

Evocations of Home: Exporting Rotuman Cultural Sensibilities

by Alan Howard & Jan Rensel

On a visit to Rotuma several years ago, we stood by a freshly dug grave and watched as two women sprinkled sand from a basket on the mound. "Why are they doing that?" we asked, as sand from a nearby beach had already been neatly packed on top, apparently finishing the project. "This sand is from the beach in the dead woman's home district," we were told. "It is customary to sprinkle sand from the home district when someone is buried somewhere else."

The fact that the woman had lived in her husband's village for some forty years was irrelevant; her "home" was where she had been born and raised. She was buried in her husband's village because some of her children were buried there; it was their home, but not hers. Although Rotumans do not speak much about the spirits of the dead (*atua*) these days (Howard 1996), in earlier times those answering our query would probably have explained that away from her home territory the woman's spirit would be uneasy, and that sprinkling sand on the grave was a means to make it feel more comfortable and peaceful.

Such is the importance of "home" in Rotuman culture, and the significance of place in people's sense of themselves. It is no fluke of culture that nearly every nook and cranny on Rotuma is named, and that each place-name has a story, or multiple stories, attached to it. Invoking a place-name conjures up memories of people, both legendary and flesh-and-blood; of events remote in time and as recent as yesterday; of landscapes old and new, of structures built and demolished. It is no accident that Rotuman legends invariably specify the places where events unfold, for not only do specific places encode a contextual richness of cultural information, but relative locations (east versus west, north versus south, inland versus seacoast) connote relationships between categories of human and numinal beings (Howard 1985, 1986).

Rotumans began migrating abroad in significant numbers after World War II. By doing so, they may have left behind the physical reality of the places they

considered "home," but they have retained strong conceptual and emotional ties to Rotuma as a place. Further, they have found ways to represent and nourish these connections in their lives abroad. This chapter is about what we have learned during our visits to Rotuman communities in various parts of the world about the ways people evoke the sensibilities they associate with home, with Rotuma.

Organising Expatriate Communities

When Rotumans began emigrating in large numbers in the 1950s, most went initially to Fiji; later migrants moved on to New Zealand, Australia, Canada, the United States, and Europe. Rotuma had been governed from Fiji as part of the British Colony of Fiji until 1970 when Fiji became independent, and thereafter became part of the nation of Fiji. Because it was an act of internal rather than international migration, travel from Rotuma to other parts of Fiji and back again was thus comparatively simple. While the number of people on Rotuma remained relatively stable for much of the twentieth century (between 2,500 and 3,200), the number of Rotumans elsewhere in Fiji climbed from 569 in 1946 to 7,147 in 1996. Most migrated to urban areas, particularly to Suva and the Lautoka-Nadi area of the main island, Viti Levu. In both these areas Rotumans have organised groups on the basis of connection to one of Rotuma's seven districts. Most individuals belong to one or another of the groups, although some, with ties to more than one district, participate in multiple groups. These organisations hold regular meetings, raise funds for selected projects in the home district, and sponsor special events of interest to the Rotuman community.

While district ties remain strong among Rotuman migrants elsewhere, the size of most communities in New Zealand, Australia, North America, and Europe is not sufficient to support separate district-based groupings. But in many places migrants have started formal or informal Rotuman associations, gathering for social occasions, organising island-style events, raising funds for island projects, and arrange for group visits back to Rotuma. The mobilization of expatriates abroad for visits to their home communities on Rotuma has become a regular

occurrence in recent years. Thus in 2000 the district of Malhaha organised a reunion that brought hundreds of its expatriates home to the island for visits over the Christmas holidays; in 2001 the district of Itu'muta did the same.

In July 2001 the Malhaha district club in Suva organised Malhaha Day, bringing expatriates from all over (Australia, New Zealand, and other parts of Fiji, as well as Rotuma) to a huge event marked by extensive dancing and feasting. There were so many participants that the dance groups were divided into three, corresponding to the sections of the district on Rotuma: Elsie, Pepheua, and Else'e. The master of ceremonies, John Tevita, described the event as "a time when we re-establish our roots and culture." Celebrities from Malhaha included the district chief and subchiefs, who came from Rotuma for the occasion; Rotuma's representative to the deposed national government, Marieta Rigamoto; and High Court Justice Dan Fatiaki. The following month the Suva Itu'muta Association, which has been registered in Australia as a community-based organisation since April 2001, hosted a fund-raising dinner and dance in Sydney. More than 500 guests attended. The event raised 20,000 Fiji dollars to be used for projects in the home district on Rotuma. These are only recent examples of a process involving expatriates from each of the districts over a period of years.

Thus the imprint of where a person is from on Rotuma, or where their family is from (even for those who were born abroad and have never been to the island), does much to structure migrants' identity. Expatriates often refer to key landmarks on Rotuma, and sometimes choose one as the group's name (for example, a group from Itu'muta might take the name Sauriroa, after the dominant hill in the district). And in the various events they organise, images of home, both verbal (in song, story, and conversation) and tangible (in food, dress, and artifacts), are ever present.

Verbal Recreations of Island Spaces

Away from their home island Rotuman migrants generally go about living their lives like everyone else around them: traveling to work by auto, bus, or train;

working in offices, stores, and other businesses; shopping in supermarkets; watching local, national, or international news on television; going to movies and sports events; and so on. For the most part Rotuma escapes their senses as they cope with the demands of everyday life in the cities and country towns they have migrated to. While some nostalgic individuals frequently self-induce memories of Rotuma, others reflect on their attachment to their homeland only when confronted with stimuli that prod their memories in that direction.

Perhaps the most powerful stimulus is meeting with other Rotumans and speaking the language, which by itself tends to evoke memories of experiences on Rotuma for those who grew up there. Conversations frequently turn to persons known to both parties, as they catch up with news and gossip. Even if the people talked about no longer live in Rotuma, the fact that the parties conversing are likely to know their life histories and their families' histories almost inevitably involves references to places and events specific to the island. It is as common for new acquaintances to ferret out shared knowledge of Rotuma's past as a way of consolidating their relationship as it is for old friends to reinforce theirs.

Each generation of Rotumans who grew up on the island was witness to certain dramatic events that stand as historic landmarks in people's imagination. For example, at a recent wedding in Hawai'i, a relative of the bride, visiting from Australia, entered into a conversation with some men who had migrated to Hawai'i a number of years earlier. After establishing that they were all from the same part of Rotuma (Faguta) and clarifying other linkages, one of them mentioned an event that took place in 1949. All of the men chimed in to tell the story. It involved a jettisoned World War II bomb that had washed up on the beach. The chief's brother had dragged it to his house to use as a fireplace support, but when warned that it was dangerous he had returned it to the beach, where it was left high and dry at low tide. Unfortunately it aroused the curiosity of a group of school boys, who began to play with it. When one of them chopped at the nose cone with his bush knife, it exploded, killing nine people, including the chief's

brother and son, and the brother of one of the men telling the story at the wedding (see Eason 1951, 109).

The remarkable thing about the story-telling was the way each person, when contributing to the narrative, mentioned specific places: precisely where the bomb had washed up, the places enroute to the chief's brother's house, the spot on the beach to which the bomb had been returned, and where the explosion took place. It was apparent that the speakers were mentally retracing these routes, that they were envisioning these places as they talked.

Discussions of other, less dramatic events produce similar reactions. Rotuma is small enough that people who grow up there become familiar with every nuance of the landscape, learn most place-names, and know who lives in each household, particularly within their own district. Nothing short of direct family ties is as likely to create a sense of kinship among expatriate Rotumans as a shared verbal recreation of these spaces, vividly recalled.

Narrating events is but one of many ways words evoke memories and images of home. Whenever we visit Rotumans living abroad we invariably end up talking about events, personalities, and the places associated with them. For example, one of our own cherished memories involves sitting around the kitchen table at Reverend Jione Langi's house in Auckland, New Zealand, during one of our visits to his household, in 1994. Langi was at the time minister-at-large for the Fiji Methodist Community in New Zealand. His constituency included Fijians, Indo-Fijians, and Rotumans. He had organised the New Zealand Rotuman Fellowship, which held semiannual meetings. At the time, with Langi's help, we were able to identify some 126 families in New Zealand with at least one Rotuman member, although not all families were active in the fellowship. His household was frequented by Rotuman visitors and he was constantly on the phone inviting people to participate in various activities, responding to requests for help or guidance, and just catching up on news and gossip. Not uncommonly visitors, including ourselves, stayed over for days or weeks at Langi's invitation.

Langi is a charismatic personality and a brilliant story-teller and conversationalist, so repartee around the kitchen table was invariably entertaining. He loves to tell humorous stories about happenings on Rotuma, or concerning Rotumans abroad. One of his favourite ploys when telephoning people was to refer to them by their family's *te samuga*, a word or two that recalls a well-known blunder or odd characteristic associated with a forebear. For example, during the early period of European contact a ship's captain reportedly went to a Rotuman man's house to pay him for provisions he had purchased. The man was not home, so the captain approached his wife, who was seated on the floor, weaving a pandanus mat. She spoke no English and in frustration the captain threw down on her mat a handful of coins. She looked at the coins and remarked (in Rotuman), "What good are these buttons; they don't have any holes in them!" The *te samuga* of this woman's descendants is "buttons." Other *te samuga* are "shake hands with the mirror," "skinny legs," and "white horse"--and there is a story behind them all. Every family (hence every Rotuman) has one or more *te samuga*.

In addition to family sobriquets, other pithy Rotuman sayings have strong place connotations. "Like the dove at Ka' ta" (*Itake 'ipe te Ka' ta*) speaks of a natural bridge near the western end of Rotuma, a favorite spot of Rotumans and birds alike. The saying refers to what happens when one dove starts to move as if to fly and the other doves take off, but the first one stays put--like a person who begins a project and then abandons it while others do the work. "Calm at the entrance to Hatana" (*Toaktoak ne müir sav Hatan ta*) refers to a sacred, uninhabited islet, off the western end of Rotuma, where large, dangerous waves occur suddenly, especially if someone yells loudly or befouls the islet. The saying suggests that even when things appear to be going well, it is important to behave cautiously and properly.

A chief's name alone is sufficient to connote a place. Tiugarea is the name of the chief of Losa, at the far western end of the island. "The sun smells Tiugarea" (*As ta pen Tiugarea'ia*) means the sun is setting, and implies it is time to stop an

activity (like dancing during a ceremony) and go home. (For more about these and other Rotuman sayings, see Inia 1998.)

The point to be made here is that it doesn't require extensive narration to generate recollections of people, places, and events from Rotuma. The mere mention of a place-name, a chief, a happening, triggers a wealth of associations that are embedded in the cultural repertoire of everyone who grew up on the island or who has visited it frequently. Conversation around Langi's kitchen table was invariably peppered with such references, constantly evoking Rotuma, much to everyone's enjoyment.

Of Thee I Sing

Rotuman songs are replete with references to place, and the connotations that go with such references. One popular song nowadays is a virtual tour of the island from east to west, consisting almost entirely of place-names.

ROTUMA, Rotuma

ROTUMA, Rotuma

ne fu 'e Pasefika

ROTUMA, Rotuma

ROTUMA, Rotuma

Situated in the Pacific

Noa'tau fu 'e palag as ta

pnia kia'a se 'Afgaha

A'helava, palaga ne asa

Noa'tau, where the sun rises

Making 'Afgaha glow red

How beautiful is the sunrise

Juju, Pepjei ma Motusa

Oinafa ma Malhaha

Itumuta, 'e Soloag As ta

Juju, Pepjei and Motusa

Oinafa and Malhaha

Itu'muta, where the sun goes down

As ta la sol kikia se Losa

Pania kia'a se Solrroa

A'helava, sologa ne asa.

The sun finally sets at Losa

Making Solrroa glow red

How beautiful is the sunset.

Other songs refer to the beauty of the island or distinctive qualities that make it special. Some songs express a yearning to be on Rotuma or for loved ones left behind. Even some of the younger generation who were born abroad have, following visits, composed nostalgic songs. One, composed by young man and his sister, both born and raised in England, consists of these lyrics:

When I dream of Rotuma with its ocean of blue,
I dream of the palm trees, the white beaches, too,
I dream of the clear skies and sunshine, I do,
Rotuma, I love you.

As I walk round the island, this island of green,
The flowers so pretty, they're wild and free,
The people are dancing and singing with glee,
Rotuma, I love you.

Oi aue, oi aue, I'm dreaming of you,
Oi aue, oi aue, Rotuma of you,
I dream of the history and legends I knew,
Rotuma, I love you.

The sea breezes are rustling the leaves in the night,
The stars they are shining, the moon so bright,
As I sit here and gaze at this wonderful sight,
Rotuma, I love you.

Oh Rotuma, Rotuma if we are apart,
I'll think of you daily, you're in my heart,
And one day I'll return to this place I call home,
Rotuma, I love you.

Oi aue, oi aue, I'm dreaming of you,
Oi aue, oi aue, Rotuma of you,
I dream of the people and island, I do,
Rotuma, I love you.
Rotuma, I love you.

The authors sent us this song on tape shortly after they composed it in 1995, but songs expressing similar sentiments have been tape-recorded commercially in Fiji by Rotuman groups for many years. More recently several compact disks have been produced containing songs, in Rotuman and in English, that evoke island scenes and themes. One, entitled *Tautoga*, was recorded in 1996 by a husband and wife team from the Netherlands (Ad and Lucia Linkels) during the 150th anniversary celebration of the Catholic mission on Rotuma. Their recordings include not only group dances and church music, but chants, one of which, a *hiko* sung by an 80-year old woman, consists of an imaginary trip around the island in the form of a recitation of titles of chiefs and associated place-names. (*Hiko* is a juggling game played by women and young girls; each player recites a chant while juggling.) Included on the disk are songs accompanied by string bands and one track consisting simply of the bell sounds used to call pigs and chickens for feeding. Needless to say, the disk is treasured by expatriates who wish to evoke Rotuma's atmosphere in their homes abroad. The Linkels also released a compact disk called *Aotearoa* with recordings from different ethnic groups in New Zealand, including a version of the place-name song mentioned above. Recent releases by Rotuman groups include a disk by the Lalavi Band in Sydney, Australia, with lyrics in Rotuman composed by the group, and a rap song incorporating Rotuman words on a disk entitled *Tales from the Script* by a hip-hop group called Migh-T-Pacific in Vancouver, British Columbia. From our experience, songs seem to be one of the most potent ways of evoking images of Rotuma and emotions associated with them.

Pieces of Ceremonies

Rotumans abroad hold a variety of formal gatherings, including association meetings, church services, and ritual performances of life crisis ceremonies. While these differ in some respects from their counterparts on Rotuma, especially insofar as key components (such as chiefs, or finely woven white pandanus mats) may not be available, such events serve as rites of intensification where Rotuman culture is foregrounded, in language as well as in a range of activities.

Meetings of the New Zealand Rotuman Fellowship are typical, including Rotuman dances and songs, prayer services conducted at least partly in Rotuman, preparation and partaking of Rotuman-style food, and a great deal of banter and play, as well as a brief session to tend to association business. The meeting we attended in 1994 was held on an urban Maori marae where more than a hundred of us slept on the floor in sleeping bags over a three-day weekend. While the children were playing games organised by the young adults, their elders sat around and became reacquainted with one another. Their conversations were mostly in Rotuman and although we were reluctant to listen in, we suspect that references to "home" were both frequent and vividly evocative.

Another source of Rotuman imagery are churches that hold services for Rotuman congregations. In each community large enough to host a Rotuman congregation, services are conducted, at least partially, in the Rotuman language. In Suva, for example, Churchward Chapel (named after the missionary linguist C. Maxwell Churchward) ministers to the Methodist community; all of the services held there are in the vernacular. Churches also serve as meeting places for special events of general interest to the Rotuman community. Insofar as religious services are a central part of life on Rotuma, these institutions often evoke vivid memories of home. At times—in sermon, song, or public announcements—explicit reference is made to people, places, and events located on the island. In our experience attending such services, the sounds of choirs singing in Rotuman is sufficient to

bring back a wealth of memories, not only of services per se, but of island choir competitions and all the rituals associated with them.

On Rotuma ritual performances play a significant role in giving meaning to the rhythm of social life. Ceremonies associated with birth, marriage, death, homage to chiefs, welcoming visitors to the island, and so on require a great deal of effort, but nonetheless (or maybe because of that) they are cherished by people on the island. So many of the culture's key elements—fine mats, earth ovens, elaborate food displays, chiefly honours, oratory, the kava ceremony, traditional group dances, among others—receive their clearest expression in ceremonial performances. Daily life may be routinized, but in anticipation of a ceremonial event people mobilize resources and become noticeably upbeat. It is then that cooperation most obviously transcends the concerns of individual households; it is then that the role of chiefs and subchiefs shifts into focus. Indeed, it would not be far from the truth to claim that the very fabric of social life on Rotuma is held together by common participation in ceremonial events (see Rensel 1994, 168-183; see also Inia 2001 for an extensive account of Rotuman ceremonies).

The importance of ceremonies is not lost on expatriates living in Fiji and abroad. Despite limitations, Rotumans in Fiji and elsewhere attempt to perpetuate key ceremonies as well as they can. We have ourselves participated in a number of ceremonial events held in expatriate Rotuman communities. For example, during a visit to Lautoka in 1994, we were invited on Saturday to attend a *hapagsu* ceremony for a woman named Sarote, who had recently been released from the hospital following an abdominal operation. A *hapagsu* ceremonies are held for someone who is recovering from a serious operation, or for an individual who has been released from prison. Any accidental injury that results in bleeding is also an occasion for performing the ceremony. Its goal is to end the ill fortune that had befallen the person, so that the event will not recur.

The ceremony in Lautoka was held on the second floor of the woman's two-story home. All the furniture had been cleared from the living room and mats were laid on the floor. As guests arrived they sat with their backs to one of two

opposing walls, leaving the wall near the entrance, which opened to a landing, and the wall facing it, unoccupied. On Rotuma the seating arrangement is of considerable significance, with titled men and dignitaries occupying the wall closest to the sea, or the east wall, depending on the building's location. In Lautoka people seemed less concerned about which wall people occupied, probably because chiefly titles are essentially irrelevant away from Rotuma, and status differentials are far more ambiguous.

Two key components of Rotuman ceremonies were very much in evidence: the traditional earth oven (*koua*) in which were cooked a large pig and a good supply of taro corms, and the bringing and presentation of mats. The *koua* was prepared by the men on site, in the front yard of Sarote's house. (In this instance there was sufficient room to prepare an earth oven, but in some urban settings it can be a problem; having yard space is therefore a definite asset for Rotumans abroad.)

On Rotuma women are obliged to bring gifts of mats to most such ceremonial events, but because few mats are produced away from the island they are a rather scarce commodity abroad. The woman who escorted us to the ceremony confessed that she should have brought a mat on this occasion, but because she was not that closely related to the family she decided to give a gift of \$30 Fijian instead, saving her few mats for occasions involving closer relatives. Other women did bring mats, although there were much fewer on display than there would have been at a comparable event on Rotuma.

Like many other types of ceremonies, the *hapagsu* calls for a special seat (*päega*) to be constructed out of mats for the key person to sit on. Making a *päega* is a ritual act requiring the mats to be folded in certain ways and in a particular order. In this instance, the mats were brought in by several young women who had trouble figuring out how to fold some of the larger mats. They had to call Sarote to come and tell them what to do. Our escort told us that most women brought up in Fiji do not know how to fold mats properly, but that they wanted to do it correctly lest some of the older women might criticize them for doing it wrong.

After Sarote took her place on the *päega* the food was brought in coconut leaf baskets (as in Rotuma) up the stairs to the landing. A man taking the role of *mafua* (a knowledgeable elder who directs the ceremonial procedures) called out the quantities of food in the customary manner. Conspicuously absent was a kava ceremony—a key component of such events on Rotuma. This is not always the case abroad. In fact we have witnessed kava ceremonies performed on several occasions in Hawai'i by members of the local Tefui Club. (A *tefui* is a Rotuman garland.) However, without the presence of titled chiefs the ceremony loses much of its cultural significance in paying homage to the chiefly hierarchy. When it is performed abroad the kava ceremony seems more a matter of honouring Rotuman culture rather than the individuals who are ceremonially served.

In Lautoka, as in other expatriate Rotuman communities, occasions like this appear to function as a means of generating and reinforcing community, perhaps even more importantly than on Rotuma. They provide opportunities for people to sit down together and share information, catch up on news, and generally to enjoy each other's company. In urban areas especially, people may have few other opportunities to interact with one another because their homes are scattered around the city and because of work obligations. The scheduling of such events is generally limited to weekends and (if they are not church related) to Saturdays. In fact, Sarote's *hapagsu* was specifically scheduled for the afternoon, because many people work on Saturday mornings.

The reproduction of events such as this, within a constricted time frame and incorporating fewer components, is a key way expatriate Rotumans have of evoking memories of home. Although it requires a lot of work, those people who cherish their cultural heritage and are motivated to nurture their memories of home, gladly make the effort when called on.

People of the Dance

Equally important to the performance of ceremonies is participation in Rotuman group dances (*tautoga*). Wherever there are a sufficient number of

Rotumans, in conjunction with non-Rotuman spouses and interested friends, performing *tautoga* is at the heart of expatriates' sense of cultural identity. Rotuman dancing is unique in a number of respects and is part-and-parcel of almost every major event on the home island. Songs are composed for each occasion and linked to a basic, widely shared repertoire of tunes and dance motions. Although on Rotuma innovations are continually occurring, expatriates often rely on better-known forms, perhaps because doing so is more evocative of performances they can recall from their past.

We have participated in *tautoga* performances in Rotuma and Hawai'i and witnessed them in Fiji, New Zealand, Australia, and the US mainland. They require a great deal of practice (*taumaka*), which serves to bring the communities together like nothing else. Even on Rotuma, where dance practices can be held daily, or at least several times a week, sessions generally begin many weeks before the event. Abroad, given time constraints, practices can only be held on weekends, requiring practices to begin months in advance. Songs must be composed, the words and movements learned, and coordination rehearsed over and over again. Since groups are generally smaller abroad than on Rotuma, missing rehearsals can be a problem.

The performance of *tautoga* are important to Rotuman identity abroad in several important respects. Firstly, the rehearsals themselves are one of the main incentives for expatriates to get together. Practice sessions provide venues where the Rotuman language is given priority (most of the songs are in Rotuman), where culturally patterned banter and styles of interaction predominate, where news and gossip about kin is exchanged, where kava is drunk in a semi-ritual fashion, and where various Rotuma-associated items (e.g., mats, lavalavas) are very much in evidence. Secondly, as we mentioned earlier, the songs often make reference to Rotuma, to the beauty of the island, to specific places and people. For people who have spent time on the island these are certainly evocative occasions. Finally, *tautoga* are generally performed before audiences that in large part are composed of non-Rotumans, which give the dances special meaning as primary

representations of Rotuman culture to the outside world. All this raises consciousness of Rotuman identity and serves to reinforce ties to the home island.

The significance of *tautoga* for expatriate Rotumans can be clearly seen in the way that videotapes that are circulated within the global community. At just about any large-scale celebration, ranging from the annual Methodist Conference on Rotuma to Malhaha Day in Suva, or the meetings of the Rotuman Fellowship in New Zealand, as well as at events such as weddings wherever they may occur, people with videocameras can be seen busily recording events. Almost invariably a major segment of the resulting video is devoted to *tautoga* performances. We have been invited to watch such videos when visiting Rotumans abroad and have received a number of them from friends. While people watch, conversation usually focuses on identifying individual dancers and on the quality of performances. The identification of dancers is commonly framed in terms of their kin connections and where they are from. Usually a village name suffices, but at times the name of a house foundation, or a careful description of the location ("Just past the *hifau* tree after the church . . . ") is used to pinpoint where persons (or their parents) are from.

The cognitive and emotional significance of such videos was poignantly brought home to us while we were visiting a Rotuman friend in Adelaide, Australia. He is married to an Australian woman and has been away from Rotuma for many years. His isolation is accentuated by the fact that very few other Rotumans live in the vicinity. During our visit he showed us several videotapes that had been sent to him, saying that whenever he gets homesick for Rotuma he puts on a tape and sings and dances along. In this case the videotapes are his most accessible connections to the culture of his homeland.

Images and Icons

In addition to videos, there are many other ways of evoking mental images of a place as distinctive as Rotuma. Perhaps most ubiquitous in expatriate households are photographs: in albums shared with interested guests, in frames

set on mantels and tables or hung on walls. Along with photos of family and friends are favourite scenes from Rotuma, sometimes blown up to the size of paintings. We can still recall the astonishment we experienced in entering a Rotuman friend's home in Honolulu. One wall in his living room was almost completely covered by a photograph of an islet off his home district. On one level the scene was of a generic tropical island with white sandy beaches, resplendent coconut trees, a sky and sea of shades of blue suggestive of paradise. On a more personal level, the photograph, which had been enlarged by a friend in Australia, evoked a wealth of childhood associations for its owner.

Artifacts from Rotuma are another means of triggering associations. Most common are mats woven from pandanus. In Fiji these may in fact be made locally, but when spread out in a living room or back yard they nevertheless are suggestive of life on Rotuma, where sitting on mats is ubiquitous. Abroad pandanus mats are generally imported, often brought by visitors from Rotuma. Fine white mats are especially treasured, but are rarely displayed, and are used only on special occasions. Other handicrafts such as *titi* (pandanus leaf girdles—we have two hanging on one of our walls), woven baskets, and fans are sometimes on display. Especially if one knows the hands that have made the items they evoke memories of persons-in-context that can be profound. In addition, simply wearing sulus can be a marker momentarily emphasizing island identity.

Evocation on the Internet

With an ever more sophisticated and electronically engaged Rotuman community worldwide, many of the above means of evoking a sense of place can take place via the Internet. Our role in this has been far from passive. In November 1996 we created a website devoted to providing a place on the Internet (<http://www.hawaii.edu/oceanic/rotuma/os/hanua.html>) where expatriate Rotumans catch up with news, post messages on a bulletin board, contribute to a forum discussing issues of interest, and find friends and kinsmen with whom they have lost touch. The main purpose of the website is to facilitate the development

of a global Rotuman community via the Internet in the face of a diaspora to all parts of the world. In addition to the features mentioned above, the website includes sections on Rotuman humor, recipes for distinctively Rotuman dishes, and an extensive archive section containing the full texts of key publications concerning the island, its language, and culture.

The website also includes a wealth of photographs taken on Rotuma by ourselves and others, and a section on Rotuman music where visitors can listen to examples of the music such as those discussed above. Maintaining this site has been among the most gratifying endeavors we have engaged in during our professional careers. Many Rotumans regularly send stories and photos for posting, and feedback from Rotumans has been extremely encouraging, especially with regard to the value of the website for keeping in touch with their culture, no matter how far away they may be.

We'll conclude with a set of random memories of our own that we posted on the website after our most recent visit to Rotuma, in July 2001:

Fava trees loaded with ripening fruit . . . fanning away the flies at mealtime . . . mosquitoes buzzing in our ears . . . the secure feeling of sleeping under a mosquito net, safe from the insects that inhabit our bedroom during the night . . . going to bed at 7:30 p.m. because we have no electricity and no good lights . . . the crowing of roosters at all times of the day and night . . . finally getting Elisapeti's kerosene refrigerator to work with the wicks we bought over the Internet (they're no longer available in Fiji) . . .

The night sky in all its glory . . . the Southern Cross and Milky Way, made so much more visible by the absence of electric lights . . . the brightness of white sand in moon glow . . . the sheen of moonlight on the leaves of coconut trees . . .

Our early morning walks, during which we meet men carrying baskets of coconuts to feed the pigs, people calling chickens to feed . . . the smell of smoke from *kohea* (cookhouses) . . . the morning star

bright in the sky at dawn . . . schoolchildren in their uniforms waiting for the bus . . . old women bent over at the waist like animated jackknives, sweeping leaves . . . *vea* (mudhens) darting across the road . . . cold water showers, ever so refreshing after walking and sweating profusely . . . bathing with a dipper from a bucket when the water is shut off in afternoons and nighttimes . . .

The heat of the sun at midday, and how delicious a cool breeze feels when it comes . . . young boys carrying big bundles of leaves on their heads . . . little girls carrying even littler children in their arms . . . the intense blue of the sea, set off by the foamy white breakers on the fringing reef . . . the lush vegetation--so many shades of green--topped by majestic coconut palms loaded with nuts . . . watching the brilliant red and black *arnea* (endemic honeyeater) sucking honey from the *hata* blossoms (pandanus plants) across the road from Elisapeti's house . . .

The food . . . *a'ana, papai, fekei* . . . so many kinds of bananas . . . *'esu* (papaya) for breakfast every day . . . *vati* . . . the toughest chickens in the world . . . *poat kau* (corned beef), fresh fish . . . watching people *mif* (suck) the flesh off the bones of tiny fish . . .

The buildings . . . the Catholic churches at Sumi and Upu . . . the new Methodist Church at Savlei . . . the school buildings at Malhaha . . . unfinished two-story houses, unpainted, with walls of grey concrete blocks . . . the Post Office Shop, the hospital, and the other buildings at the government station in Ahau . . . the derelict, roofless houses long ago abandoned . . .

Waiting for the boat (*Bulo ni Ceva*) that was supposed to arrive on Thursday . . . delayed to Saturday . . . delayed to Tuesday . . . delayed again to Thursday . . . delayed till whenever . . .

We can hardly wait to return!

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