the vessels. Outside shippers seem only interested in Rotuma if they are given a government subsidy, all the more necessary when cargoes are small. The voices of Rotuma have changed with

2012), 4, 10. [http://www.consumersfiji.org/upload/Submissions/SUBMISSION\\_FCC\\_Review%20of%20Shipping%20Fares%20Freight%20Charges%20-%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.consumersfiji.org/upload/Submissions/SUBMISSION_FCC_Review%20of%20Shipping%20Fares%20Freight%20Charges%20-%20FINAL.pdf) (accessed 15 December 2016).

<sup>89</sup> <http://www.indexmundi.com/commodities/?commodity=copra&months=360> (accessed 15 December 2016).

<sup>90</sup> *Fiji Times*, 13 May 2008, 20 October 2009, 24 August 2010; Investment Fiji, 2016-Shipping. <http://www.investmentfiji.org.fj/pages.cfm/for-investors/key-infrastructure-services/shipping.html?printerfriendly=true> (accessed 15 December 2016); See, re Rotuma-Tuvalu Bilateral Trade Agreement of 1998, "Strengthening Inter-Island Shipping in the Pacific, 2013." Available online at [http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/TransportReview\\_2013\\_Chapter5.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/TransportReview_2013_Chapter5.pdf) (accessed 15 December 2016); *Fiji Times*, 21 December 2016.

<sup>91</sup> *Fiji Times*, 13 May 2008; "Big ship for Rotuma", 14 May 2015. Available online at <http://fjijun.com.fj/2015/05/14/big-ship-for-rotuma/> (accessed 15 December 2016); Ministry of Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, "A Green Growth Framework for Fiji"; draft, 2 June 1914, 67; "Concerns over Poor Boat Service", *Fiji Times*, 6 September 2016. Available online at <http://www.rotuma.net/os/News.html> (accessed 15 December 2016).

each new generation but the refrain remains the same for a ship to obtain effective transport and access to markets, but no longer simply for copra. Yet so many skilled Rotumans are scattered across the Pacific. Without a vigorous and viable resident population and a productive domestic economy, it seems the future ahead for Rotuma remains the past; history repeats rather than teaches.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Rotuma's resident population has been stagnant at about 2500 for seventy years with a disproportion of elderly people. Population, Rotuma Website. Available online at <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Population.html> (accessed 15 December 2016).