

# PACIFIC STUDIES

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A multidisciplinary journal devoted to the study  
of the peoples of the Pacific Islands

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SEPTEMBER 1994

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**PUBLISHED BY**

**THE INSTITUTE FOR POLYNESIAN STUDIES  
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY--HAWAII**

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Editorial Policy: *Pacific Studies* is published quarterly by The Institute for Polynesian Studies, Brigham Young University-Hawaii, Laie, Hawaii 96762-1294, but responsibility for opinions expressed in the articles rests with the authors alone.

Subscription rate is U.S. \$30.00, payable to The Institute for Polynesian Studies. Articles submitted to the editor must not be submitted elsewhere while under review by *Pacific Studies* and should be the original typewritten copy, completely double-spaced (including quotations, references, and notes). Authors may write to the editor for a style sheet and information on computer-disk submissions. Books for review should also be sent to the editor.

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This publication is printed on acid-free paper and meets the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Council on Library Resources.

ISSN 0275-3596

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September 1994

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## THE TRUTH AND OTHER IRRELEVANT ASPECTS OF NUKULAEAE GOSSIP

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*Yale University*

THE QUESTION of whether all societies share the same understanding of the nature of truth has played an important, if often unrecognized, role in anthropological thought since the inception of the field. What constitutes the truth for members of different societies, the extent to which it is a universal or relative notion, and how it is animated, constructed, and negotiated in daily life are fundamental concerns in discussions of the nature of belief systems, rationality, and social action. For example, as Lewis points out (1994:565), underlying the age-old contrast between beliefs in magic and scientific knowledge is the underexamined judgment that mere belief is untrue, unreliable, and irrational, while knowledge is the opposite. Nevertheless, until recently, these epistemological assumptions and others like it had been confined to backgrounded positions in the study of social formations and cultural systems, thus escaping systematic scrutiny.

In recent years, issues relating to ethnophilosophical understandings of the nature of truth have become more visible, along with closely related concepts such as disclosure and concealment (George 1993; Petersen 1993), secrecy (Bledsoe and Robey 1986; McNaughton 1982; Piot 1993), and lying and deceit (Anderson 1986; Bailey 1991; Basso 1987; Biebuyck-Goetz 1977; Gilsenan 1976; Goldman 1995; Lewis and Saarni 1993; Nachman 1984). Petersen's analysis of *kanengamah* (reserve, restraint), a personal quality held in high regard in Pohnpei in Micronesia (1993), is a pertinent example of the way in which issues of truth are typically treated in this burgeoning ethnographic literature.

Pohnpeians view *kanengamah* as a prerequisite for individuals' success in social and political endeavors. The quality manifests itself, *inter alia*, when

an individual carefully avoids revealing the truth all at once, and knows the art of “managing the release of information” (Petersen 1993:343). Yet, for Pohnpeians, *kanengamah* is not the opposite of being truthful but rather goes hand-in-hand with it, because a socially mature person both displays *kanengamah* and has access to the truth. As a result, Pohnpeians view certainty as a rare and ephemeral commodity, and indeed a suspicious one, which leads them to be wary of any authoritative claim to truthfulness, that is, any assertion of raw authority. Petersen’s analysis typifies contemporary anthropological approaches, which demonstrate that the truth is a sociological, and hence inherently relative, category, rather than a phenomenological or “objective” one. Thus different societies give different values to the truth, contrast it with different categories, and evaluate it in terms of moral standards and norms of social relations (cf. Just 1986). Pohnpeians simply do not appear to adhere to Grice’s maxims of quantity (“provide as much information as is necessary, and no more than is necessary”) and quality (“state only what you believe to be true”) in the same way that the average Westerner does, or perhaps they attach different meanings to notions like “necessary” and “believe to be true” (Grice 1975; cf. Duranti 1993).

To date, most ethnographic works on local conceptions of the truth have tended to characterize it as a sort of Durkheimian concept that informs all aspects of the lives of communities. For example, Petersen’s analysis depicts Pohnpeians as being subject to a more or less invariable set of norms regarding concealment of information across all contexts of social life. The assumption underlying such works is that members of a social group articulate a specific theory of truth through their actions and reflections, and that an ethnographer can characterize the general philosophical “climate” of a society. However, notions of what counts as true may differ across contexts of social life, sometimes substantially so. For example, in Western legal settings such as courtrooms, a great deal of time and effort is spent arguing over whether specific pieces of evidence can be used to support the truth of a particular account. The legal criteria for establishing the truth can also be considerably more subtle and covert: Conley and O’Barr (1990) demonstrate how American judges and attorneys favor certain narrative structures over others in courtroom depositions, and how these biases lead them to accept the accounts of certain litigants and witnesses as legitimate testimonies and to reject those that do not conform to their unstated normative expectations. Such works demonstrate that an investigation of philosophies of truth in particular societies must take on an aggressively context-sensitive approach.

Furthermore, recognizing the inherent relativity of ways of conceptualizing the truth across and within societies does not constitute an end in and of

itself. Rather, the aims of an anthropology of truth must strive to understand why the truth has the characteristics that it does for particular groups and subgroups, and should identify the implications of particular ways of defining the truth for social processes and cultural constructs. Outside of anthropology, Foucault's work is most prominently associated with these endeavors (especially 1980, 1982). Claiming that definitions of the truth are regimented by and subservient to the interests of powerful institutions and of individuals associated with them, Foucault demonstrates that the pivotal issue is not so much *what* counts as true or not true but the very *criteria* that determine such. Controlling the criteria for truth is a considerably more subtle and effective way of exercising domination than simply controlling the truth. Truth and power thus stand in a circular relationship of legitimization, which Foucault terms "regimes of truth." The diffuseness of this relationship makes both truth and power particularly difficult to recognize and challenge.

The variability of the nature of truth across contexts is one example of this diffuseness. Because the criteria for truthfulness shift from one setting to the other, many fail to apprehend them. Power can then be understood as the ability to control these shifting criteria. This ability is not "owned" by individuals but is associated with the social positions that they occupy. The relationship between truth, power, and knowledge is most clearly visible in contexts that are elaborated into institutions. Not surprisingly, Foucault's writings and those that his work has inspired have focused on the most formalized and institutionalized social events that societies have to offer: prisons, courtrooms, hospitals, and other bureaucratic, scientific, and educational institutions. Within anthropology, for example, Lindstrom's (1990) analysis of the relations among power, knowledge, and regimes of truth on Tanna (Vanuatu) centralizes formal oratory and interviews, religious discourse, songs, and debates as social events through which these relations can be most fruitfully investigated.

This article does not use a Foucaultian model of the truth, although it is inspired by it. Rather, my analysis addresses two issues traditionally underexamined in works inspired by Foucault's writings. First, though Foucault does help us understand how the truth is constituted in everyday contexts that are not obviously dominated by institutions like the state, he does so only in relation to these institutions. In the everyday existence of individuals, truth inherits the characteristics that are formed in institutions. However, I will argue here that, while everyday definitions of the truth do refer to institutional definitions, they can also depart from them in significant ways. Second, the way in which individuals manipulate definitions of the truth in everyday contexts can open the door to resistance. This stance differs from



Foucault's view: While he does not deny the possibility of agency-based resistance to the depersonalized power of institutions, Foucault maintains that "resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (1978:96), that is, counterhegemonic action ultimately never escapes institutional power, and in fact contributes to its constitution. I will demonstrate here that the regimes of truth imposed from above can be challenged in social contexts, such as gossip, that are least subject to institutional control.

The approach I will argue for may appear at first glance to be pushing relativism and particularism to an unworkable extreme: Not only does the truth differ in nature from one society to another, but it does so from one setting to another within specific societies. Ways of defining the truth in one context are, of course, not completely unrelated to ways of defining the truth in another. Indeed, this article argues that the criteria of truthfulness across social contexts are intimately related to one another on at least two dimensions: through the connection between these criteria and power and prestige, and through the relationship between truthfulness and aesthetic values. However, the criteria at play in one context are not necessarily subsumed by the criteria extant in another.

I will focus on issues of the truth in one social context, namely gossip, about which a few preliminary words are in order. As many analysts have demonstrated, gossip is a complex phenomenon: It can be a political tool, an instrument of community cohesion, a genre of oral performance with aesthetic value, a context in which personal biographies are constructed, a locus where community history is produced, and a way of displaying and manipulating cultural norms.<sup>1</sup> Most relevant here is the fact that gossip frequently emerges as a prime site of political resistance whose mundane setting and apparently innocuous nature make it particularly difficult to control and stifle (see Bailey 1971; Harding 1975; Scott 1985; Szwed 1966). In the ethnographic setting that this article focuses on, gossipers often ridicule the deeds and words of individuals whose ambitions are too conspicuous or who are in positions of power (Besnier 1991, 1993). Derogatory statements, spoofs, irreverent words, and scandal-provoking stories are the bread-and-butter of kitchen-hut conversations and late-night whispers on the shore of the lagoon.

Nonetheless, little research has focused on the mechanisms that make gossip such an attractive weapon of everyday resistance. Insights into this question can be gained only through an investigation of gossip in its natural social context that focuses on the details of how interaction is constructed, which few researchers have attempted. Yet the importance of grounding any investigation of politics in the fine-grained analysis of talk has been amply demonstrated (e.g., Briggs 1992; Duranti 1990; Gal 1989; Hill and Irvine

1992; Irvine 1989; Myers and Brenneis 1984). Talk always presents an occasion when multiple meanings can materialize, and careful attention to talk often reveals that political action is considerably more complex (and sometimes quite different in nature) than it appears at first glance. Political processes and talk are constitutive of one another (Brenneis 1988), in that talk both reflects and creates political processes. I will now investigate the political dimensions of a very brief excerpt from a gossip session and explore what provides resistant qualities to a seemingly innocuous stretch of gossip.

### **Nukulaelae Atoll**

Nukulaelae atoll is a small, relatively isolated community in the Tuvalu group in the central Pacific. The atoll's 350 residents are for the most part monolingual speakers of the Nukulaelae dialect of Tuvaluan, a Polynesian language. Nukulaelae was first sighted by Westerners in 1821 and converted to Christianity by Samoan missionaries in the 1860s at a time of accelerated and traumatic social change. The contemporary inhabitants of Nukulaelae organize themselves in approximately sixty-five households (*fale*), each of which is headed by a person called a *matai*, usually but not always a man.<sup>2</sup> Households comprise about thirty landholding groups of kin (*pui kaaiga*). Both of these organizational units vary widely in composition and size across time and space.

Today, the atoll is under the political leadership of a Council of Elders (*taupulega*) headed by an elected chief (*ulu fenua*), to which all *matai* in the community theoretically belong. The exact function of the council and the chief, and the extent of their authority, are hotly contested topics (Besnier 1991). Briefly, much of the controversy surrounding leadership and authority on the atoll can be traced to the complexities of its inhabitants' political ideology. Two broad strands can be discerned in the Nukulaelae prescriptive schema for political organization. On the one hand, one finds a yearning for an iron-fisted leadership that, when it operates legitimately, brings prosperity, harmony, and "beauty" (*gali*) to the community, an ideology that strikes a familiar chord in the Polynesian region (cf. Marcus 1989).

Yet there are simply too many ideological factors that argue against the full actualization of this yearning. Indeed, Nukulaelae Islanders also articulate a fierce spirit of egalitarianism, according to which everyone in the community is on the same footing and no one is entitled to exert authority over others. Not surprisingly, egalitarianism is most explicitly articulated in off-stage, private contexts, echoing comparable dynamics reported even of hierarchy-conscious Polynesian societies. However, egalitarianism is a much stronger and more overt force in Nukulaelae society than in most other

Polynesian societies, in that it permeates not just behind-the-scenes talk and action, but also on-stage political maneuvers.

The resulting ideological schema presents severe problems for political action because it leaves little basis for the successful exercise of power and authority. Positions of power, authority, and prestige are temporary and fragile. Politically ambitious agendas are frequently derailed by the community (see Besnier 1993), and power is particularly difficult to locate in Nukulaelae society. For example, the chieftainship, where one would expect power and authority to be concentrated, constantly finds its authority challenged in more or less subtle ways by the rest of the community. The pastor is accorded enormous prestige, but his authority is carefully bounded, and any attempt on his part to partake in the secular affairs of the community is quickly and thoroughly squelched (Besnier 1994). Other candidates--such as the holder of the office of island president, the member of parliament, better educated individuals, or people who have amassed some form of capital outside the community--are constantly marginalized in one way or another, to ensure that they do not develop ambitious designs.

### **Oratory**

Nevertheless, one pattern emerges among holders of positions that are at least good candidates for exerting power and authority over the rest of the community: A skillful control of oratory is useful in lobbying for key political positions. Oratorical skills are particularly important because, without them, one cannot make one's voice heard in public: To open one's mouth in political meetings, at feasts and dances, in church, or at family feasts, one must control the details of oratorical performances lest one be laughed off the stage. Furthermore, one cannot aspire to positions of power, prestige, and influence without at least paying lip service to the spirit of egalitarianism that pervades the community's political ideology, one of the major tenets of which is the establishment of consensus. Thus, an ambitious individual will strive to become the voice of consensus as often as possible and to emerge as the person best able to become the mouthpiece for the truth that most will agree with, while skillfully inserting, of course, a perspective that will benefit him- or herself (cf. Lindstrom 1992:112). Without oratorical skills, one cannot assume this responsibility.

These observations must be qualified by several remarks. First, a minor but significant detail: Oratorical skills are necessary to vie for positions of influence, power, and prestige but alone cannot insure success. Thus, certain individuals may be good orators but other social traits (e.g., their being too overtly ambitious, or simply the fact that they are women) may thwart

any political ambition from the start. The relationship between oratorical skills and politics also has an important implication: Persons who cannot manipulate oratory are simply left out of the limelight and hence out of the race for key political positions.

Second, the exact characterization of skillful oratory is an ambitious project and should be the subject of a different study. Suffice it to say here that Nukulaelae Islanders do not have the highly developed canon of oratorical references, similes, and conventionalized allusions that one finds in, say, Samoan and Tongan oratorical styles. What “proper” oratory consists of is considerably less rigid and open to creativity. However, because the discussion that follows relies on an understanding of what skillful oratory *is not*, a few words about speechmaking are in order.

Oratorical styles are highly fluent, rhetorically well-formed, *recherché*, and replete with parallelisms and synonymous or near-synonymous doublets (e.g., *fakamaaloo kae fakafetai*, “thank you and thank you”;<sup>3</sup> *viikia kae taavaea*, “praised and glorified”; *fekau mo gaaluega*, “duties and tasks”; *tuu mo aganuu*, “customs and traditions”). Oratorical texts are framed by more or less elaborate opening and closing formulas, called *fakalagilagi*, and often contain metalinguistic references (e.g., *au e faipati atu*, “I am speaking to you”). Oratory is flowery, “exuberant” (Becker 1988), and “articulate” (McDermott 1988). Indirectness, a salient characteristic of oratorical language, is achieved by drowning meaning in the sheer quantity of words. In contexts that call for oratorical performances, much value is placed on texts in which a lot of form is dedicated to expressing little referential meaning.<sup>4</sup> Skillful oratory is aesthetically appraised as *gali* (“beautiful”) and *taaua* (important), and is most closely associated with the *maneapa*, a large community house strategically located at the center of the village, in which feasts, meetings of the Council of Elders, and other community-wide functions are held (see Goldsmith 1985 for a general discussion of the *maneapa* in Tuvalu). The *maneapa*, sometimes alluded to as *te fale o muna* or *te fale o pati* (the house of words), is the seat of “high culture,” of every event valued as power-laden and special. Speaking in the *maneapa*, in keeping with the gerontocratic basis of this society, is theoretically restricted to *matai* (although this feature of the “old order” is increasingly being challenged today).

Third, a crucial characteristic of Nukulaelae oratory is its intimate connection to the truth. Like members of other Polynesian societies (cf. Firth 1967 on Tikopia), Nukulaelae Islanders spend much time talking about the truth, and they talk about it in ways that centralize repleteness of information and exuberance of form. In oratorical contexts and other forms of formal language, the verb or noun *tonu*, “truth, true” (etymologically related to

*ttonu*, "straight"), frequently co-occurs with the word *kaatoatoa*, "complete, whole," with which it forms a doublet, *tonu kae kaatoatoa*, that is, "true and complete." The frequent association of these two terms is not simply a rhetorical device but is symptomatic of a conceptual linkage central to Nukulaelae communicative ideology: What is true is also complete and whole (for further discussion of this point, see Besnier 1994).<sup>5</sup>

Finally, a few words are in order regarding how skills, such as oratorical skills (or rather the lack thereof), are defined in this community. The biography of a member of the Nukulaelae community, including what the individual is good at or not, begins before the person is born. In particular, one inherits one's *pona* (stigmata) from one's parents and grandparents. A *pona* is a negative personal trait, usually of an interactional or social nature (e.g., lying, gossiping, avarice), known to everyone in the community and frequently invoked in everyday discourse as an explanation for behavior. A *pona* is an attribute of both families and individuals; the latter inherit their *pona* through bilateral kin ties, be they through filiation or adoption. Thus, whenever an individual's *pona* is mentioned, Nukulaelae Islanders immediately attempt to relate it to the kin group's *pona*. Indeed, local discourse about personhood primarily consists in finding links between people's conduct and the *pona* associated with their family. Although one can inherit positively valued skills and attributes, these are considerably less interesting to everyone than the negative traits that run in families. This model of personhood does not preclude the possibility that an individual will break the familial pattern; however, to do so, the individual must work awfully hard to "prove" to the community that *pona* do not *always* run in families, because, at the slightest slip, everyone shakes their heads knowingly. The relevance of this economy of personal traits will be made clear presently.

### Gossip

The particular form of interaction and political action that I focus on here can be characterized as "gossip." Gossip is generally defined as a negatively evaluative and morally laden verbal exchange concerning the conduct of absent third parties that takes place within a bounded group of persons in a private setting, the gist of which is generally not intended to reach the ears of its victim. This definition works reasonably well for Nukulaelae. As do members of many other societies, Nukulaelae Islanders regard derogatory talk about third parties as devoid of value, an attitude that is nicely invoked by a common metaphor for gossip, *pahi agina i te matagi*, literally, "words blown around by the wind," that is, statements that have little social anchoring and no credibility. At the same time, gossip is also viewed as a reprehend-

sible and potentially disruptive activity in that it potentially undermines the values of *feaalofani* (mutual empathy), *fiileemuu* (peace), and *gali* (“beauty”) that ideally characterize people’s actions. Indeed, gossip on Nukulaelae can thoroughly undermine on-stage political processes. Furthermore, gossip in this community is extremely pervasive, so much so that everyone on the atoll regularly engages in it, even though many would defend themselves vigorously against such a characterization.

The label “gossip” is not without problems. The most important caveat is that its boundaries do not correspond to those of any named category in Nukulaelae society. The word that most closely resembles “gossip” is *fatufatu*, literally, “to make up [stories].” Needless to say, there is little consensus about when a particular story is “made up” and when it represents “the truth,” and thus the label *fatufatu* can potentially be applied to a broad range of talk. The term is also most clearly associated with men’s evaluations of women’s interactional activities. When men engage in what an outsider might recognize as gossip, they are said to *sauttala* (chat); labeling their chatting as *fatufatu* would implicitly question their masculinity, even though men’s *sauttala* resembles women’s alleged *fatufatu* in many respects. The characterization of women’s communicative activities as reprehensible and unwholesome gossip and of men’s as morally neutral talk is a common phenomenon cross-culturally, and it enables men to denigrate women’s social activities and thus justify gender hegemony. Yet the situation I will focus on presently can be described as gossip even though its protagonists are men, because it does fall into a category of interaction that Nukulaelae people ultimately characterize as illicit, counterhegemonic, potentially disruptive, and difficult to control, characteristics that it shares with social events labeled “gossip” in many other societies.

Nukulaelae gossip is intimately associated with liminal and devalued settings, such as kitchen huts, which Nukulaelae people view as dirty and smoky, construction sites (barely domesticated areas), and the beach, which serves as the community’s toilet and where one thus always runs the risk of stepping on feces. The locus of gossip is constitutive of gossip itself, in that members of this community denigrate talk that takes place in such settings, partly because of the nature of its physical setting. Gossip is not *gali*, in sharp contrast to oratory, for a number of reasons: It takes place in ugly contexts; its purposes are potentially disruptive of the “beauty” of the community, in which everything from social relations to the physical appearance of dwellings and bodies is tidy, orderly, and aboveboard; and it is disorderly in form.

Despite its devaluation, gossip has a clear social organization (cf. Brenneis 1984; Goodwin 1990). Gossip commonly takes place among a group of

“regulars” that maintain some compositional consistency over time. The composition of these groups bears only a tenuous relation to the kinship or factional structure of the community: While members of the same family or network tend to socialize together, gossip groups commonly cut across family and network boundaries. In addition, the composition of gossip groups is in a constant state of subtle flux, and this fluidity generally prevents these groups from turning into well-defined political factions. At any given time, gossip conversations are dominated by a *principal speaker*, who addresses a relatively uninterrupted flow of talk to one or, more commonly, several *principal interlocutors*; the talk is also meant to be overheard by a *secondary audience*. Certain people emerge as particularly adept gossipers, a characteristic that is the *pona* of particular families, and these individuals often take the role of principal speaker in gossip groups. Women and men have a tendency to gossip in segregated groups, although it is also common for women to take the peripheral role of secondary audience in men’s gossip groups and vice versa. Membership in gossip groups, be they composed of women or men, is constitutive of friendship ties between adults: People come together to gossip because of friendship, and gossiping is one of the main means of strengthening such ties.

### **The Ten-Dollar Piglets**

In 1985 I spent approximately eight months on Nukulaelae, conducting field research on a variety of issues including emotionality, political life, and gender. Among the materials I collected figured gossip interaction, a form of interaction on which I had already focused my attention during previous field sojourns. To record gossip, I would place a tape recorder in the corner of a kitchen or storage hut and remain next to it to observe whatever was taking place. This practice quickly became accepted as yet another of my strange activities and interests, but some people at the same time enjoyed the complicity of stimulating juicy talk among the conversationalists present. The kitchen hut that belonged to the kin group with which I am associated on the atoll was an ideal site for my enterprises, because its strategic location by the lagoon-side path on the edge of the bush made it a favorite venue for socializing. After warning those present that the tape recorder was on, I would let the interaction take its course. Nukulaelae being very small in both size and population, it was well known on the atoll (if not terribly well understood) that I used these tapes for ethnographic work. The collection method worked so well that it enabled me to obtain what appeared to be a highly naturalistic sample of the most informal of Nukulaelae interactions.

Yet, despite the appearance of extreme naturalism, my presence with a tape recorder was problematic on at least one occasion.

I would first listen to the tapes to make sure that they did not contain any material that could potentially backlash against the conversationalists involved. Dealing with recordings of gossip requires care in a tightly knit society whose attitude towards gossip is full of ambivalence and complexity, and where privacy is limited in large part to what one does not say. After screening, I would hand over my tapes to my research assistant, whom I will call Mafa,<sup>6</sup> a Funafuti Islander who helped me transcribe (and frequently obtain) these tape recordings. (The social organizations and dialects of Funafuti and Nukulaelae are virtually identical.) Mafa, a complex person in many ways, was well known and generally appreciated on Nukulaelae, where she had joined a kin group headed by Vave, with whom she had kin ties, for the duration of my fieldwork.

Late one afternoon, I recorded a gossip session that, at first assessment, appeared rather banal. In my view at the time, nothing particularly scandalous was uncovered, and the tape contained more silence than talk as the participants lounged around, enjoying the late afternoon coolness that, despite the lack of a breeze, provided a break from the oppressive heat of the day. Present were the “regulars” of that period, consisting of Fousaga, the head of the household; Maika, Fousaga’s *tuaatina*, classificatory mother’s brother (MFBS in this case); Fousaga’s younger brother Taatia; and myself. We sat around in the platformed area of the kitchen hut, while Tagi, Fousaga’s wife, and Sose, Taatia’s wife, were making dinner at the other end of the hut. Smoke from the cooking fire filled the air.

A brief excerpt of what I recorded turned out *not* to be as banal as I had originally thought. This excerpt, narrated principally by Maika, concerned an economic transaction between Vave, my research assistant’s host and kinsman, and Teao, an old friend of his. Vave, in his early fifties, is an ambitious and upwardly mobile father of two. Along with his spouse, he had become a Baha’i a few years earlier. This religious conversion is highly significant, in that until recently all Nukulaelae Islanders adhered to the Congregationalist Protestant Church of Tuvalu, a modern-day product of nineteenth-century London Missionary Society enterprises (see Munro 1982 and Goldsmith 1989 for further historical background). Since the early 1980s a few individuals have either become Jehovah’s Witnesses or converted to the Baha’i faith. Leaving the congregation to which everyone else belongs is considered an act of extraordinary boldness in Nukulaelae society, which constantly stresses communal action, unity of purpose, and oneness of spirit in all arenas of social life.



Why Vave took that step is a very complex question that merits careful analysis but is beyond the scope of this essay. Briefly, Vave himself proposes that the seed of nonconformity had always been in him, and he explicitly links his attraction to a *talitonuga foou* (new belief system) to his nonconformist tendencies. His principal explanation for leaving the church was his displeasure with what he saw as the highly materialistic basis of Nukulaelae Christianity, which he feels is inappropriate for a religious denomination. The atoll's pastor, in Vave's opinion, receives far too great a share of the community's resources. Indeed, the pastor is the recipient of a substantial flow of goods and services, which he reciprocates with symbolic resources, by praying for the well-being of the community in particular. Needless to say, as monetization and capitalist principles are gaining more and more prominence in the economic life of an island with no direct access to a steady source of cash, this system of reciprocity is increasingly becoming the target of criticism and discontent; but few dare to be as vocal in their criticisms as Vave. Because of the complex associations between religious life and economic life on Nukulaelae, leaving mainstream religion seriously compromises one's role in the socioeconomic life of the atoll. As a result, Vave and his wife, as the sole adherents of the Baha'i faith, were quickly marginalized from exchange networks and eventually became the victims of constant, microscopic forms of harassment. Their economic autonomy and the new off-island networks associated with their religious affiliation helped them cope quite comfortably with social marginalization, but this further fueled general resentment. As an outcast, Vave is frequently an object of ridicule and a favorite target of gossip, along with a couple of other marginalized members of the community.

The gossip fragment in question was yet another example of the type of private discourse targeting Vave in the mid-1980s: It assumes implicitly that all participants share the same attitude towards Vave, made up of a mixture of condescension and envy. Immediately prior to the beginning of the fragment, the principal speaker, Maika, had been jokingly discussing with Sose and Fousaga his (fictitious) plans to purchase ducks. The fragment then begins with an analogical change of topic, in which Maika, seizing the slightest opportunity to gossip about Vave, invokes a recent event in which, according to Maika, Vave had offered to sell to Teao a pair of piglets, for which he eventually asked ten dollars each. Even as they are rapidly becoming more common, financial transactions other than monetary gifts play an uneasy role in Nukulaelae society, and they are not commonly engaged in without a certain amount of embarrassment. For example, Nukulaelae people frequently avoid asking directly for the price of items, preferring

indirect means of doing so such as by subsequently sending a child to ask how much money is due. Sometimes, what begins as a monetary transaction becomes a gift, particularly when recipients find themselves unable to meet their debts. But one thing was clear in 1985: No one asked twenty dollars for two piglets, an enormous sum of money for animals that might not survive. In the gossip excerpt, Maika and his interlocutors squeeze out of the incident every confirmation they could find of Vave's avarice and antisocial behavior. Teao, according to Maika, had paid up, being too ashamed to return the overpriced piglets, and was thus duped by the gullibility that had led him to do business with an untrustworthy character. To add insult to injury, one of the piglets promptly died, while the other was barely hanging on to dear life.

When my research assistant, Mafa, heard the recording, she became incensed. She already had been irritated by another of Maika's gossipy pranks, during which he had jokingly voiced his suspicion that Mafa regularly spent the night in my hut "fanning" me, a remark with inappropriate sexual undertones given the close personal and professional bonds between Mafa and me. She dropped her work (I was fishing at the time) and went straight to Vave to report what she had heard, urging him to go and confront Maika. Vave's and Mafa's version of the dealings over the piglets was that Vave had offered the piglets as a present to his old friend Teao, who had insisted on paying for them at a rather inflated price. This interesting insistence may have been motivated by any number of factors, not the least of which being Teao's desire to distance himself from Vave. What is clear is that payment is a violation of accepted norms, according to which a loose system of gift reciprocity is the only morally viable way of conducting business between old friends.

What happened next is a little opaque. Mafa told me in 1985 that Vave had gone to Maika and had *faipati fakallei* (spoken properly) with him; "speaking properly" is a method of conflict management in which parties go over conflictual events, forgive one another, and ostensibly put the past behind them (cf. Besnier 1990a). Vave told me in 1990 that he had talked to Teao semi-informally, ostensibly to minimize my direct involvement in the affair. My own view is that the first version is closer to what took place at the time. The long and short of it all is that everyone was greatly embarrassed. Maika abruptly stopped his late-afternoon visits to Fousaga's kitchen hut and did not resume them for several weeks. Not knowing how to handle the situation, I did my best to avoid him. But the person who ended up with most egg on her face was Mafa, whose precarious position as a stranger and a Baha'i made her a particularly easy scapegoat. According to subsequent

gossip (some of which I simply overheard), she had misinterpreted Maika and overreacted. In any case, gossips pointed out, Maika had told the story to *fai fakkata*, that is, "to make jest." Why did she fail to recognize a funny story that was not meant to be anything more than that? No one seemed to blame Maika for having lied, and no one talked about his intentions other than to underplay the seriousness of his actions. A well-socialized adult on Nukulaelae must always take life in stride and maintain a benign attitude towards the rest of the world; she or he must be jovial, noninterfering, and gentle. There is no greater compliment than to be characterized as displaying a *mata katakata* (laughing face) and a *mata fiafia* (happy face). A good human being is *fiilemuu* (peaceful), one who knows how to control his or her anger at all times. By having reacted the way she did, Mafa fit none of these ideals.

The events following the tape recording reveal tensions between various social categories. First, the events highlight a contrast between people who gossip lightheartedly and people who take life too seriously, or, more generally, between adequately and poorly socialized individuals. There also emerges a conflict between individuals who can perceive boundaries between social situations and understand how norms differ from one situation to another, and people who, like Mafa, apparently cannot. Finally, on a more subtle level, the contrast between Baha'is and "real" human beings (i.e., adherents to the only "true" religion) backgrounds the entire affair, as it had come to background all interactions between Vave and the rest of the community.

### **The Excerpt**

I now turn to a close analysis of the gossip excerpt. Texts of all kinds (and the contexts in which they are embedded) must be understood in terms of the complex array of cultural constructs of which they are constitutive. Interaction fragments, particularly where narrative plays a central role, both articulate and are articulated by the relations among agents, interactors, and the "facts" established through narratives (cf. Bauman 1986; Bauman and Briggs 1990); they rest on and develop (reproduce, modify, add complexity to) the biographies of agents and interactors; and they assume a place in the culture's moral evaluation of interactive acts, giving them various values with respect to truth, beauty, and importance. In short, texts are to be understood in terms of the community's social aesthetics (Brenneis 1987), that is, the standards by which events are evaluated for accountability, effectiveness, and style. I now turn to the transcript of the gossip excerpt, and analyze some of its formal features, evaluating what these features tell us about



- fakafoki te: :- peelaa iaa  
 ia e:- muna ake loo hoki, e  
 nofo fua peelaa, ko te lima  
 40 taalaa. Iaa ia e hai ki ai  
 i puaka a: :, (.) a Isa ne  
 ttogi i ei, (2.5)
- FOUSAGA** Mm: = *Hm.*
- MAIKA** = taki lima taalad. (4.0) *Five dollars each. But*  
 45 Naa a ko ia hoki laa hEE: : *then he didn't even ask how*  
 ssili atu hoki laa me: :, me *much the pigs were going*  
 e fia te ttogi o puaka. *for. This done, he goes*  
 (4.0) (oti n)aa, a(e) *off, and grabs himself a*  
 (h)ano ia, (.) puke mai *pair of pigs. While that*  
 50 tena avaa puaka, ((semi- *guy's got three pigs*  
*falsetto)) kae llei eilaa [left].*  
 e- e lua ana puaka. A ko  
 ia teenei e: tolu ana  
 punuaa puaka. (4.0) ((*low*  
 55 *voice*))  
 ( ) ( )  
 [ ]
- SOSE** ((to N)) Niko koe naa *Niko you're gonna choke on*  
 maa ausia. *the smoke.*
- 60 **NIKO** llei. = *'t's all right.*  
**SOSE** Mm. *Hm.*  
 = [ ]
- MAIKA** Naa laa, puke aka ana: *Then he grabs himself a*  
 avaa puaka, (.) vau ei ia, *couple of pigs, comes back,*  
 65 *feppaki mai mo: : : [and] runs into Vave's boy,*  
*ttamaliki teelaa a Vave, he tells that boy Faauga to*  
 fai (atu) ei kia:- .hhhh *go and (have a look) if*  
 (.) Faauga kee (hano o *Vave's come back [to ask*  
 aasi) kee vau ia: :- (.) *him] how much the piglets*  
 70 Vave me fia ttogi o:- (.) *cost. ( ) the piglets*  
 punuaa puaka. (4.0) ( ) *to- to the village, and*  
 a puaka kia:- ki fale, a ko *then I come along again and*  
 au e toe fanatu koo muna *he tells me that they cost*  
 mai me e lua- e: : sefulu *twen- ten dollars, ten*  
 75 taalaa, taki sefulu taalaa *dollars for each pig.*  
 i te puaka. ((*high*  
*falsetto, very fast*)) *What?? [I] tell [him] to*  
*return the pigs but he's*

- 80 Taapaa eel! (.) koo hei *already brought the pigs-*  
 laa (o) fakafoki eiloo *I say to him, "You made a*  
 puaka i puaka koo oti ne *mistake. You should've*  
 aumai nee:- (6.0) Aku *taken those pigs, those*  
 muna, "koe e ssee. Moi *larger pigs,"*  
 puke pee(laa) koe i puaka  
 teelaa:-, puaka kolaa koo  
 85 llasi,"  
 (3.0)  
**FOUSAGA** Koo fua ei. *And they [should] be*  
*weighed.*
- 90 **MAIKA** [ Peelaa a puaka kolaa : *Pigs like that*  
**FOUSAGA** Mm:. *Hm.*  
**MAIKA** kolaa eeloo: koo ssao:- *the ones that have already*  
*made it-*  
**FOUSAGA** A koo fua ei. = *And they [should] be*  
 95 = Koo fua ei, kae hano (mo) *weighed then.*  
**MAIKA** = Koo fua ei, kae hano (mo) *And they [should] be*  
 au puaka kolaa : *weighed, and you [only]*  
 (4.0) *take those pigs tha : : t*
- 100 **FOUSAGA** Teena te faiga, maasei maa *That's the way to do it,*  
 puke i punua me: : see iloa *it's no good taking piglets*  
 me e oola me e mmate. *cuz you don't know if*  
*they're gonna live or die.*
- 105 **MAIKA** [ oo: : : *Right.*

[Gossip, 1985:1:B:258ff]

It should be noted first that the text is generally difficult to follow, even for native speakers. This opacity is strategic and is in fact typical of gossip on Nukulaelae as elsewhere: As Donald Brenneis notes about gossip in Bhatgaon, a Fiji Indian village, "it is often difficult to reconstruct underlying events on the basis of [gossip] texts themselves" (1987:244). Nevertheless, the text exhibits several interesting features. First, the story is highly incidental. The topic is raised as a casual and rather unlikely analogy; in lines 1 to 5, the affair is introduced as a new topic with the comparative *peelaa m-m-mo* (like, as if).<sup>8</sup> The analogy is followed by several seconds of talk during

which Maika informs his interlocutor that one of the piglets is dead and the other is not doing well. In these lines, Maika moves away from the main story line and would perhaps have continued doing so (or at least he gives his audience that impression) had Fousaga not rekindled the gossip in lines 17-18, with “*Kae fia ttogi?* (And how much did they cost?).” It is also relevant that Fousaga already knows the answer to this question, since he had already provided it in lines 7-8; his question thus does not simply function as a request for information. By line 11, the narrator has done little other than drop a hint, make an allusion, and laugh about it (in line 5). As in Bhatgaon, “one is rarely told why a story is being told, and the links between the account and preceding discourse are not made clear” (Brenneis 1987:244).

Second, the performance is highly dysfluent, even by the standards of informal and unplanned conversation. (It is certainly recognized as such by native speakers.) The narrator hesitates a great deal (e.g., lines 2, 15, 41, 46, 85-97), repairs himself many times (e.g., lines 23, 68-69, and 74), and pauses at syntactic junctures where pauses are least expected (e.g., between three prepositions and their objects in lines 67-71). Several utterances are never carried through to completion (e.g., those ending in lines 38, 50, and 81), and what appears to be the most significant element of several utterances is left unsaid. When he snorts and clears his throat (in lines 1 and 33-34), he does not pause, and the words that follow are colored by the snorting and throat clearing. At the level of phonology and prosodics, Maika’s delivery is breathy and creaky (see lines 4, 5, 9, and 67). He switches to falsetto or semi-falsetto voice in several instances (e.g., lines 50-51 and 76-77), a common characteristic of highly informal talk, which never occurs in oratory and similar contexts. Throughout the extract, he voices oral stops in words. Nukulaelae Tuvaluan, like most Polynesian languages, does not have a phonemic voiced-voiceless contrast in stops, and the contrast can be exploited for purely affective purposes. Thus, in line 3, he pronounces the phrase *punuaa puaka* (piglet) as, phonetically, [bunua: buaga], and later on (e.g., line 64) even utters the /k/ sound in *puaka* (pig) as a voiced velar fricative [yy] (i.e., phonetically, [buaya]). The voicing of stops is characteristic of very casual talk, and it gives the impression that the speaker is too uninvolved to pay much attention to the contrast between voiced vowels (which always follow consonants in this language) and voiceless stops. Finally, he uses Nukulaelae dialect forms in /h/ throughout, which are devalued compared to the corresponding standard Tuvaluan forms in /f/ or /s/. In one instance (line 49), the /h/ sound is almost imperceptible.

Third, the text is rhetorically poorly formed. It is common for Nukulaelae narrators to “ground” narratives in a great deal of background detail; thus the invocation of many names, in lines 32-42, of individuals playing mar-

ginal roles in the development of the story itself is not unusual. But the narrative in these lines, and in lines 63-85, is highly unfocused. Maika clearly is not concerned with producing an elegant rhetorical performance in the degradation ceremony he is orchestrating.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the responsibility for providing moral evaluations of the story falls on the all-too-willing audience, not on Maika. For example, it is Fousaga who utters the interjection of scandalized outrage “*taapaa ee!*” in lines 21-22 and the interjection “*ttee!*” in line 11, which have approximately the same meaning (translated here as “You don’t say!”). The audience is highly involved as coauthor of the discourse and is primarily responsible, like the chorus of a Greek dramatic performance, for the affective component of the text. The immediate result of this coauthorship is that a shared complicity in the degradation ceremony emerges, which both diffuses responsibility and binds the interactors together (see also Besnier 1989; Brenneis 1984; Duranti 1986). In short, the victim’s public biography, woven out of many strands, has more than one weaver. The evaluative statements that the narrative contains (e.g., “*koe e ssee* [You made a mistake]” in line 82) are carefully framed as directly reported speech; the utterance is thus deeply embedded in the story world, which makes it particularly resilient to scrutiny (cf. Besnier 1992; Briggs 1992; Hill 1995).<sup>10</sup>

### Gossip as Antipoetics

Maika’s performance, which epitomizes Nukulaelae gossiping styles but pushes their characteristics to an extreme, contrasts sharply with what is considered “beautiful” and important as canonically embodied in oratorical performances that take place in the *maneapa*. As mentioned earlier, oratorical talk is fluent and well formed, rich in parallelisms and other poetic devices, and framed by elaborate opening and closing devices. Maika’s gossip is characterized by the opposite: It is dysfluent, fragmented, and disorganized; its phonological and rhetorical structures are sloppy; and it is poorly linked to the previous conversation. As such, Maika’s gossip falls squarely in local perceptions of gossip in general: Gossip is the antithesis of beauty because of its physical location, purpose, and form. On the basis of this local characterization, I describe talk that is most antithetical to poetically valued speech as *antipoetic*, that is, talk whose formal features and context place it in the most devalued regions of Nukulaelae social aesthetics. Although this term does not correspond to any particular descriptor in Nukulaelae Tuvaluan, the category it denotes clearly has social validity in local practice.<sup>11</sup>

It is significant that Nukulaelae Islanders do not have an explicit theory



of oral poetics. Nor do we find in their society the sort of genre elaborations in oral and sung performances that are found in other societies of Western Polynesia (e.g., Tonga), where each genre is associated with highly formalized rhetorical strategies. To be sure, certain formal features recur in valued texts and performances, as described above, but these features are not articulated in an aesthetic self-consciousness. Yet, despite the absence of local theories of verbal aesthetics, one can still speak of a Nukulaelae sense of poetics and verbal aesthetics, to which antipoetics is contrasted. Nukulaelae audiences can discriminate between good orators and poor rhetoricians: they can be moved by the form and substance of particular oratorical performances or by the lyrics of certain songs, even though they do not generally reflect explicitly on the basis of their appreciation (in contrast to, say, the audience of a Tongan song-dance performance).

Earlier, I described the relationship between aesthetically valued rhetoric, truth, and completeness. Extending this model further, a tripartite constitutive link emerges between the truth, completeness, and verbal aesthetics. Because of its formal repleteness and exuberance, formal oratory is maximally truthful; I have also shown elsewhere (Besnier 1994) that church sermons and written texts in general are even better candidates for maximal truthfulness. In oratorical and related performances, the truth is maximally thematized, and it is thus not surprising that only older men, who alone have the authority to assert what is true and what is not, are allowed to talk in these contexts. In contrast, the truth is minimally relevant to antipoetic performances. Because such performances leave much unsaid, understated, or waiting to be filled in by the audience, they lay few or no claim to truthfulness. Thus, by forming his talk as the antithesis of aesthetically pleasing talk, Maika attempts to suspend evaluative criteria of truth that apply to formal talk. In other words, the truth is diffuse in Maika's gossip. First, it is diffuse in terms of what actually gets said, which the performance style makes it difficult to decipher. Second, it is diffuse in terms of who assumes responsibility for what gets said, as the audience is a highly coconspiratorial entity.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, to return to the Foucaultian model of the truth outlined at the beginning of this article, Maika's success rests on his ability to produce a gossip excerpt whose formal characteristics place it outside of the regime of truth articulated in the community's formal institutions. Had the tape recorder not been there, Maika's agenda would probably have been successful: His audience would have enjoyed his performance, dismissed it as unimportant talk, but also retained one of its basic messages--Vave is not to be trusted. However, the tape recorder was there, and suddenly someone placed Maika's diffuse text against criteria for the truth appropriate to orthodox social contexts, an action that effectively derailed the gossipier's agenda.

### Antipoetics, Prestige, and Resistance

So far, I have asserted that performances of the type analyzed here are devalued in contrast to oratorical performances. However, this characterization must be qualified. To the extent that the gossip fragment discussed here is representative of most Nukulaelae everyday interactions (and is in fact a superb example of successful gossip, until the derailment), it cannot be completely valueless in the moral economy of Nukulaelae communicative repertoires. Rather, its value lies at the fringe of the community's social aesthetics, in the areas of an already unelaborated social aesthetics that are least explicitly recognized as belonging to an economy of aesthetics.

To understand the value of Maika's performance, some information about the gossipers public persona is necessary. Maika was an elderly man with little overt political or social status in the community. Rather poor, he never developed the *gravitas* in public settings that most of his age-mates cultivated. In Nukulaelae eyes, the synecdoche for this lack of a public presence is the fact that Maika was an extremely poor rhetorician. Judged to be incapable of speaking up in public though his status theoretically entitled him to a voice in contexts such as feasts and political meetings, he differed from most elderly men, who were generally eager to display their oratorical skills. He is reputed to have inherited this complete lack of rhetorical confidence from his forefathers, and his children continue the tradition; it is his family's *pona*. Its symptoms are simple: When members of that family try to make a public speech, they begin to tremble and cry (*e tagi kae polepole*) and can no longer string words into sentences. The family has had this trait *mai mua i lotou tupuga*, "since the time of their ancestors," as one of my consultants put it. Maika's and his kin group's *pona* is a manifestation of a "weak heart" (*loto vaaivai*) and was even compared by one of my interviewees with an illness (*masaki*).

In accordance with Nukulaelae's fiercely egalitarian ideology, any man past a certain age is free to engage in rhetorical performances. At the same time, the ability to do so is not accessible to all, in that some people have an inherited inability to speak beautifully. This seemingly contradictory situation is a perfect example of the classic distinction between equality of means and equality of ends (see Flanagan and Rayner 1988). For an elderly man, the consequences of being literally voiceless in public are grave. Indeed, prestige and, to a large extent, social standing in general depend crucially on one's ability to deliver a complex and elegant rhetorical performance on the spur of the moment. Oratory is one of the few means through which one can acquire prestige and thus lay claim to some form of power.<sup>13</sup> Even this process is never straightforward, as the competition is fierce. Talking a lot in

public places an individual in the running; talking *well* in public opens the door for prestige accrual.

This prestige is in turn closely linked to power and leadership. Thus, the most important role of the island's *ulu fenua* (chief), an elected rank that theoretically any adult member of the community may fill, and arguably the most powerful and prestigious social role in the society, is to *fakafeagai* (face) the island community, visiting dignitaries, and representatives of island-external powers like the national government. Crucial to the ability to *fakafeagai* is the ability to manipulate high rhetoric. For example, when asked why women are rarely elected as chiefs, Nukulaelae men invariably explain this exclusion in terms of women's assumed inability to speak well.<sup>14</sup> Echoing arguments made in many other societies to justify the exclusion of particular groups from positions of power (Besnier 1990b:434-437; Brenneis 1990:121-124; Lutz 1986:294), they maintain that women, in contrast to men, are great gossipers (although women hold contrary views), have little sense of *mmalu* (dignity), and lack self-control in their interactional habits.

Women themselves acquiesce with some of these judgments, at least in their public relations with men. On the rare occasions when they are called upon to speak in public, they frequently ask for forgiveness for their alleged inability to speak; *e valea te gutu*, "my [literally, the] mouth is unsocialized, ignorant," they claim, sometimes in the process of delivering a beautiful rhetorical performance. (As Scott would predict, the "hidden transcripts" they produce in other contexts often represent reality in rather different terms [1990:70-107].) Voicelessness in public contexts, be it constructed or not, guarantees that one will never have much of a claim to any form of prestige or power.

Thus there is little room in the competition for prestige and power for such voiceless men as Maika, who, unlike women, cannot even justify their voicelessness by invoking gender. Being excluded from orthodox forms of public politics, Maika had become an expert in heterodoxy. Among other things, he had become in his old age a confirmed trickster, adopting a role to which his seniority entitles him in Nukulaelae society, as it does elsewhere in the Pacific. Throwing decorum to the wind, he would engage in antics that blatantly violated Nukulaelae propriety. For example, he would periodically squeeze his genitals between his thighs and, lifting his loincloth from behind, display the result, particularly to women. This sort of behavior provoked very ambivalent responses. It outraged adult men, while women were torn between being horrified and choking with laughter. It is in the context of the persona that he had developed that one should also understand how Maika emerged as a valued conversationalist in kitchen huts and by the

lagoon. Everyone gave him as much conversational floor as he wanted and took delight in listening to his subversive gossip, even if he was thought to go too far on occasion. Maika thus had a strong and loud voice in private contexts, even if his verbal antics could easily be as devalued as his nonverbal ones. Instead of capitalizing on the poetic manipulation of language in public contexts, Maika capitalized on an antipoetic performance style, thereby laying some claim to prestige, albeit prestige of a different kind from that which his age-mates fought over in the *maneapa*. I refer to this type of prestige as *alternative prestige*.<sup>1 5</sup>

The fact that certain communicative practices can potentially subvert the sociopolitical status quo is certainly not exclusive to Nukulaelae society. In many communities across the world, talk is a principal means through which the underprivileged, the downtrodden, and the powerless resist, and sometimes manage to undermine, structures of inequality, as demonstrated in the growing literature on resistance that pays attention to communicative practices (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1986; Briggs 1992; Ong 1987; Radway 1984; Willis 1977). For example, in rural Lebanon, young men with little social status capitalize on verbal skills “where more solid resources are lacking” (Gilsenan 1976:193), constructing fantastic narratives of their exploits at the expense of agents of their oppression, narratives that are told in dramatic performances to small audiences of their peers. Scott (1985) describes how Malay peasants employ obsequious flattery and religious discourse in their interactions with unpopular landlords and engage in gossip about these landlords as a coded form of coercion.

The Nukulaelae material I have described differs from these other situations in that inequality here does not correlate with patterns of differential access to material resources that delimit clear society-internal boundaries between groups and persons. Indeed, despite accelerated socioeconomic change, land remains the principal measure of economic power, but this resource is distributed roughly equally among kin groups. Rather, inequality rests in large part on individuals’ self-claimed access to symbolic capital, and oratorical skills play a central role in these claims. Not surprisingly, oppositional discourse on Nukulaelae takes a form that differs from the form it takes in social contexts with more dramatic patterns of inequality. In contrast to the theatrical narrative performances of poor young rural Lebanese men, in contrast to the appropriation by Malay peasants of the rhetorical tools of religious obligation in interactions with landlords, the more insidious (and most successful) forms of Nukulaelae gossip capitalize on the *absence* of verbal skills, on inarticulateness, and on one’s ability to place one’s utterances outside orthodox regimes of truth. A good Nukulaelae gossip story such as Maika’s depends crucially on its evasive, marginally

coherent, and dysfluent style. These are the very features that give it subversive characteristics.

On Nukulaelae, and probably in many other communities, the efficacy of the performance as a counterhegemonic act depends crucially on its relation to the truth. As demonstrated here, many formal features of the gossip performance converge on one purpose: that of making truth irrelevant to the quality of the narrative, in order to extract the text from potential scrutiny, for truth according to its locally defined criteria. By doing so the gossiper thus escapes, at least at the moment of performance, potential accusations that he is lying.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the more adept at making the truth become irrelevant to a performance, the more appreciated an individual is as a performer and the greater the alternative prestige.

Making antipoetic discourse one's trademark has important social implications. Since adult men compete for social status through oratorical performances, the gossiper's alleged rhetorical incompetence means that he has little or no access to overt forms of power and prestige. This case is thus an example of how devalued discourse is exploited to create and maintain prestige of an oppositional nature. It documents how one individual attempts to cope with social facts that place him at a marked disadvantage in the competition for social status. The strategies he adopts enable him to confront the very processes that place him at a disadvantage and turn these inside out in an insidious, sabotage-like fashion. At the same time, the gossiper chooses his victims well: By focusing on the actions of an already marginalized individual to nurture his own alternative prestige, he helps reproduce the structures that marginalize this individual, thus lending further legitimacy to his own search for alternative prestige. Working within the bounds of orthodoxy, since he is gossiping about an individual already bracketed for attack, enables him to engage in his self-serving heterodoxic enterprise (Bourdieu 1977:164-171; see also Abu-Lughod 1990; Briggs 1992). Nukulaelae gossip is thus both a strategic resource used to advantage by some and a form of political action constrained by a variety of historical, sociocultural, and communicative consequences. At play here is the complex linkage among styles of discourse performance, regimes of truth, and the construction of persons as social entities (gossiper and victim). Gossip, as the meeting ground for (anti)poetics and politics, is an ideal setting for the unraveling of this linkage.

However, the alternative prestige gained through antipoetic performance is even more fragile than the type of prestige one can claim through overtly valued rhetorical performances, for two major reasons. First, alternative prestige on Nukulaelae depends crucially on certain social boundaries being kept intact. Indeed, when one's antipoetic performance is tape recorded and

heard by others, the performance can be challenged; it can be scrutinized and placed again in a universe of discourse in which truth and lying are again relevant, as was the case in this incident. In such cases, the alternative prestige structure collapses and loss of face ensues. As in other cases of sociopolitical action initially intended to challenge structures of social inequality, but which ultimately promote these structures (e.g., Merton 1957: 421-436), the gossip is reminded that communally sanctioned structures are powerful and not easily challenged.

Second, alternative prestige depends on antipoetic performances that can be characterized as degradation ceremonies (see Garfinkel 1956). In these degradation activities, the actions of individuals with high claims to prestige in public contexts are denigrated, and individuals who are already marginalized, such as Vave, are further ridiculed. As shown earlier, this is done subtly, with as few signs of personal involvement as possible; rather than voicing overt value judgments, the performer carefully lets the audience express negative affect towards the topic of discourse. The reasons for this are simple: Denigrating others is subversive of two of the most important values in Nukulaelae society, *fealofani* (reciprocal empathy) and *fiilemuu* (peace), values constantly invoked in public discourse (e.g., in the *maneapa* and in interviews with the anthropologist). Gossipers must thus depict their victims in a negative light while appearing not to threaten communal empathy and peace (Besnier 1990a). This dilemma is the principal motivating force behind the use of antipoetic discourse strategies. But alternative prestige remains dangerously associated with the subversion of what are perceived as foundational values in society at large, and is thus vulnerable.

Maika's political strategies represent one extreme of a continuum (or perhaps of a series of continua) of strategies that members of the community may adopt at different times and in different contexts to maximize their chances of having a voice--and thus their social resources and their share of power, prestige, and status--while remaining within the bounds of "acceptable" behavior, or perhaps while negotiating what these bounds are. It is suggestive to compare this strategic approach to communication and micro-politics on Nukulaelae with what Brady describes as "strategies for survival" for Tuvalu in general (1970). The limited resources of atoll environments engender many "crunches," for land, food, and, increasingly nowadays, monetary resources. A fruitful way of coping with these crunches is to maintain flexibility in the kinship structure, land-tenure system, and residence patterns. A flexible kinship structure, for example, allows adoptive relationships of various types to play an important role in descent and inheritance, thus enabling members of the group to improve their access to economic

resources (see also Brady 1974, 1976). The patterns I have described in this article, though of a very different nature from the type of socioeconomic manipulations described by Brady, nevertheless offer interesting parallels. Gossip, like the maneuvers to gain access to economic resources that Brady describes, is a prime locus of the interplay between structure and agency created by agents' attempts to handle structural constraints, to find ways of circumventing aspects of the structure that places them at a disadvantage.

Most agents in that community will bank on various resources, varying and adapting them according to the context in which they find themselves. Few will, like Maika, bank so radically on one type of resource like insidious gossip. What is interesting about Maika's case is precisely its atypicality. Maika's marginal status in Nukulaelae society helps us locate the outer edge of the agent's struggle to deal with preexisting structures. The tools used in that struggle exploit aspects of a system that otherwise places the agent on the boundary of society. Yet, as I have shown here, much can go wrong in the process, and the results often represent a rather meager reaping, in that Maika's strategy depends for its success on its being bound to a small social scale. Indeed, the instant this scale is enlarged by the presence of an ethnographer and his tape recorder, the sabotage ceases to work properly.

#### **A Note on Ethics**

I have implicitly touched on a number of other issues in this article of which space precludes a fuller discussion, but which nevertheless deserve some mention. First, the story I related here raises general questions about the relationship between the ethnographic observer and the object of ethnographic observation. The situation (and others like it) has destroyed any illusion I might have started with regarding the possibility of "distance" between the community who "generates" the "data" I write about and myself as observer and recorder. With my tape recorder, innocuous at first glance, acting as a powerful instrument of social disruption, I became the agent of what Stewart aptly terms the "contamination" of the observed object (1991).<sup>17</sup> Thus, rather than searching for a solution to what sociolinguists call the "Observer's Paradox" (Labov 1972b), that is, the fact that observation distorts what is observed, one must treat the observer as inextricably entangled with the object of observation.

Furthermore, the incident related in this article raises complex ethical questions relating to the ethnographic enterprise. Despite the conspicuousness of the tape recorder in the kitchen hut and the fact that I drew everyone's attention to it before recording, the reality of "data gathering" receded

from interactors' consciousness as the gossip progressed. In a sense, the tape recording became surreptitious, and all the ethical discomfort associated with such recordings (see Larmouth, Murray, and Murray 1992) quietly emerged. Where is the boundary between clandestine and consensual tape recording located? Alternatively, as Harvey aptly asks (1992:81-85), are the ends of any ethnographic work ever explicit from the perspective of those being observed?

In a provocative essay, Harvey describes how, during fieldwork in a Peruvian Andes village bilingual in Quechua and Spanish (1992, also 1991), she made clandestine tape recordings of people talking while drunk. The villagers, who appeared docile and compliant when sober, became loquacious and defiant when inebriated. In drunken talk, villagers voiced complex emotions about their oppressed status as poor peasants, which never surfaced otherwise. Had she failed to take into account drunken talk, Harvey would have presented villagers as passive victims devoid of agency, thus providing a distorted depiction of their ideological stance. In the same fashion, failing to take into account the microscopic forms of prestige seeking that Maika engages in while gossiping would not do justice to the complexities of his position in Nukulaelae society, and of Nukulaelae society in general. Although recognizing the contentious nature of her methods, Harvey questions the extent to which her taping practices were more problematic than any other anthropological method: "it is the relationship between researcher as member of a particular and powerful social group and that of the researched as members of less powerful groups that constitutes *all* data collection, covert and overt, as problematic" (1992:81, emphasis in the original; see also Dwyer 1982:255-286).

I would take Harvey's point further, suggesting that anthropological methods that base ethnographic analyses on *impressionistic re-creations* of what is said during a drunken episode or a gossipy moment are more abusive of scientific authority than methods based on the microscopic analysis of a transcript of what is said, without ignoring, of course, the ethnographic authority embedded in the transcribing process (see Tedlock 1983). Meaning (in the most general sense) resides not just in the strings of words that make up an utterance, but also in the form of words, in the organization of interactions, and in the positioning of interlocutors vis-à-vis the text and context of the interaction. To derive an analysis of social relations solely on the basis of a re-created and translated representation of what the ethnographer (who is often an unskilled listener of the interactors' language) thought was said fails to do justice to the social dynamics at play even in the most inconspicuous interactions. Clearly, the ethics of fieldwork are considerably



more complex than they may appear at first, and this complexity cannot be simply resolved by relying on such tools as "informed consent," as some have suggested (e.g., Fluehr-Lobban 1994).

### **Conclusion**

This article was based on an analysis of the linguistic and rhetorical characteristics of a brief gossip excerpt. These characteristics, which give to the text a diffuse quality, assign the text to a particular place in the community's social aesthetics, one that can be described as "antipoetic," that is, as the antithesis of the clarity, order, and articulateness associated with socially and aesthetically valued discourse where criteria for truthfulness are established and maintained, and regimes of truth instituted. Because of the constitutive links between verbal aesthetics and the truth, the gossip extract evades, momentarily at least, local regimes of truth. That this particular gossip fragment should have these characteristics is not haphazard. Successful Nukulaelae gossip in general has antipoetic characteristics that suspend scrutiny for the truth.

To return to the broader questions posed in the introduction, this article contains several implications of theoretical import. I hope to have demonstrated that the truth as it is defined and reiterated in institutional contexts may have more limited applicability to mundane contexts such as gossip than predicted by the Foucaultian model. Gossipers can more or less successfully dodge regimes of truth regimented in institutional practices, and yet their gossip can have powerful implications for institutional politics (cf. Besnier 1993). It is true that the dynamics of gossip (e.g., its aesthetics, prestige value, and truthfulness) are largely defined in negative terms, but these negative terms can become important enough in the conduct of social interaction that they acquire a centrality of their own. The case study presented here calls into question the extent to which regimes of truth are as uniform across social contexts as they are generally depicted to be.

Furthermore, this article has again demonstrated the importance of gossip as an instrument of resistance, an importance that is now well documented. However, in contrast to most other works on the topic, which have often simply asserted the counterhegemonic potentials of gossip, this study offers a detailed demonstration of how resistance "works" in a particular society and thus opens the door to potentially fruitful comparisons with other societies. This article further differs from other studies of gossip as oppositional practice in at least one important way. Research that has demonstrated the resistant dimensions of gossip has typically focused on situations in which subjugated individuals gossip about their subjugators, thereby

accomplishing a variety of goals ranging from consequential character assassination to the vicarious pleasure of saying derogatory things about ones oppressor. Although Nukulaelae people do engage in this sort of practice against those in power or those who aspire for power, Maika does not choose as his victim a particularly powerful person, and certainly not someone who subjugates or oppresses others. Vave is already marginalized, a potential victim of everyone's scorn. Yet issues of power and prestige are at stake in Maika's gossip performance. The role of power can only emerge through a microscopic analysis of the gossip text and the context in which it is embedded. This article thus demonstrates that the counterhegemonic nature of gossip can take unexpected forms and provides an illustration of the richness that a microscopic approach to social interaction, combined with a thorough understanding of social structure, can uncover.

### NOTES

Fieldwork on Nukulaelae was conducted in 1980-1982, 1985, 1990, and 1991. The last three field sojourns, during which the data relevant to this article were gathered, were funded by the National Science Foundation (grants nos. 8503061 and 8920023), the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, and the Wenner-Gren Foundation. I thank the Government of Tuvalu and Nukulaelae's Council of Elders for permission to conduct field research. Successive versions of this article were presented at the 1990 meeting of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania, and at Yale University, and Victoria University of Wellington, as well as the Universities of Auckland, Waikato, and Queensland. I am grateful to Laurence Goldman, Tony Hooper, Fred Klaitis, and Bruce Rigsby for their incisive criticisms offered during some of these events. Philip Bock, Ivan Brady, Don Brenneis, Kana Dower, Joseph Errington, Michael Goldsmith, Angelique Haugerud, and anonymous reviewers provided extensive comments on earlier versions, for which I am most indebted. The usual disclaimers apply.

1. There is a sizable body of anthropological, sociolinguistic, and sociological literature on gossip, of which Merry (1984) provides an excellent summa?. However, few works on the topic are based on transcripts of naturally occurring gossip interactions (Bergmann 1993; Brenneis 1984, 1987; Goodwin 1990; Besnier 1989, 1990a), largely because such data are difficult to obtain. Analyses based on elicited gossip (e.g., Haviland 1977), on translated or re-created interactions (e.g., Brison 1992), or on general impressionistic accounts (e.g., most ethnographic writings on the subject), although useful in many respects, cannot capture the complexities that emerge in the analysis of spontaneous interaction.

2. The term *matāi* is borrowed from Samoan. However, what the terms denote on Nukulaelae and in Samoa differ significantly. Samoan *matāi* are commonly characterized as "titled holders," whereas on Nukulaelae the category has little more meaning than "head of household." There is no system of chiefly title on Nukulaelae.

3. The first of these terms is compounded from a borrowing from Samoan, while the second is a native Nukulaelae term.

4. Nukulaelae values regarding oratorical styles are thus in direct contrast, for example, to "place stories" among the Western Apache (Basso 1984, 1988), that is, place names that can be simply mentioned to invoke complex historical and moral narratives associated with the locations named. The Apache value these names for their power to invoke multiple networks of meaning through simple mention of the name.

5. The question of what details are necessary and sufficient for an oratorical performance or a stretch of similar discourse to be true and complete entails complex issues of authority and entitlement that I cannot discuss here. Furthermore, a concern for completeness does not preclude creative variation in retelling. Some orators are better tellers than others, usually on account of their claims to authority over particular oratorical narratives because of genealogical links to the protagonists, and sometimes because they are particularly skilled in varying details within the bounds of accepted constraints (compare Rosaldo's 1975 remarks on Ilongot rhetorical creativity). History (an important feature of oratorical performances) on Nukulaelae is usually seen as "owned" by kin groups or individuals representing kin groups; Nukulaelae Islanders are reluctant to go on record by retelling narratives that do not "belong" to them or their kin group, and risk being sharply criticized by others if they do so. Owners of narratives control what completeness consists of for particular narratives.

6. All names mentioned in this article have been changed, and some details have been either changed or left out in an attempt (largely in vain, I realize) to protect the identity of those concerned.

7. The orthography used throughout this article is based on phonemic principles, in which double graphemes indicate geminated segments. Geminated oral stops are heavily aspirated, and other geminated phonemes are articulated for a longer time than their ungeminated equivalents. The letter *g* represents a velar nasal stop, *l* is a central flap, and all other letters have their approximate International Phonetic Alphabet value. The transcription conventions are adapted from those developed by Conversation Analysts (see Atkinson and Heritage 1984), a key to which follows.

(1.2)	length of significant pause in seconds
(.)	untimed pauses (less than 1.0 second)
word-	abrupt cut-off
<i>word</i>	forte volume
WORD	fortissimo volume
<i>hhh</i>	audible exhalation
<i>.hhh</i>	audible inhalation
wo::rd	nonphonemic segment gemination
?	rising pitch (not necessarily in a question)
'	slightly rising pitch
.	falling pitch (not always at the end of a sentence)
!	animated tempo
=	turn latching
[]	beginning and end of turn overlap
((text))	information for which a symbol is not available

<i>((high))</i>	dominant pitch level of utterance string
<i>((creaky))</i>	voice quality
( )	inaudible string
(word)	conjectured string

8. The expression is made up of the adverbial or verbal deictic *peelaa* (thus), which has a variety of meanings (it appears repeatedly in the transcript with the place-holding meaning of the hesitation marker “like”). As a comparative expression, *peelaa* takes an object marked *mo*, which in other grammatical contexts functions as a coordinator (“and, with”). The object marker *mo* is repaired twice here. The line structure of the transcript has no analytic significance but rather is an expedient way of referring to details in the text. There is no evidence that casual gossip on Nukulaelae is structured in lines or in any other comparable way.

9. The gossip fragment is structured at some level of analysis, like any conversation. Indeed, the audience punctuates the narrative at strategic locations with a response or a prompt of some sort. As a fragment of conversation, Maika’s and Fousaga’s interaction exhibits all the fine-grained organization that ethnomethodologists have described in other communities. But the excerpt lacks a clear rhetorical structure on a more overt level. In that the story line is interrupted several times and the order in which details are provided fails to follow the expected order a Nukulaelae audience expects of a well-formed narrative.

10. Note that the coda of the fragment is about how to choose pigs, not about Vave. Vave’s reputation is confirmed dead, and what is left to do for the accomplices is to learn how to keep clear of the likes of Vave.

11. Many scholars have demonstrated that informal conversations have an aesthetic structure, which resides in the spontaneous use of such features as parallelisms and repetitions (Jakobson 1960; also Silverstein 1984). I emphasize here that I am talking about local definitions of what is aesthetic and what is not. I also want to suggest that Maika’s performance has few, if any, of the features that Jakobson and his successors identified as the locus of poetics in everyday interaction, and that not *all* everyday interaction is necessarily poetic, even in the broadest sense of this term. This hypothesis is obviously in need of further scrutiny, which space consideration precludes here.

12. The strategic use of diffuseness in establishing a particular relationship between a text and the truth is, of course, not an exclusive characteristic of Nukulaelae gossip, as Terry Eagleton shows:

Many modernist literary works . . . make the “act of enunciating” the process of their own production, part of their actual “content.” They do not try to pass themselves off as unquestionable, . . . but as the Formalists would say “lay bare the device” of their own composition. They do this so that they will not be mistaken for absolute truth--so that the reader will be encouraged to reflect critically on the partial, particular ways they construct reality, and so to recognize how it might all have happened differently. (1983: 170)

13. Contrast the considerably more stratified case of Tikopia, where “social status is a more useful prerequisite to oratory. . . than a knowledge of the fine points of public speaking” (Firth 1975:38).

14. A woman, Looine, was *ulu fenua* for a brief period in the 1950s. The mention of this fact is invariably followed by the narrative of her inability to *fakafeagai* with the captain of a New Zealand ship that called at Nukulaelae during her tenure because she did not speak English. In addition to high rhetoric, some knowledge of English helps in positions of social salience.

15. The terms *covert prestige* and *negative prestige* have acquired some currency in the Variationist school of sociolinguists (see in particular Labov 1972a and Trudgill 1974). I find these labels problematic, because the qualifier "negative" implies that prestige cannot be actively constructed and because "covert" implies that "overt" forms acquire prestige in easily recognizable ways.

16. In "public" discourse, including most discourse directed at the anthropologist, Nukulaelae people frequently invoke the notion of "lying" (*loi, ppelo*). Islanders, who assume outsiders to be infinitely naive when it comes to social life, frequently warn me against believing what others have told me or what I overheard. But "lying" is never invoked as a relevant category during gossip itself, or in in-group interactions following gossip performances.

17. However, I have not adopted in this article a hermeneutically inspired postmodernist approach (e.g., Clifford 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986). Although that approach calls for a healthy critical stance on the myth of the ethnographer's invisibility (preferably in other people's work), I am dubious that a focus on the ethnographic eye would be helpful in capturing the social processes that shaped and were shaped by the events narrated here. Indeed, the patterns of inequality that placed Maika at a social disadvantage, and his attempts to deal with these patterns, existed independently of my presence as an ethnographer in the community and thus can be analyzed without focusing on my presence.

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**HOME ALONE: THE EFFECTS OF OUT-MIGRATION  
ON NIUEAN ELDERS' LIVING ARRANGEMENTS  
AND SOCIAL SUPPORTS**

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MIGRATION IS AN ubiquitous and powerful force that has long influenced the size and composition of Pacific populations. Migration is both a response to and a cause of economic change and modernization in Oceania (Ahlberg and Levin 1990; Cole and Parry 1986; Connell 1990; Fawcett and Carino 1987; McCall and Connell 1993). The general impact of migration on the demography and economy of Pacific societies has been examined extensively (e.g., Cole and Parry 1986; Connell 1990; McCall and Connell 1993). With respect to a specific subpopulation--the elderly--the impact of migration has received little direct attention, but some passing commentary (e.g., James 1993; Macpherson 1990; White 1990).

Presented here is a study of demographic change on Niue, a small Polynesian island in the southwestern Pacific. Two decades of massive, sustained migration from Niue has resulted in around two-thirds of the population living outside the country, primarily in New Zealand. Migration has had a dramatic effect, not just on the composition of the population remaining on the island but also on the social integration of the elderly, most specifically on the amount and type of social support available to people in old age.

**Social Gerontology and the Pacific**

As a distinct area of interest within the social sciences, social gerontology began to take shape in the 1940s. A basic issue that has preoccupied social

gerontology for decades is the adjustment or adaptation of people to age roles, and the determinants and consequences of this. Comparative studies by anthropologists played a key role in the formation of social gerontology. Ralph Linton's article on age and sex (1942) and Leo Simmon's *The Role of the Aged in Primitive Society* (1945) were seminal works. Both argued that the status of the aged varies among societies and that allocation of resources to the elderly is negatively related to the level of technological and occupational development, that is, to level of modernization. Later anthropologists argued that cultural values are as important as technology or economy in determining resource allocation in old age. Clark and Anderson (1967), for example, say that cultures that express a preference for youth, small nuclear families, productivity, individualization, and independence produce very different social opportunities in old age than do cultures (such as Pacific cultures) that emphasize alternate values. Anthropologists of aging continue to stress the importance of cultural values for understanding the social position of the elderly, at the same time acknowledging the importance of history and social organization (e.g., Amoss and Harrell 1981; Silverman 1987; Sokolovsky 1990).

#### *The Elderly in Pacific Societies*

While the past decade has seen a great increase in the number of publications relating to the aged in various Pacific societies, these works still comprise a relatively narrow body of literature. Generally, only two main arenas with respect to aging or the elderly have been addressed: namely, the epidemiology of disease and disability, and social structure. Each of these arenas has an influence on demography, affecting the size, composition, and distribution of populations.

Epidemiological studies report significant demographic change in the size and composition of Pacific societies. Decreases in mortality and increases in life expectancy are occurring in many nations (Newell 1983; Taylor, Lewis, and Levy 1989; Taylor, Lewis, and Sladden 1991) such that people aged 65 years and over now comprise an increasing proportion of the population, more than the 4 to 5 percent typical of Third World nations (Hoover and Siegel 1986). This has been accompanied by a pan-Pacific epidemiologic change, away from acute, infectious disorders towards greater prevalence of chronic, degenerative conditions (Baker, Hanna, and Baker 1986; Barker 1988, 1989, 1990; Finau, Prior, and Evans 1982; Manton, Myers, and Andrews 1987; Taylor, Lewis, and Levy 1989; Taylor, Lewis, and Sladden 1991). Such shifts in disease patterns mean that people are not just living longer but are living longer while becoming more physically or

mentally impaired or disabled. At some point, impairments or disabilities become severe enough to require assistance or caregiving from others.

Anthropological and sociological interest in Pacific elderly has had three primary foci: (a) actual and perceived social status and role changes, including gender differences with respect to these; (b) intergenerational relations and changes therein; and (c) the effects of socioeconomic change on social status and role (Barker 1990; Counts and Counts 1985; Donner 1987; Holmes 1972; Holmes and Holmes 1987; Holmes and Rhoads 1987; Maxwell 1970; Nason 1981; Pearson 1992; Rhoads 1984a, 1984b; Rubinstein 1986; Zimmer 1987). On the whole, this literature reports that although the specific roles and activities assigned the elderly are undergoing reevaluation by younger members of Pacific societies and being changed by economic development, as a social group the elderly generally are still accorded high status and respect. This social-science literature overlaps to some degree with demographic interests, yet the effect of population change on the social institutions involving the elderly has not yet been extensively examined (Martin 1989).

#### *Modernization and the Elderly*

The relationship among family, household structure, economy, and social change (modernization) has long been a topic of central interest in Western social science (Hauser 1976; Martin 1989; Simmons 1945). Most theorists agree that modernization changes household and family structure and thereby the social integration or status of the elderly, but the exact nature of such change has been intensely debated.

Modernization is associated with industrialization, urbanization, economic development (frequently involving increased female participation in the labor force) and commodification, bureaucratization, education, secularization, and migration--in short, with mass society (Hauser 1976; Silverman 1987:314-319). Small, flexible, mobile, nuclear families are supposedly better suited to modernized societal conditions than are large, multigenerational extended families. From classic scholars such as Durkheim and Weber through to contemporary social scientists, such as Burgess (1960) and Cowgill (1974; Cowgill and Holmes 1972), theorists depict the process of modernization as having a negative effect on the elderly--extruding them from large extended families, reducing their social statuses, decreasing their control over resources, and diminishing their economic, political, and social roles.

Critics of modernization theory argue that this portrayal pays insufficient attention to the history, complexity, and diversity of local conditions that

generate, among other things, household and family form (Aschenbaum 1982; Aschenbaum and Steams 1978; Foner 1984; Goldstein and Beall 1981; Palmore 1975; Palmore and Manton 1974). These commentators note that in many societies elderly people who continue to command key resources (be they material, social, or supernatural) often maintain a high social status despite changing economic conditions (Silverman 1987). Central among the social resources at an elder's disposal are other people: political leaders, family members, distant kin, and neighbors. Thus, examination of the living arrangements of the elderly and the social resources at their command is a way of assessing the degree of social integration of the elderly and the impact of modernization.

*Social Support: Formal and Informal*

Individuals who live longer than their forebears but in a state of declining health are liable to have personal, physical, and social problems in old age, especially in a bureaucratized society with changing socioeconomic conditions. Societal adjustments, in both the public and private sectors, are needed to address these problems. Among governmental or public sector programs designed to offset the deleterious effects of modernization on the aged, the more important programs address income maintenance, housing, and health care (Hauser 1976).

Public sector programs are frequently referred to as formal services. They are accompanied by largely invisible but nonetheless essential private sector or informal services. Primary among these is social support, usually from family. The appropriate ratio of formal to informal services for the elderly and eligibility to receive publicly provided services are major and perennial components of the debate over public welfare policies.

Attenuation of the extended family system is unlikely in modernizing nations where the birth rate remains high (Hauser 1976). The informal social support system available to the elderly is believed to be stable because high fertility forestalls or offsets other potential changes in family organization. Most Pacific societies fit a high fertility profile. In advanced old age or in the event of increasing physical or mental frailty, then, older Pacific adults should still have access to well-functioning informal social support systems, that is, to people capable, willing, and able to provide care. This assumption about the continued availability of family, however, does not consider the impact of migration or demographic change.

A situation such as that on Niue, where out-migration has been severe and sustained, immediately calls into question the adequacy of this assumption about the elderly's access to informal social support. In the face of



extensive demographic change, do elderly people continue to have access to informal social support, to family care? This central question underlies the analysis presented in this article.

On Niue, migration and modernization go so closely hand-in-hand that it is impossible to disentangle their effects. Modernization--socioeconomic and political change--was both an incentive for and a response to migration. And migration resulted in well-documented demographic change. Rather than examining modernization or migration per se, I look at demographic change and its effects on social support.

### **Methods**

presented first is an overview of Niue and a brief history of its demography, particularly with respect to the aged. Then comes a detailed look at population changes between 1976 and 1986, including regional differences. An account of Niuean public sector responses to the plight of the elderly is followed by an in-depth examination of the availability and use of informal social supports. Investigation is made not just of household size and composition and of provision of care to the frail elderly, but also of regional differences and the impact of out-migration.

The analysis presented here gives a picture of Niue as it was during the period 1985-1986. Since then, socioeconomic change has both accelerated and changed direction. The island experienced a severe hurricane that destroyed many agricultural and other plans for economic advancement. The death of the premier, Sir Robert Rex, has resulted in a change in political leadership. Despite these events, though, life on Niue and the social processes discussed here continue in the same general vein as before.

Data come from several sources. Whenever data from published sources are used, an acknowledgment is made; unreferenced original data come from my examination of official records, surveys, or field notes.

Examined were a variety of published and unpublished government documents, historical and archival reports, and medical records, available on Niue or in New Zealand. Official Niuean census reports for 1976, 1981, 1984, and 1986 are major sources of information (Niue Government 1980, 1985, 1988). Data collected from Niue hospital for the period 1977-1982 are also presented.

Individual and household level demographic data were acquired in a formal survey of the health and well-being of Niuean elderly. A questionnaire was used to assess the living situation and social support available to a randomly selected sample of 50 percent of the Niueans aged 65 years or over on the island in October and November of 1985. Discussion of self-reported

health status and physical functioning of this elderly sample has appeared previously (Barker 1989); detailed demographic findings are reported here.

Twelve months of anthropological field research on the island in 1982 and 1983 generated much documentary, observational, and interview material (see Barker 1985, 1988, 1990). Although this research focused on an entirely different age group (on children), it was hard to overlook the elderly. Very often when I asked about children's health or welfare issues, people would breezily reply that children weren't a problem, but what were they going to do about their "oldies" (a term Niueans sometimes use to refer to older family members)? So, despite having many observations, notes, and informal interview comments about old people that enrich the documentary evidence, a sustained, systematic ethnography of older people's lives is lacking. Ethnographic research is necessary to answer many of the questions generated by this article. For example, what do these demographic changes mean to older people and to other Niueans? What is the nature of the interaction between old and younger people? Who actually does what for whom, when, where, and how often?

Answers to these and other important questions await research focused on such topics. This article, however, suggests what kinds of social processes are taking place and, therefore, are in need of special attention.

There is a general methodological caveat. In several distinct yet related ways, age is a problematic concept in this article.

The first way in which age is problematic is that age 65 years or above has been chosen as the marker of old age. Niueans would not necessarily agree with this choice. For them, old age is a matter of demeanor, ability, activity, and how socially engaged an individual is, rather than a numerical category (see also various chapters in Counts and Counts 1985). I have used the age 65-plus mark, however, because it is the most widely used marker in social gerontology, and using a standard convention makes comparisons easier. Choosing any other marker (e.g., age 60) would change certain details but not the overall shape or nature of findings in this study.

A second but related point is that accurate attribution of chronological age, especially old age, is difficult not just for Niueans but for all Polynesians. Old people alive now were born before birth registration was mandatory and before the Western system of reckoning dates was well known. Moreover, the only birthdays widely or publicly celebrated are the first and twenty-first. Celebration of first birthdays seems to have an origin in traditional times whereas recognition of twenty-first birthdays is a fairly recent importation from the Western world. Thus, many older people do not know their exact chronological age but estimate it by matching memory with particular historical events.

Just as Rubinstein described for another small Pacific population, the

Maloese in Vanuatu (1986), for Niueans aging is an individual rather than a group phenomenon. On Niue, social groups are distinguished primarily on the basis of gender and village affiliation. Except for children, age is not a salient basis on which to distinguish social groups. Unlike children, who are talked about as constituting a group, the aged do not make up a cohesive category in the thoughts of Niueans. Niueans know individual older people and how well or poorly they are doing, but they do not have a sense of there being a common process of aging applied to a group of people.

For Polynesians, too, age is less important than ability, for children as well as adults. Attention is paid more to whether a person is performing any particular role correctly than to his or her age (see, e.g., Rubinstein 1986). Further, age relative to other people and not age in some absolute chronological sense determines behavior. Thus, to understand deference and command behaviors, it is more important to know who is older or younger than whom than to know exact ages.

The social status of "elder" is achieved by all mature adults long before they reach chronological old age. Thus, civic "elderness" precedes numerical "elderliness" so that the role of elder is well established and much practiced well before age 65. Chronological old age, however, is a highly respected status, for "old-elders" are wise and experienced as well as politically powerful. Just as there is a tendency to elevate into "elder" status young adults who achieve precociously certain markers of elderhood (producing children, receiving university degrees, holding certain kinds of public office), so there is a tendency to inflate the chronological age of older elders. Combining civic "elderness" with chronological "elderliness" is a mark of respect.

Age inflation was a problem encountered, for example, in hospital records where a few older people with readmissions were given different ages at each admission (Barker 1988). Actual age, confirmed through discussion with the person and his or her family, or from other records, was usually within ten years of the alleged age. It seemed that more inflation took place of men's than of women's ages.

This report refers to age as if it were unproblematic. It must be kept in mind, however, that "old age" as used herein is a convention and an imprecise attribute, and that the idea that the elderly constitute a distinct social group is a concept fundamentally foreign to Niueans.

### **Niue Island and Its Demographic History**

An isolated, large raised island, some 600 kilometers south-southeast of Samoa and 500 kilometers east of Tonga, its nearest neighbors (Figure 1), Niue perches atop steep 75-meter-high cliffs rising out of deep ocean.

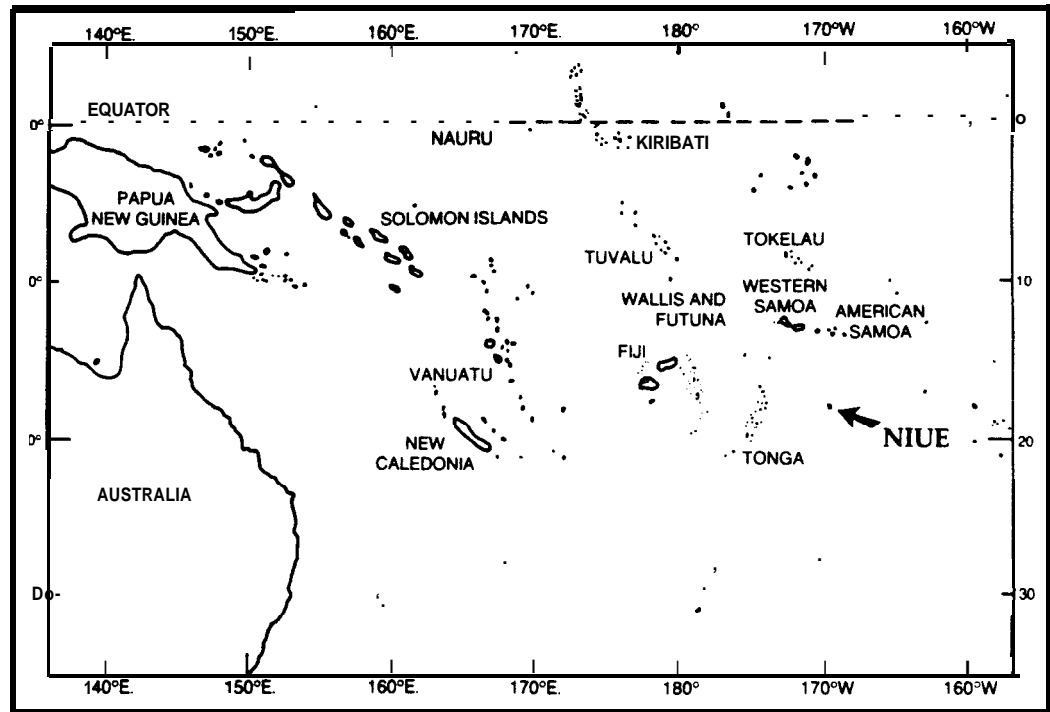


FIGURE 1. **Location of Niue island.**

Despite a lack of surrounding reefs or lagoons, fishing is an important supplemental activity to subsistence slash-and-burn agriculture. Principal crops are taro, tapioca, yam, sweet potato, and banana. The shallow soil, nestled in tiny pockets between jagged coral pinnacles, is fertile though difficult and labor-intensive to till. Secondary forest and bush still cover some 75 percent of the total land area of 260 square kilometers, providing important resources for continued hunting of pigeon, fruit bat, and land crab, and for the gathering of fern shoots. Situated on the edge of a hurricane belt, Niue is occasionally devastated by high winds and torrential rains. Lacking streams or ponds, the island is subject to periodic drought. Roof catchment and artesian bores provide water for domestic use.

Though its myths, prehistory, and early contact history are like those of neighboring states, Niue has a distinct language and contemporary history (Loeb 1926; Ryan 1977; Smith 1983). Daily life is similar to that of other Western Polynesian societies, although Niue has a more flexible social hierarchy with no hereditary chiefs, considerable egalitarian values, a strong work ethic, and an emphasis on individual achievement (Barker 1985; Ryan 1977; Pollock 1979).

There are 13 coastal villages situated on the main perimeter road. More villages are located on the leeward (west) than on the windward (east) coast

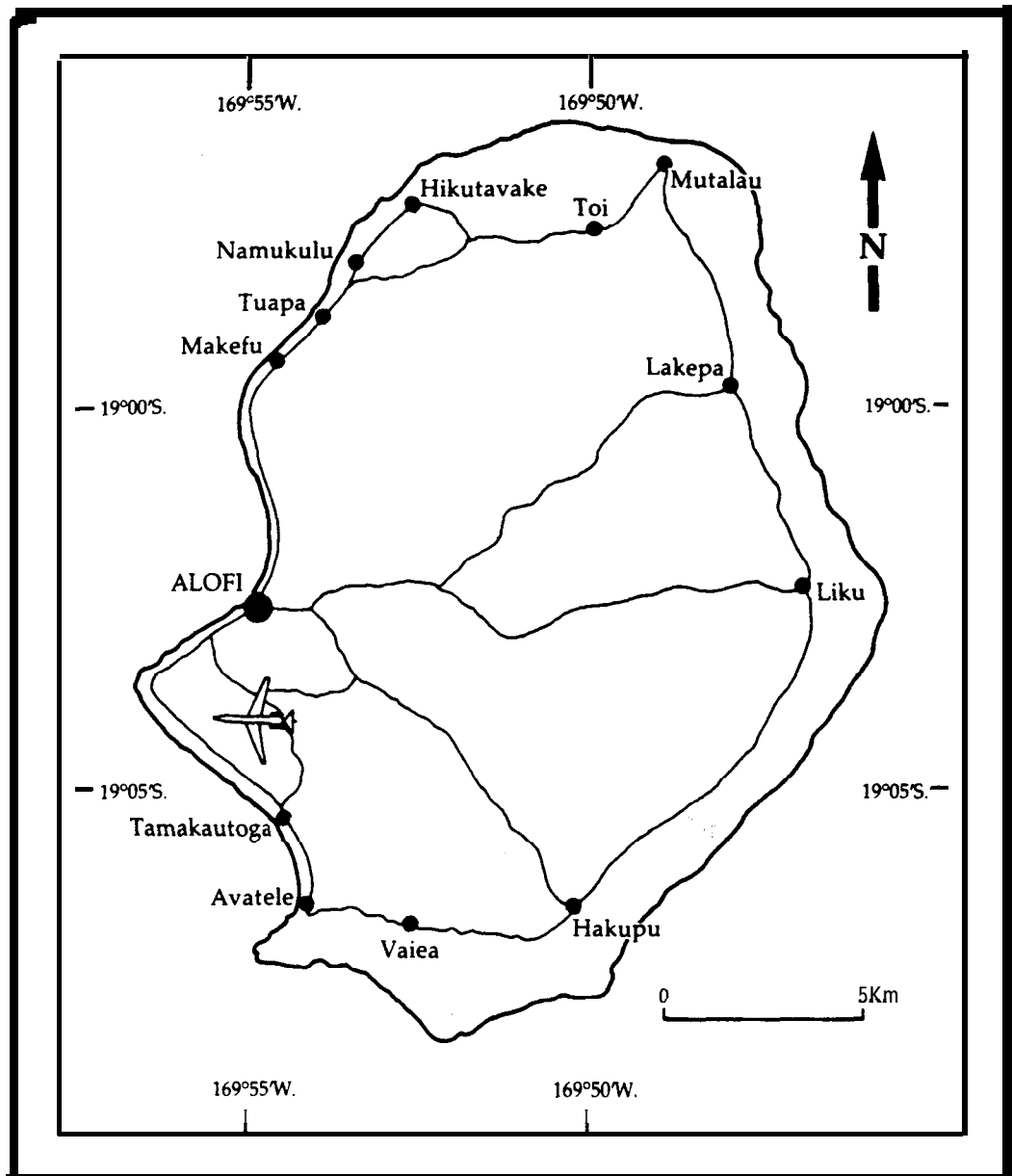


FIGURE 2. Niue island and its villages.

(Figure 2). The church is a central feature of life in the villages, not merely as a focus for religious activity but also as a fundamental institution in the social, political, and recreational arenas.

Samoan missionaries settled on Niue in 1846, the first European missionary not arriving until 1861. Although Cook visited Niue during his second voyage in 1774, Europeans did not proclaim sovereignty over this island until 1900 when Britain formally annexed it, handing it over the next year to New Zealand administration. The next major constitutional change took

place in 1974 when Niue became independent in free association with New Zealand, which remains responsible for providing Niueans with citizenship, for defense, and for foreign relations (Chapman 1976; Niue Government 1982b).

Niue's economy is unlike that of most neighboring Pacific nations, having recently shifted from being based primarily on agriculture to being heavily reliant on the provision of government services (Macpherson 1990:111). Over 75 percent of the adult population works for the Niuean government, for wages or salary (Connell 1983:6). Some cash cropping of passion fruit, limes, taro, and coconut for export as coconut cream and as copra provides additional money. Wages go toward the construction of hurricane-proof housing and the purchase of durable consumer goods, such as motorcycles, refrigerators, and washing machines (Pollock 1979). Niue thus enjoys a high standard of living compared to its nearest Pacific neighbors (Connell 1983).

At independence in 1974, Niue inherited a well-developed service and welfare infrastructure. In 1982-1983, the island had 130 kilometers of all-weather roads, an international airport with one flight a week to and from Western Samoa, satellite telecommunications with the wider world, a local radio station, and piped water and electricity available to all households. There were six schools, five elementary and one secondary. A 20-bed hospital was the center for all medical, dental, and pharmaceutical services.

Niue has been inhabited since ca. 120 B.P., colonized intermittently by successive waves of voyagers, most likely from Tonga and Samoa (Niue Government 1982b; Trotter 1979). The island has probably never supported a population greater than 5,000, because of the difficult terrain, the arduous nature of agriculture, constant warfare between settlements in the pre-European-contact period, endemic disease, and drought and hurricanes with resulting famines (Bedford, Mitchell, and Mitchell 1980).

Although periodic epidemics swept across the island throughout the last half of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth centuries, causing mortality rates to rise, there was no sustained decline in total population. An 1861 census by European missionaries Lawes and Pratt showed a total population of 4,700 (Niue Government 1988). Official censuses were first conducted by the New Zealand administration in 1901 and thereafter at five-year intervals, producing more high-quality population data than for any other Pacific nation (Bedford, Mitchell, and Mitchell 1980). Because of the small numbers involved and severe chance fluctuations, analysis of these data is difficult.

Between 1900 and 1930 Niue's population fluctuated around the 4,000 mark. From 1930 to 1960 slow but consistent growth was recorded, reaching a total population of 5,194 by 1966 (Niue Government 1980, 1988). Pop-

ulation loss due to migration was slight until 1970. Since then, permanent out-migration has been massive and continuing, despite persistent efforts by the Niuean government to entice Niueans back to the island. Unlike its neighbors, Niue's greatest recent worry has been depopulation, not overpopulation.

Temporary out-migration by youth for work was a common feature of Niuean life during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Niue Government 1982b, 1988). A census in 1884 revealed a total population of 5,070 on the island--and another 503 married men who were temporarily absent as contract laborers (Niue Government 1988). Population movement in the latter half of the twentieth century, however, is quite different. In each of the three five-year intercensal periods between 1971 and 1986, Niue lost a large proportion--nearly one-fourth, 23 percent--of its population. Between 1976 and 1981, the total population on Niue dropped by one-third (34 percent). This has been mainly due to permanent out-migration of unmarried youth and of adult married couples with young children (Bedford, Mitchell, and Mitchell 1980; Niue Government 1985, 1988). New Zealand has been the primary destination of Niuean migrants, who successfully occupy particular niches in the work force (Larner and Bedford 1993; Walsh and Trlin 1973). Smaller groups of Niuean migrants are also to be found in other Pacific societies, particularly Tonga, Western Samoa, and the Cook Islands (Rarotonga).

Analysts have pointed to several factors to explain the timing of these extreme levels of recent out-migration, why they did not occur until 1970. The first factor was pent-up demand for transport off the island. After years of negotiation and work, an airport was opened in 1971. Air transport was able to take from the island people who for a long time had wanted to leave but been unable to do so. The once-a-week flight was able carry many more passengers off-island than could the heavily overbooked monthly cargo steamer of former times (Bedford, Mitchell, and Mitchell 1980). A second factor was the devastation wrought by hurricanes in 1959 and 1960. Another factor was independence in 1974. Intense political factionalism, exacerbated by Niuean values of individual achievement and egalitarianism, and reports from migrants of an easier life in New Zealand, led to continued out-migration (Bedford, Mitchell, and Mitchell 1980; Chapman 1976; Niue Government 1985, 1988).

Other demographic change has occurred in recent years. The pattern of disease on Niue has changed to reflect greater occurrence of chronic disease, mortality rates have dropped, fertility rates have remained steady and high, and Niuean life expectancy has risen. When compared to migration, however, Bakker argues that the impact on population structure of these

demographic changes has been relatively unimportant (1980). More than any other demographic process, migration has affected the structure and composition of the contemporary Niuean population.

### **Effect of Migration on the Elderly**

Between 1976 and 1986, the *number* of elderly people (those aged 65 or more years) on Niue dropped by 69, from 247 to 178 individuals. This decline was due mainly to deaths ( $n = 52$  in the period 1978-1982 [Taylor, Nemaia, and Connell 1987]) and to the nonadvancement of late middle-aged people into the old age categories because they had moved off-island. Migration by the elderly themselves played a minor role. Between 1976 and 1981, 12 people aged 65 or more years migrated from Niue to New Zealand (Niue Government 1988), 3 being transferred to New Zealand for specialist medical treatment (Barker 1988).

A more important effect of permanent out-migration by youth and families, however, has been a steady rise in the *proportion* of elderly in the island population. Between 1976 and 1986, the proportion of elderly rose by 1.7 percent. In 1986, the 178 people aged 65 years or above comprised 8.1 percent of the total population of 2,199 Niueans (Niue Government 1988). This is very high compared to the proportion of elderly commonly found in underdeveloped Third World nations, which generally ranges between 3 and 5 percent (Hauser 1976; Hoover and Siegel 1986).

### *Aged Dependency*

One indicator of the impact of the increasing proportion of elderly is aged dependency, a measure of how many older people have to be supported by economically productive younger adults (that is, people aged 65 years or above per 100 people aged 15 to 64 years). In 1986, aged dependency on Niue reached 15.3. Again, this is very high for an underdeveloped nation, nearly three times the ratio commonly found in Third World nations (Hoover and Siegel 1986), and an increase over an already high level of 13.6 in 1976 (Niue Government 1980).

Aged dependency also measures the availability of younger adults to care for elderly people. The increase in aged dependency between 1976 and 1986 indicates that fewer working-age adults (effectively, kin) were available in the mid-1980s compared to the prior decade. Or, put another way, the same number of working adults had to support more older people in 1986 compared to 1976. So, compared to 1976, in 1986 Niue had more older people and fewer potential caregivers.



*Other Demographic Processes*

In the past few decades, Niue passed through not just a demographic transition but also an epidemiological transition (Taylor, Nemaia, and Connell 1987). Both transitions affect the elderly. Leading causes of death changed from being primarily acute, infectious, and potentially preventable to being chronic and degenerative in nature. Hypertension, diabetes, and other risk factors for cardiovascular disease are now prevalent, especially among males. Accidents, especially traffic accidents, are a leading cause of death, particularly for males (Barker 1988, 1993; Taylor, Nemaia, and Connell 1987).

Mortality rates on Niue have decreased in the past four decades and are now quite low, in 1980 reaching a crude mortality rate of under 10 per 1,000 total population (Bakker 1980; Taylor, Nemaia, and Connell 1987). Life expectancy has increased to the extent that for the period 1978-1982 average life expectancy at birth reached 66.5 years (Taylor, Nemaia, and Connell 1987), an improvement since the 1976 Niuean census that reported a life expectancy of around 62 years (Niue Government 1980). As is common elsewhere, females can expect to live longer than males, by about two years. Because more men than women die at younger ages, the sex ratio of older people on the island was 62.6 men for every 100 women, this imbalance being most noticeable after age 75 (Niue Government 1985). While the overall proportion (60 percent) of the elderly who are female has remained steady despite other demographic changes, the proportion of the aged who were very old--over age 75--increased markedly, by 8 percent between 1976 and 1986 (Table 1).

*Implications for Social Support*

Why are these important demographic changes? What are their implications for social support of Niuean elderly?

First, increasing life expectancy means more people will live to reach age 65 and also that more will likely reach age 75 or above. The older a person is, the more likely he or she is to experience declining health and increased functional impairment or disability, especially as chronic diseases become common (such as diabetes, hypertension, or renal disease). The sicker, more physically impaired, more dependent an individual, the more likely he or she is to need day-to-day assistance. Although women usually have more impairments than men, they generally live longer and require domestic assistance later than do men (Brody, Brock, and Williams 1987; Verbrugge 1984). Further, men usually require more assistance than women, especially with daily activities, such as cooking. Social support or day-to-day assistance

**TABLE 1. Elderly Population, Niue Island, 1976-1986**

Village	Total Pop. 1986	Intercensal Change in Pop. 1976-1986	Total Population, Age 65+				Difference in Elderly Pop., 1976-1986		Percentage of Age 65+ Pop. Who Were Female		Percentage Change in Female Elderly Pop., 1976-1986	Percentage of Age 65+ Pop. Who Were Age 75+		Percentage Change in Pop. Age 75+, 1976-1986
			1976		1986		%	N	%	1986		1976	1986	
			%	N	%	N								
Niue Island	2,199	-34.1	6.4	247	8.1	178	+1.7	-142	60	60	0	39	47	+8
Makefu	117	-9.4	6.7	9	7.7	9	+0.9	0	44	56	+12	22	33	+11
Tuapa	228	-18.7	8.3	24	9.6	22	+1.3	-2	63	55	-8	29	64	+35
Namukulu	53	-53.1	7.9	9	0	0	-7.9	-9	56	0	-56	33	0	-33
Hikutavake	116	-46.1	9.7	21	15.5	18	+5.8	-3	52	50	-2	24	39	+15
Toi	91	-36.8	7.6	11	6.6	6	-1.0	-5	73	67	-6	27	17	-10
Mutalau	186	-48.1	6.6	24	9.7	18	+3.1	-6	63	56	-7	42	56	+14
Lakepa	138	-35.9	5.0	11	8.7	12	+3.7	-1	45	67	+22	9	50	+41
Liku	111	-55.6	5.3	15	7.2	8	-1.9	-7	60	50	-10	7	63	+56
Hakupu	231	-32.6	7.5	27	9.5	22	-2.0	-5	67	73	+6	41	55	+14
Vaiea	36	-55.6	7.4	6	11.1	4	+3.7	-2	67	60	-7	67	20	-47
Avatele	179	-46.4	7.5	27	6.7	12	-0.8	-15	56	83	+27	59	25	-24
Tamakautoga	172	-42.8	6.4	20	7.6	13	+1.3	-7	65	54	-11	55	54	-1
Alofi	541	-14.9	4.5	43	6.3	34	+1.8	-9	60	56	-4	51	44	-7
Alofi South	256	-23.4	4.5	28	7.8	20	+2.5	-8	53	55	-2	46	50	+4
Alofi North	285	+1.2	4.5	15	4.9	14	+1.0	-1	73	57	-16	60	36	-24

Sources: Niue Government 1980: table 2; Niue Government 1988: table 1.2A.

can come either from informal sources, such as family and kin, or from formal sources, such as government programs.

Taken overall, demographic change on Niue reveals longer life expectancy, greater chronic illness, many more very old people (those aged 75 years or more), but no change in the already imbalanced sex ratio. This suggests a greater need for social support services, a need that will continue to increase in the future. This is being driven more by factors such as age, disease, and disability rather than gender. Aged dependency reveals a declining pool of younger people (kin) available to provide care or informal social support to frail elderly people. Potentially, then, in the future the public sector--the Niuean government--will have to increase both the number and scope of formal services it offers to ensure adequate care for frail elderly.

### *Regional Differences*

All villages on Niue have been affected by out-migration but not in the same way or to the same degree (see intercensal population-change data, Table 1). Nor has the effect on the elderly been uniform. Despite the relatively small size of the total population and of the island, different regions on Niue had quite distinct migration experiences (Table 2). Vaiea and Namukulu villages are very small, both having fewer than 100 residents in 1986, and experienced very large, chance fluctuations in population. Because of this, I omit these two villages in this discussion of regional differences.

*The West Coast.* Between 1976 and 1986 Alofi, the capital, and the other western coastal villages, Makefu and Tuapa, experienced the least population change of all regions on Niue.

The western region had the smallest mean decrease in total population and a small rise in the average proportion of elderly. There was also a considerable rise in the mean proportion of elderly who were very old (aged 75 years or more) but no change in the proportion who were female.

TABLE 2. **Demographic Change, by Region, Niue Island, 1976-1986: Percentage**

Region	Total Pop.	Total Elderly Pop.	Elderly Females	Elderly Age 75+
Niue Island	-34.1	+1.7	0	+8.0
West Coast	-14.3	+1.3	0	+13.0
South	-40.6	-0.5	+7.3	-3.7
Northeast	-45.3	+1.9	+0.6	+23.2

Sources: Niue Government 1980, 1988.

These are the largest, wealthiest, and most stable villages. Not only does this region encompass the seat of government and the residences of many senior government officials, but it is the leeward coast. Thus, access to the sea and therefore to fishing revenues is greater than elsewhere. Access to land for agricultural purposes, including supplementing income, is also relatively easy.

*The South.* Tamakautoga, Avatele, and Hakupu had a more mixed experience with respect to demographic change in the decade 1976-1986. Although these villages lost on average nearly 41 percent of total population, there was no rise in the mean proportion of elderly in the population. Moreover, the proportion of elderly who were very old decreased somewhat, although the mean proportion who were female rose sharply.

These are moderately wealthy villages, which have experienced considerable but not the greatest out-migration. Coastal access is difficult only for Hakupu; all villages have access to moderately productive land and agricultural pursuits. A variety of medium- to high-level government employees reside in these villages.

*The Northeast, the 'Back.'* Permanent out-migration has affected most severely the five villages in the Northeast, or as they are known on the island, "Back" villages--Hikutavake, Toi, Mutalau, Lakepa, and Liku. These villages generally experienced the biggest declines in total population between 1976 and 1986, losing on average almost half (45 percent) of their people. This region not only experienced the greatest rise in the mean proportion of the population who are elderly, but the proportion of elderly aged 75 years or more rose most precipitately, by a mean of +23 percent. In 1986, in three of the five Back villages, more than half the elderly were of an advanced age, 75 or more years. The proportion of elderly females increased very slightly.

Not only are these villages the most distant from Alofi, the center of commerce and government jobs, but they have a long history of economic disadvantage compared to other villages on the island. Throughout the 1970s the Northeast had the highest proportion of people living in poverty (Bakker 1980). Continued out-migration throughout the 1980s exacerbated the region's socioeconomic woes. Out-migrants from the Northeast did not always have an overseas destination in mind. Internal migration, from the Back villages to the West Coast, has been a feature of life on Niue since the mid-1970s (Bakker 1980). Youth seeking education and employment mobilize some of their more-distant kin ties to people in other parts of the island or marry and move to their spouse's village.

Nowadays, the Back villages are characterized as being poorer and the most traditional compared to the other villages. Ownership of consumer goods demonstrates this: For example, the 1986 census shows that 34 percent of the households on Niue are located in the Back villages but only 23 percent of the refrigerators, 21 percent of the electric washing machines, and 14 percent of the video/TV/VCR sets. In addition, 40 percent of the households who rely on open fires or traditional *umu* (earth ovens) for cooking are in the northeastern quadrant of the island (Niue Government 1988). Relatively few people living in these villages have high-paying government jobs. Coastal access is exceedingly difficult for three of these villages, which greatly reduces day-to-day subsistence and potential revenues from fishing pursuits. Money from weaving and other traditional handicrafts goes disproportionately to people in these villages, who derive a substantial part of their income from such occupations.

### **Public Sector Response: Formal Support Services**

Although children continue to make up about half the total population (Niue Government 1988), Niue's population is rapidly aging. Reasonably enough, until recently Niuean social and welfare policies have been aimed at improving and sustaining children's health and welfare. Now, however, the elderly comprise an important and growing population segment not just in size but also in need for resources. With an increased life span and chronic diseases that often lead to functional impairments, older people generally make disproportionate use of health and welfare services; for example, in the United States in the mid-1980s the elderly made up about 12 percent of the population but used 30 percent of health services (Brody, Brock, and Williams 1987; Verbrugge 1984). With continued aging of the population, increasing use of formal services by elderly Niueans is inevitable. In the future, public policymakers on Niue will have to reallocate health and welfare resources from children to the elderly.

Hauser identified income maintenance, housing, and health care as key formal services necessary to support the elderly in a modernizing society (1976). The government of Niue has been providing these three formal services for some time.

#### *Income Maintenance*

Poverty among the elderly was long noted by the island's administration. In 1958 an annual tax was instituted to provide relief funds for the indigent aged. This tax was later incorporated into the general financial structure

of the Niuean government, which has ever since been providing small pensions to elderly people (Pulea 1986). The pension is modest, about one-fifth the take-home pay of a low-level government employee such as an untrained nurses' aide.

#### *Housing Assistance*

Housing assistance takes the form of provision of government-owned small wooden huts, known as assembly units. Originally used as hurricane relief shelters, assembly units are now seen as a right for older people. The small rental fee for these units is sometimes deducted directly from the persons pension.

About 10 square meters in area, these "in-law apartments" or "granny flats" are placed near a main dwelling. Frail older people move to the small unit, maintaining independence yet relinquishing the burden of running a large household to their children or other kin who live nearby. Though they may no longer head the household, elderly people are still household members even though they might now live in a separate dwelling. Frequently, a grandchild is dispatched from the main dwelling to live with his or her grandparent(s), as a way of keeping kin ties "warm" and providing assistance.

#### *Medical Services*

At the time of my fieldwork, Niue was said to have "the best medical services in the Pacific" (Connell 1983; Walsh and Trlin 1973). These services are supported by massive financial aid from New Zealand and from international agencies, such as the World Health Organization (Connell 1983; Niue Government 1982a). As is common throughout Oceania, medical services are two-tiered (Newell 1983). A strong, centralized hospital tier run by health professionals supports a smaller and much weaker peripheral tier of district workers and clinics. Cases requiring specialists or urgent intensive care are evacuated by air, usually to New Zealand.

Alofi is the site of the 20-bed hospital complex, which has been in existence since 1922. This complex provides outpatient, X-ray, laboratory, pharmacy, and dental services. A mobile medical clinic staffed by a physician and a nurse visits each of the outlying villages four times a week, and an ambulance is always on call. All health-care services are provided free of charge. Per capita expenditure on health services in 1982 was NZ\$191, around 12 percent of the annual government budget (Niue Government 1982a). None of the four physicians attached to the Niuean Health Department has any

training in geriatric medicine beyond that given during basic coursework at the Fiji Medical School. Several of the 23 registered nurses, however, had worked in geriatric facilities for varying periods of time while in New Zealand (Barker 1985).

Documentation of older adults' use of outpatient services on Niue simply does not exist (Barker 1988). In the period 1977-1982, however, a total of 274 hospital admissions of Niuean elderly were made. They comprised about 8 percent of all hospital admissions in this period (Barker 1988). The elderly on Niue do not yet overuse medical services in comparison to their proportion in the total population.

No official institutional alternatives to hospitalization exist to provide long-term care to very frail elderly. Fourteen (5 percent) of geriatric admissions from 1977 to 1982 were for the unspecific admitting diagnosis "nursing care." Geriatric "nursing care" patients were all people aged 70 years or more, two-thirds of whom were men over age 80. Such patients generally remained in the hospital until their death, between three months and two and a half years later (Barker 1988). Although the establishment of a geriatric nursing home, similar to Mapuifagalele in Western Samoa (see Holmes and Holmes 1987), has been mooted in the past, so far the idea has received little public or governmental support.

In addition to providing medical services to elderly people on an emergency or routine basis, once a month the Health Department dispatches a public health nurse to check on all elderly people, especially those known to be frail or recently discharged from the hospital. The majority (79 percent) of elders surveyed in 1985 were on the public health nurse's "geriatric list" and were visited monthly. At the time of her visit, this nurse also distributes free skim-milk powder as a nutritional supplement.

### **Informal Support**

Although formal support services are vital and important for maintaining older people in the community, it is the private sector that actually provides the vast bulk (over 80 percent) of social support and care. Informal care in old age comes mainly from family (Stephens and Christianson 1986; Stone, Cafferata and Sangl 1987). This is especially true in developing nations (Nydegger 1983), where formal services for the elderly are likely to be rudimentary in scope and function, and very secondary in a public sector focused on providing a broad array of services for children. Elderly people without informal social support, especially family caregivers, are at risk of not receiving adequate care or, outside the Third World, of being institutionalized.

Women--wives and daughters--are the primary providers of day-to-day help (Stephens and Christianson 1986; Stone, Cafferata, and Sangl 1987). Because men experience greater mortality at younger ages than do women, more older men than women are likely to be married. Therefore, spouses who provide care tend overwhelmingly to be wives and not husbands. Like wives, daughters provide hands-on personal and instrumental care as well as emotional support. Sons do help their parents, but it is more likely to be assistance with finances, transport, or housing rather than day-to-day? personal care, meal preparation, or similar activities.

Compared to those with wives and daughters, frail older people without spouses or daughters are at risk of neglect. Equally at risk are people who live alone and have medical or functional (physical) conditions that compromise their ability to care for themselves.

Out-migration has reduced the number of younger adults present and able to provide care for elderly Niueans. The increasing dependency ratio is one sign of this. Other indications of the nature and consequences of out-migration on the availability of informal social support for the elderly comes from a structured survey conducted in 1985 of a randomly selected sample of half of all (126) elderly Niueans on the government pension list as of October 1984 (Barker 1989).<sup>1</sup>

#### *Survey of Niuean Elderly*

The survey sample comprised 21 males and 42 females. Their average age was 74.4 years ( $SD = 6.4$ , range 65-87). More than half (57 percent,  $n = 36$ ) were aged between 65 and 74 years, with 27 percent being between 65 and 69 years. Although 33 percent of the men were over age 80 whereas only 20 percent of women were this old, these differences were not statistically significant.

A relatively large portion of these 63 elderly people were healthy and active (Barker 1989). One-quarter (24 percent) reported having no medical problems and one-third (33 percent) experienced no diminution of functional abilities. Over half had vision or hearing problems. Respiratory conditions, arthritis, and diabetes were other common health conditions. Fifty percent claimed some form of limitation to functional ability or regular activity, decreased mobility being the most common impairment. Overall, 14 percent ( $n = 9$ ) of these older Niueans reported having four concurrent medical conditions and being multiply impaired.

Number and type of medical conditions were unrelated to sex, age, or functional status. Functional status, however, was significantly ( $p < .05$ ) related to both sex and age: Men were generally more impaired than



women, those aged 75 years or above were more impaired than those aged 65 to 74 years, and men aged 75-plus were more impaired than younger men (Barker 1989). Caution is needed in interpreting these data, however; findings with respect to very old men could result from age inflation, that is, the attribution of advanced chronological age to men disabled by many functional impairments.

Forty percent of the survey group were married, significantly more men (62 percent) than women (29 percent) (Fisher's Exact,  $p < .01$ ). Only 8 percent ( $n = 5$ ) had either never married or were divorced or separated. Just over half (52 percent) the respondents were widowed, most for longer than 10 years, some for as long as 45 years. Five individuals (three men and two women), however, were widowed less than two years. These people seemed to have adjusted to their new status without undue stress. Unlike in the industrial, modernized world where death of a spouse often occasions major change in housing or geographic location, the death of a spouse on Niue changed the household constellation relatively little. This may have been a protective factor. The relative weakness of the spousal bond compared to sibling ties could also protect the newly widowed from some bereavement trauma (Barker 1989).

Few offspring born to these elders remained on Niue, most having migrated to New Zealand or, occasionally, to other Pacific nations (Table 3). There was no relationship between the elder's age, sex, or marital status and the number or sex of offspring remaining on the island. Four men (21 percent of all men) and 13 women (32 percent of all women) had no children left on the island.<sup>2</sup>

Altogether, 67 percent of the sample had at least one son and 60 percent had at least one daughter in New Zealand; 15 percent had four or more sons

TABLE 3. **Children Born to Niuean Elderly and Children Remaining on Niue Island, 1985**

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Total children born	5.5	3.2	0-16
Total children left on Niue Island <sup>a</sup>	1.7	1.5	0-6
Sons born	3.0	2.5	0-10
Sons in New Zealand	1.6	1.8	0-7
Daughters born	2.5	2.0	0-9
Daughters in New Zealand	1.3	1.4	0-6

Source: Author's survey, 1985.

<sup>a</sup>Excludes five children (primarily sons) who had died, not moved away from Niue.

and 6 percent four or more daughters in New Zealand. Thirteen percent had at least one son residing off Niue but not in New Zealand: 6 percent had a daughter living in some place other than Niue or New Zealand.

Overall, then, the availability of (actual and potential) caregivers to frail elderly has decreased since 1976. In 1985, compared to men, women have fewer primary caregiving resources, that is, fewer spouses and fewer children remaining on the island.

### *Households*

Defining a household on Niue is far from straightforward. Dwellings belonging to a *magafaoa* or related kin group are usually clustered together on contiguous parcels of land within the village boundary. Several different family units, all members of the same *magafaoa* or extended kindred, reside in these dwellings. Thus, one's neighbors are usually also one's kin, though not necessarily close kin. Dwellings, and the land associated with them, are assigned to individual family units within the *magafaoa*. Large *magafaoa* contain several distinct but related households composed of various families, that is, combinations of married couples and their offspring, distantly attached adults or children, and visiting kin, spread over a several generations. People who share a hearth, a cooking *umu*, or other domestic utilities are usually regarded as belonging to the same household; an extended family, scattered across several dwellings, can still form a single household based around a common hearth and a stable core of family members, such as a grandparental couple (Barker 1985; Pollock 1979).

If older people keep a separate hearth, they are living in a different household but within the same family. If they do not keep a separate hearth, as often happens as older people become more and more frail, they are thought of as residing separately, especially if they move to an assembly unit or to another dwelling away from the central hustle-and-bustle generated by young children.

*Size.* The average number of other persons in the household in which the aged lived was 2.7 ( $SD = 2.6$ , range 0-12). Just over half (56 percent,  $n = 35$ ) the respondents lived with two or more people. For men, the more children still on Niue the greater the number of persons lived with (Pearson's  $r = .79$ ,  $p < .0001$ ); this association did not hold for women.

Nine (14 percent) elderly Niueans lived alone, seven in assembly units. The proportion of the total population living alone remained steady at 2 percent between 1976 and 1986. Figures are not available for how many elderly lived alone in 1976, but in 1986 the proportion living alone was considerably

higher than for the rest of the population. Of course, what living alone means here is different from what it means in an urbanized, Western nation. Living alone on Niue usually means not sharing a dwelling with another person while having that dwelling located near--within calling distance of--other people, usually close (lineal) km. Only three of the nine elderly living on their own, however, had close kin next door: Six lived near people who were collateral kin (e.g., niece or cousin) or who were simply described as "neighbors."

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s medical officers reported that older people living on their own tended to be in far worse medical and physical condition than those living with others. This was no longer true in the mid-1980s. Among older people surveyed, living alone was not significantly related to medical or physical condition (Barker 1989).

*Composition.* Spouses and children played prominent roles in the constellation of households containing elderly respondents, as Table 4 documents.

A respondent's age was unrelated to his or her marital status, number of other persons lived with, or household membership. The elder's sex and marital status, however, affected greatly the number of others in the household and their relationship to the respondent.

TABLE 4. **Size and Composition of Households with Elderly Members, Niue Island, 1985 (N = 63)**

	Total Number	Subtotal
Number of others in household		
Mean	2.7	
Standard deviation	2.6	
Range	0-12	
Composition		
Older person lives alone	9 (14%)	
Lives with one other	19 (30%)	
Spouse		9
Child		5
Other		5
Lives with more than one other	35 (56%)	
Spouse + child(ren) + grandchild(ren)		16
Child(ren) + grandchild(ren)		10
Grandchild(ren) + their child(ren)		7
Other relative		2

Source: Author's survey, 1985.

Consider further, for example, the elderly people who lived on their own. Only one man lived on his own. A widower, he had no children currently living on the island. Eight widowed women also lived on their own. Only three of those women had no children on Niue; the other women had up to four children on the island but had chosen to remain independent and live by themselves.

Spouses formed the basis of the household for the majority (96 percent) of married elderly people. Such households were often extended through the presence of several grown children (plus one or more sons-in-law or daughters-in-law) and grandchildren. Many more daughters than sons were members of elderly people's households. Adopted daughters or step-daughters were important household members for 10 percent of the elderly.

Of the elderly whose spouses had died, nine (26 percent of widowed people) lived in households with grandchildren. Just one married elderly person (4 percent of married people) lived with a grandchild and his offspring. At the time of the survey, this man's wife had been visiting their children in New Zealand for a few months but it was unclear whether her stay there was to be temporary or permanent. The couple faced several options. The wife could return to Niue soon, could stay in New Zealand for a number of years to help her children with household tasks and later return to Niue, or could decide not to return to Niue at all. If she did not return soon, the husband might or might not decide to join her.

No kin other than direct lineal descendants were present in the households of married elderly people, whereas those who were widowed frequently formed or joined households with collateral or distant kin. Four (11 percent) widowed respondents, for example, lived in households made up of their equally-old siblings or the offspring of siblings. In general, then, elderly people on Niue live in multiperson households composed mainly of spouses and offspring, with social ties extending across several generations. Children who remain on the island, and their offspring, not only tend to form the basic households in which many elderly live but they also serve as important sources of help and assistance for people who require help.

*Internal Migration.* Migration within Niue appears low, in keeping with the somewhat matrifocal, endogamous nature of the village. Only seven (11 percent) elderly people regarded themselves as having lived for any substantial period of time in a village other than the one in which they were surveyed. Internal migration by elderly women was very different in nature from internal moves by elderly men.

Four internal migrants were women who had changed villages upon

marrying some 35 or more years previously. A recent move was made by a woman who accompanied her husband to his natal village upon his retirement and relinquishment of a government-supplied house in Alofi.

One 67-year-old man and his wife had returned to Niue after being in New Zealand for many years, during which time they supervised their children's household. Once the education of their New Zealand-domiciled grandchildren was complete they returned, not to their natal village but to live with a daughter in her husband's village. Another male who migrated internally was an 87-year-old widower whose only child, a son, lives in New Zealand. A long-standing dispute with in-laws in a West Coast village recently turned bitter and resulted in his moving to an assembly unit on his cousin's property in the South. The future does not look bright for him, as he is in only fair health, needs personal assistance on a day-to-day basis, and is no longer able to engage in any form of productive work. He is exactly the kind of person liable to be neglected should he become more physically frail or decrepit (see Barker 1990).

*Regional Differences.* Differences by region in household size and composition are not great (Table 5). However, these differences demonstrate that compared to other regions, in the villages of the West Coast substantially more older people live alone or live with more than one other person. That is, immediate access to social support is different for the elderly in each region. Further, 25 percent of older people in the Northeast and 14 percent in the South live not as expected with a female relative but with a grandson. On the West Coast, however, the elderly reside with women--wives, daughters, or granddaughters.

TABLE 5. **Size and Composition of Households with Elderly Members, by Region, Niue Island, 1985 (N = 63)**

	West Coast (n = 21)	South (n = 22)	Northeast (n = 20)
<b>Size</b>			
Mean	3.5	3.7	3.1
Standard deviation	3.0	2.4	1.8
Range	1-12	1-10	1-7
<b>Composition</b>			
Lives alone	5 (24%)	2 (9%)	2 (10%)
Lives with one other	3 (14%)	7 (32%)	9 (45%)
Lives with more than one other	13 (62%)	13 (59%)	9 (45%)

Source: Author's survey, 1985.

*Caregiving*

Maintenance of social roles and the ability to perform personal-care tasks and provide for basic daily subsistence needs are major aspects of life. Not all Niuean elderly were able to undertake these activities independently.

*Personal Care.* No elderly Niuean claimed to need assistance with eating, bathing, toileting, dressing, or general grooming. The public health nurse, however, noted that though the individuals themselves made no such claims, four (6 percent) people needed reminding about personal hygiene.

*Subsistence Needs.* Of the 63 people surveyed, 40 percent ( $n = 25$ ) said they needed help with subsistence or domestic tasks. Eighteen people (29 percent) received help with cooking only while a further seven (12 percent) required assistance with both obtaining food and drink and with cooking. Significantly more men (62 percent) than women (28 percent) needed assistance with domestic chores (Fisher's Exact,  $p < .01$ ). This is not surprising. Although it is not uncommon for a man to engage in household chores, there are nevertheless differing sex-role expectations that result in men's having less practice than women at performing domestic chores.

Though a few dwellings on Niue have indoor electric ranges, most households use either a charcoal stove or the traditional earth oven, usually located in a separate but nearby hut. These cooking methods require considerable physical agility to heat the charcoal or stones and to cover and uncover the cooking pit. Elderly people received help with cooking from relatives with whom they lived or from kin in neighboring houses.

*Social Activities.* Activities that signal an elders continuing social involvement are the performance of tasks that contribute to the economy of the general household or extended family group, such as minding children, picking up rubbish, preparing food, weaving mats, and so forth (see also Rubinstein 1986). Almost all elderly people in the sample, 89 percent ( $n = 55$ ), performed at least one domestic task on a regular basis (at least once a week). Three respondents undertook domestic activities less frequently and five performed no tasks. Of all males, 19 percent ( $n = 4$ ) no longer did any household chores, whereas all females still engaged in some domestic activities, a difference that is significant (Fisher's Exact,  $p < .01$ ).

As is common in contemporary Polynesian societies, the church is the center not just of religious but also of village life. One of the most important social activities Niueans undertake is attendance at weekly church services. The majority (71 percent,  $n = 45$ ) of elderly maintained social involvement

in their community by attending church every week. There was a significant difference in church attendance by sex (Fisher's Exact,  $p < .02$ ), more males (38 percent,  $n = 8$ ) than females (12 percent,  $n = 5$ ) rarely attending church. Nonchurchgoers tended to be over age 75.

One important contribution that the elderly make to their community is using their knowledge of local history and lore to settle land boundary and ownership disputes (see also Rubinstein 1986). Explaining present family and land connections through past kin ties and land ownership or use is an important social function. Another social role indicating continued social engagement, and one reserved largely for the elderly of either sex, is that of traditional healer or *taulaatua*. Relatively secret and officially discouraged (Niue Government 1982a), the practice of traditional medicine is similar in many respects to that described for other Polynesian societies (Parsons 1985).

*Care Recipients.* Approximately half the elderly receiving care are male (Table 6). As a group, female care recipients are around five years younger than male care receivers. Although this is a statistically significant difference ( $p < .05$ ), it probably reflects inflation of men's ages rather than an actual difference in age between frail older males and females.

The proportion of elderly in each region frail enough to receive care

TABLE 6. **Elderly Care Recipients and Their Caregivers, by Region, Niue Island, 1985**

	West Coast	South	Northeast
<b>Care Recipients</b>			
Number	6	9	10
Percentage of region's total elderly	29	41	50
Mean age in years	77.2	73.8	80.3
Standard deviation	5.3	5.7	7.0
Age range in years	74-82	70-85	65-87
Percentage male	50	44	60
<b>Caregivers</b>			
Wives	2	3	3
Husbands	0	2	1
Daughters	2	3	2
Sons	1	0	2
Other	1	1	2
Percentage preferred primary caregiver (wife or daughter)	67	67	50

Source: Author's survey, 1985.

increases in parallel with the degree of out-migration from each region (compare Tables 2 and 6). The relatively stable West Coast region, which sustained least out-migration, has the smallest proportion of elderly receiving care whereas the Northeast, which sustained the most out-migration, has the greatest proportion of elderly receiving daily care and assistance. The sex and age of people receiving care varies slightly by region, the oldest being in the Northeast. This is consistent with the high number of very old people who live in this region.

*Caregivers.* For just over half the cases (60 percent), wives or daughters were primary caregivers to frail older people. This is a considerably lower proportion than is found in Western countries, such as the United States, where around 80 percent of informal care is provided by these two classes of caregiver. Preferred primary caregivers, that is, wives or daughters, are most common in the West Coast villages on Niue and least common in the Northeast (see Table 6). Again, this parallels the level of out-migration from each region. Husbands play prominent caregiving roles in the South as do sons in the Northeast. In all regions on Niue, between 10 and 20 percent of frail elderly receive care from relatives other than spouses or offspring.

In summary, then, those elderly in need of daily care receive it primarily from women: wives and daughters. There is some variation by region. In the Northeast, which experienced greatest population loss between 1976 and 1986, not only do proportionately more older people need care but this care is more often delivered by people who are not preferred primary caregivers.

### **Effects of Out-Migration on Informal Social Support**

To examine further the impact of permanent out-migration by young adults and their children on the elderly's access (potential and realized) to informal social support, the sample was split into groups representing extremes--those elderly with few and those with many children remaining on Niue. The question is: How does a diminution in resources for informal support affect the elderly and their living arrangements? By comparing elderly with few and with many children remaining on the island, this question can be answered. The Few group comprised elderly people with a low proportion (25 percent or less) of their still-living children left on Niue; the Many group had a high proportion (75 percent or more) of their living children left on Niue.

There was no significant association between the elder's age or sex and the number of children remaining on the island (i.e., whether they were in the Few or Many group). Consistent with expectations generated by census



figures, more people (54 percent) in the Few group than in the Many group (20 percent) come from the five Back villages, although there were no statistically significant differences in village affiliation between these two groups. Nor was the village affiliation in these groups different from that of the entire sample.

The Few group totaled 20 people, 4 (20 percent) males and 16 women. Most (60 percent) were under age 75. Generally, the people in this group were healthy and active; 45 percent still engaged in productive activity in the bush gardens, and almost all (90 percent) still attended church on a weekly basis.

Of the five men and five women in the Many group, the majority (70 percent) were between ages 65 and 74; 20 percent still engaged in heavy activity, such as bush gardening; and 60 percent went to church on a regular basis.

The size and composition of households in which the elders of both groups lived is one indication of the impact of out-migration on informal social support availability. Informal social support decreased between 1976 and 1986, most affecting the Back villages, men, and the very old.

#### *Size of Household*

Overall, significantly ( $p < .0006$ ) fewer people lived in the Few group's households than in the Many's (Table 7). On average, elderly individuals with few children left on Niue lived with three fewer people than did elderly with many children left on the island.

TABLE 7. **Household Size and Composition: Elders with Few and with Many Children Remaining on Niue Island, 1985**

	Elderly with Few Children ( $n = 20$ )	Elderly with Many Children ( $n = 10$ )
Size*		
Mean	2.2	5.6
Standard deviation	1.5	3.3
Range	1-7	1-12
Composition <sup>†</sup>		
Older person lives alone	7 (35%)	1 (10%)
Lives with one other--spouse only	6 (30%)	0 (0%)
Lives with more than one other	7 (35%)	9 (90%)

Source: Author's survey, 1985.

\*ANOVA,  $p < .0006$  †  $\chi^2$ ,  $p < .005$

In both groups, people aged 75 or more years lived with significantly fewer people than did those aged 65 to 74 years (mean = 1.5,  $SD = 1.2$ , range 0-3 versus mean = 3.0,  $SD = 3.2$ , range 0-12; t-test  $F(22, 13) = 7.797$ ,  $p < .004$ ). Moreover, women aged 75 or more years lived in significantly smaller households than did other women in the two groups (mean = 1.3,  $SD = 1.0$ , range 0-3 versus mean = 2.7,  $SD = 3.4$ , range 0-12; t-test  $F(17,6) = 12.848$ ,  $p < .005$ ).

#### *Composition of Household*

Not surprisingly, for the Few and Many groups, an elderly individual is significantly more likely to live alone if widowed (46 percent) than if married (7 percent) (Fisher's Exact,  $p < .02$ ). The proportion of widowed and married people, however, did not vary significantly between these two groups. Three people in the Few group and two in the Many group lived in assembly units; all but one of these individuals was widowed.

People in the Few group are significantly more likely than those in the Many group to live alone (Kruskal Wallis  $H = 7.833$ ,  $p < .005$ ). Seven of the total number of elderly living alone ( $n = 9$ ) have few children remaining on Niue. Over half (54 percent) the married people in the Few group live just with their spouses, whereas no married person in the Many group lived with just a spouse. Most in the Many group live in households containing children or grandchildren. It is no surprise then to learn that only about one-third (35 percent) of the Few group lives with more than one other person whereas most (90 percent) people in the Many group live with more than one other (see Table 7).

People in the Few group are different in some important respects from their counterparts in the Many group. Those with few kin left tend to report themselves as being healthier and more active than those with many kin remaining. With fewer close kin around to help out, these people have to stay active and fend more for themselves--or at least claim to be active and able.

A total of 11 people in both groups receive daily help with personal or household chores, 7 (35 percent) in the Few group and 4 (40 percent) in the Many group. People in the Few group relied less on wives and daughters and more on distantly related kin to provide care than did people in the Many group. This clearly demonstrates that after young married adults or unmarried youth have migrated from Niue, frail older kinspeople left behind rely on more distant relatives for care.

*The Importance of Daughters*

On a societal level, there has been no change in the sex ratio produced by out-migration. Exactly the same proportion of males and females--34 percent--departed from Niue between 1976 and 1986 (Niue Government 1988). However, as not every person produces the same number of sons and daughters, the impact of a son's versus a daughter's departure can be very different.

Indeed, for people in both groups there is a significant association between the ratio of daughters-to-sons and the proportion of offspring remaining on Niue. In these two groups, compared with those who had mainly sons, elderly people who had either the same number or more daughters than sons were significantly more likely to have most of their children still in residence on Niue (Fisher's Exact,  $p < .03$ ). If an elder had more daughters than sons, he or she was more likely to be in the Many group than in the Few group, that is, to have more than 75 percent of his or her offspring still on the island.

The impact of this differential access to daughters is quite widespread. It affects the size of the household in which the elder resides, its composition, and, of course, the availability of a preferred primary caregiver in times of sickness or frailty. On Niue, as elsewhere in the world, it is women--wives and daughters--who are the preferred primary caregivers and who daily provide the majority of care to the frail elderly.

Unlike elderly men, most elderly women are widowed and are unlikely to remarry. Therefore, women generally have no spouse to care for them, and so must rely even more on daughters or more distantly related kin.

*Adoption*

Adoption of a girl is a mechanism that can increase the ratio of daughters-to-sons. Parents sometimes ask if they can adopt a grandchild as repayment for the years devoted to bringing up their own offspring and for company (Barker 1985; see also various chapters in Counts and Counts 1985). This is overtly acknowledged to be a way of ensuring the availability of a young, able-bodied person to do household chores and provide care in old age (Barker 1985). Adopted children, *tama hiki*, girls especially, are explicitly and repeatedly reminded of the strong moral obligation they have to care for their adoptive parents. Adoption also demonstrates that although the physical strength or functional ability of an older person may be declining, he or she retains an important social competence, namely, the ability to raise chil-

dren. Niueans generally make only a slight distinction between long-term fostering and adoption of a child. Customary adoption (long-term fostering or *de facto* adoption) and legal adoption (*de jure* adoption) both carry the same moral and social obligations between generations. Adoption, then, is more than a way of cementing the biological and social ties between generations; it is also intended to ensure care in old age.

Throughout their adult life, women are more likely than men to adopt, and to adopt close female kin (Barker 1985:330-353). Although it is a married couple who legally adopts a child, in fact most customary and legal adoptions are initiated by only one person usually a woman. Of 33 legal adoptions recorded on Niue in 1981 and 1982, 75 percent were adoptions made through the biological mother's parents, female siblings, or more distant female kin. Three times as many girls as boys were adopted by the mothers parents; boys were significantly more likely (Fisher's Exact,  $p < .03$ ) to be adopted by distant paternal kin.

In old age, then, women are more likely than men to have a favorable daughter-to-son ratio and therefore to live in larger, multigeneration households and be given care by daughters rather than by sons or more distant kin. This is yet another reason why women are less likely to be abandoned or neglected in old age than are men: Men are more likely to have no daughter to care for them (Barker 1990).

In 1985, 10 percent (six) of the surveyed elderly were either living with or being cared for by adopted children. Four of these six were care recipients, were women, and lived mainly with their adopted daughters.

### **Adequacy of Care: The Decrepit Elderly**

Do all elderly Niueans who need informal social support receive adequate care? The short answer is: No. In general, elderly people who are still active and relatively intact or engaged (in physical, mental, and social senses) receive better care and more adequate informal social support than do elders who are becoming decrepit, that is, are becoming physically frail, cognitively impaired, or socially withdrawn (see also various chapters in Counts and Counts 1985). Frequently, decrepit elders on Niue are neglected (Barker 1990).

In 1982-1983, only about 5 percent of the elderly on Niue were very frail or decrepit (Barker 1990). Decrepit elderly tended to be very old, widowed, and living alone, with severe mobility impairments, multiple sensory losses, and very limited or no social roles. They also tended to be male, childless, of a fractious disposition that created conflicts within the kin group, or recently returned from a decades-long period overseas (Barker 1990). The differ-

ence between intact elderly and decrepit elderly is even signaled linguistically. Regardless of chronological age, *ulu motua*, "gray-haired one," is used to refer to a socially active and mentally able elderly man whereas *penu-penu-fonua* or *mutumutu-fonua*, "grayfish of the land," is a graphic if rather morbid metaphor describing decrepit, physically and mentally frail old men.

Some decrepit people--predominantly very old men--end up in the hospital for "nursing care" (Barker 1988). Total abandonment of frail old people no longer occurs, and neglect is not absolute. Compared to intact elders, very frail people still living in the community receive less frequent visits from kin and less adequate nutrition, clothing, or psychosocial care. Unlike the intact elderly, decrepit elderly on Niue are no longer personally in control of essential resources.

On Niue, abandonment or neglect of the very frail elderly is not new and not a response to rapid depopulation. Rather, it has been noted by various commentators since the early twentieth century (Barker 1990). It is a behavioral response to the liminal status of the very frail, decrepit elderly, to their impending transition from frail elder living in this world to an ancestor residing in some supernatural domain. Neglect is a form of distancing--from the disquieting manifestations of decrepitude, from supernatural contamination, and from the emotional upheaval caused by death, an expected but nonetheless difficult social process (Barker 1990). Having an elder live alone is yet another means of literally and figuratively distancing younger kin from the potentially noxious influence of the supernatural world as the very frail journey to the next world.

### **Conclusion**

Since 1976, there has been massive, sustained out-migration from Niue island. More than other demographic or epidemiologic processes, migration has fashioned the structure and composition of the contemporary population. The permanent loss of youth and young married adults with children has resulted in an increase in the proportion of elderly in the population, especially in the Northeast (i.e., the Back villages), which has experienced the greatest overall population loss. The elderly now comprise over 8 percent of Niue's population, and aged dependency, at 15.3, is very high. Moreover, the elderly population is increasingly composed of the very old, those aged 75 years or more.

Compared with previous decades, older Niueans now have fewer children, grandchildren, or other kin left on the island. People for whom the majority of their children have migrated away from Niue tend to live in smaller households--even to live alone--and to have less access to or con-

trol over essential resources. Older men are more likely than older women to be frail and in need of care on a daily basis, to not engage in social activity (especially church attendance) or household chores, and to be neglected should they become frail or decrepit.

As elsewhere, on Niue females rather than males are the preferred primary caregivers. Wives and daughters carry the responsibility of providing care to physically or cognitively impaired older people. Compared to those with few daughters, the elderly with many daughters or with more daughters than sons more frequently receive care from close lineal kin. In old age, women are more likely than men to have a favorable daughter-to-son ratio because of a lifetime propensity to adopt younger female relatives.

In the near future, the elderly population on Niue will become proportionately even larger and more physically frail and dependent. This will further strain shrinking familial resources and a social welfare and medical system still geared towards acute, infectious disease and children. As the informal support system or private sector--the family--becomes burdened by increasing aged dependency, then the public sector will have to expand formal supports to older Niueans. Increased financial, social welfare, and medical services will be needed.

The social processes of aging on Niue are similar to those described for other Pacific societies (see, e.g., Rubinstein 1986). In Pacific societies generally, mature older people are not recognized as forming a distinct social group whereas frail, decrepit elderly individuals are so categorized (see, e.g., various chapters in Counts and Counts 1985; Barker 1990; Donner 1987; Rubinstein 1986). In Pacific societies, role and status in old age are not ascribed, nor are they functions of chronology or relative age; rather, role and status in old age are achieved and situationally defined. Older people strive to make old age a prolongation of maturity rather than a slide into decrepitude and death. Elders who are engaged, vital, active community participants generally fare better than do decrepit elders, physically or cognitively frail individuals who are no longer socially engaged.

Population numbers for Niue are small and therefore subject to large chance fluctuations, which makes interpretation somewhat difficult. It would appear, however, that on Niue the inextricably entwined processes of modernization and migration have had a considerable impact on the living situation of the elderly, changing household size and composition in ways that reduce the amount of informal support available to elderly family members. This study suggests that closer examination is needed of migration, that ubiquitous process throughout the Pacific region. Investigating the impact of migration on specific subsets of a population, such as the elderly, will produce new insights not only into the nature and form of contemporary

Oceanic societies but also into the public policy tasks confronting the formal (government) and informal (family) sectors, especially with respect to the provision of financial, social welfare, and medical services.

### NOTES

1. Nine elderly non-Niueans on Niue during the 1986 census have been excluded entirely from this analysis.

It is difficult to know precisely how many Niuean elderly were on the island in any specific year because various official sources give slightly different figures. For example, the census carried out in 1986 records a total of 178 Niuean elderly (Niue Government 1988: table 1.2A). This figure is higher than the government's old-age pension list, a list of 126 people compiled in October 1984. It is reasonable to expect the 1986 numbers to be *lower* than the 1984 numbers, because of deaths and, possibly, out-migration of elderly people. That this is not the case could result from several processes: (a) back-migration to Niue by 1986 of elderly people who had been resident elsewhere in 1984; (b) exclusion from the pension list of elderly who for some reason did not meet eligibility requirements; and (c) enumeration or counting errors in the 1986 census. A combination of some or all of these factors most likely accounts for the apparent increase in elderly between 1984 and 1986. Back-migration by the elderly does occur but in small numbers and infrequently. Few Niueans would not meet the eligibility criteria for a pension, which are that a person be a permanent resident of Niue and a New Zealand citizen, and be aged 65 years or more if male and 60 years or more if female (Pulea 1986). Census miscount is always possible but the procedures for enumeration and checking effectively minimize this. The "confidentiality assurance technique of randomly rounding census statistics to base three" preserves accuracy of data without compromising privacy but does occasionally result in "a total disagreeing slightly with the total of the individual items as shown in the tables" (Niue Government 1988:25). While the absolute number of elderly at any point in time might be unknown, the proportion of elderly in the population, and the general size and composition of this group, is well known and essentially the same across differing sources of information.

The government pension list was used for the survey as it was the only available document that both reliably affirmed a person's status as elderly and reported that individuals name and village of residence. Of the 126 names appearing on the list, a representative sample of half was randomly drawn by selecting every second name.

2. Because some individuals did not answer every question completely, denominator data vary slightly from analysis to analysis. Percentages are calculated on the basis of the number of people who supplied usable responses rather than on the total number in the survey.

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## **CHANGING PATTERNS OF COMMITMENT TO ISLAND HOMELANDS: A CASE STUDY OF WESTERN SAMOA**

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This article uses remittances as a measure of the commitment of migrants and their children to communities of origin. The article outlines patterns of remittances and argues that there is no single unilinear shift in either migrants' or their children's commitment to the "island home." Rather, a range of commitment diverges over time as migrants review the value of maintaining links with communities of origin. Case studies are used to point to connections between certain factors that shape migrants' assessments and their remittance patterns. Possible consequences for the state of Western Samoa, which has come to depend on these remittances, are also considered. The article is based on data from Western Samoan migrants in New Zealand, but the factors identified may have more-general relevance in understanding orientations of other Pacific Islander migrant populations to their communities of origin and the consequences of changing patterns for those communities.

MIGRANTS' COMMITMENTS to their communities of origin may rest on complex emotional and social foundations. These assume considerable analytical and practical significance. Analytically, it is useful to establish how various foundations influence the character and durability of migrants' relations with their communities of origin. Practically, it is useful to understand how the foundations of migrants' links influence their willingness to invest financial, intellectual, and social capital in those communities. The bases of commitment to communities of origin may assume considerable practical significance for those concerned with planning and policy making in both the states from and to which migrants move. The volume and sustainability of migrant remittances to a number of Pacific states have become immensely important factors in national social and macroeconomic policy (Loomis 1990; Ahlburg 1991; Macpherson 1991; World Bank 1991).

These foundations are of considerable academic and practical significance but are not easily operationalized: establishing satisfactory indices of commitment is problematical. Attitudinal measures on their own are unsatisfactory. Communities of origin often assume considerable importance in economically and socially marginalized migrant populations in urban industrial societies. This theme is evident in novels, for instance, such as Albert Wendt's *Sons for the Return Home*, in which a Samoan family lives in self-imposed exile in New Zealand, suffering various privations as they prepare for their return to the village. Similar sentiments are evident in poetry and popular music. In various popular Samoan songs the village is portrayed as the place in which people live correctly, behave well to one another, and life is good. The city is portrayed as the place in which migrants are troubled, disillusioned, and eventually disappoint their families. In such circumstances it is highly likely that attitudinal measures will reveal a strong, positive orientation to villages of origin. How, and indeed whether, this is translated into action is a separate issue.

One way of getting beyond the limitations of attitudinal measures is to add a behavioral indicator of how migrants relate to communities of origin over time. This is not to suggest that attitude and behavior are unrelated. Those who profess high levels of commitment could be expected to invest personal resources in the community and, as the basis of their commitment changes, so too would the nature and scale of their investment. On the other hand attitudes and behavior can vary independently. One readily available and widely used index of commitment is the volume of remittances migrants send. Unable to participate personally in the activities of the nonmigrant family and village, migrants may participate by proxy. Remittances reflect migrants' attempts to assess and translate spiritual and social bonds into some more-concrete and visible expression of commitment. The nature of individuals' commitment can then be established, albeit crudely, by examining the patterns of their remittances.

Considerable caution, however, is required in interpreting remittance data. That varying volumes of remittances reflect varying levels of commitment would be a misleading assumption. Fluctuations in volume may reflect shifts in either the capacity or propensity to remit, or indeed the interplay between these two, and it is important to distinguish between these and to establish their relative importance in any given situation. Structural factors, over which migrants have little if any control, may influence the volumes of remittances.

Declining remittance volumes need not necessarily reflect declining levels of commitment. A migrant community that remains highly committed to supporting kin in the community of origin may be prevented from doing so

when its members face increasing levels of unemployment as a consequence of, say, capital restructuring in metropolitan economies. Conversely, increasing volumes need not reflect increasing commitment. Increases may result from rising levels of economic participation, which mean that more members obtain employment and are able to remit. In an earlier essay (Macpherson 1991), I considered various political and economic factors that influenced Samoan migrants' capacity to remit and sought to resolve a technical question: How do these factors shape the volume of migrant remittances?

That essay raised, but did not attempt to answer, another set of important questions. What factors might influence Samoan migrants' propensity to remit? Even if technically possible for a migrant population to maintain a given level of remittance, would migrants be disposed to continue to send significant proportions of their income to Samoa? This raised a related question. Even if migrants were to maintain present levels, would their children replace them as remitters? These questions are important for both academic and practical reasons. Do migrants' commitments to their communities of origin, as reflected in remittances to people in those communities, change over time and if so, how and why? The pattern of commitment of migrants from small, apparently homogeneous societies are frequently assumed to be similar. This article acknowledges the possibility that migrants' orientations may be complex and sets out to establish the changes that occur over time and to identify the factors that shape them.

### **Some Methodological Issues**

Studies that relate remittance volumes to total number of migrants tend to work with measures of such as per-capita remittances and to use these as the bases of statements about the declining capacity or propensity to remit. Though such indices over time can give an indication of general trends they are unsatisfactory for several reasons.<sup>1</sup> Even the best of these studies, such as Ahlburg's 1991 study of Tongan and Western Samoan remittance patterns, are unable to determine conclusively whether changing volumes are the consequences of changes in propensity or capacity.

First, such studies are unable to establish with confidence the relative importance of factors that influence capacity and propensity. Studies can, with complex statistical analyses, construct models of the relative importance of the various factors but are unable to answer the question of how migrants construct their activity. Such analyses can speculate on but cannot establish whether remittances represent repayment of past debts or insurance for the future or indeed both (Ahlburg 1991). Second, such studies provide little indication of the range of remittance patterns that produces



the notional per-capita remittance figure. For instance, a given per-capita figure may be produced by very different remittance conduct or "styles." The range of orientations to community of origin, which may exist even in relatively small migration streams from apparently homogeneous societies, may be masked in studies of this type.<sup>2</sup> Use of these indices can result in the conflation of diverse orientations and misleading analyses, as Hayes notes in a recent review of evidence from the Pacific (1991).

This problem of differentiation carries over into attempts to use aggregated data to understand changes in per-capita figures over time. Aggregated data cannot show how, if at all, an observed change is related to shifts in the remittance patterns. The range of orientations that shape the per-capita remittance figures may be converging or diverging significantly. Even where the early orientations of migrants in small streams are similar, these may diverge over time or under particular sets of conditions. To understand the range of commitments that produce the measures of central tendency somewhat, different studies are needed to get at the different remitter profiles.

Establishing the various remittance profiles that produce measures of central tendency is an advance but remains relatively crude. It is important to know what remittances mean to those who give them. Without an understanding of the beliefs and values that underlie remittance patterns, predicting how and why these might change over time (in terms other than the capacity to remit) is impossible. Consider, for instance, the cases of two migrants who remit 20 percent of their net incomes. The cases are apparently similar until we know that one remits to insure his intention to live and take an active role in political leadership in the community of origin. In this case the person will likely remit for as long as this aspiration is held. The other remits a comparable proportion of income to discharge certain responsibilities to her parents so she may be free to marry and pursue personal goals. In this case the remitting will likely cease as soon as the person considers her responsibilities discharged.

It is also useful to know something of why migrants remit. In the one case above the migrant chooses to do so for reasons connected with a set of social and religious beliefs to which she remains committed. In the other the migrant has little option because of the power of those around her to ensure that she remits for as long as she remains under their protection. Here again, this information has obvious practical significance. In the first case the remittances are likely to continue for as long as the person remains committed to the beliefs that underpin remitting. In the latter case the remittances are unlikely to continue after the person extracts herself from the circumstances in which she is effectively required to remit.

This article sets out to establish a range of remitter profiles by taking a group of migrants long resident overseas and showing how and why their commitment to their communities of origin and their remittance patterns have changed over time. This longitudinal approach can reveal some of the variety in cognitive, social, and economic factors that influence orientations and that lie behind the distribution at any given time. The article's value lies in its ability to link reliable longitudinal data on migrants' psychosocial orientations and their remittances.

### **The Migrants**

I draw my data from the Samoan population that has migrated, mainly from Western Samoa, to New Zealand in the period since 1945, and specifically on life-history, attitudinal, and remittance data from sixteen persons (eight men and eight women) from a peri-urban village ten kilometers from Apia, the capital of Western Samoa, who have been resident in New Zealand for a period of eighteen years. These people were chosen because they were brought up in similar circumstances in the same village and migrated at around the same time to similar unskilled and semiskilled occupations in the same center in New Zealand. The women were concentrated in the service and light manufacturing sectors and the men in the transport and construction sectors. In this respect they reflected the concentrations of Samoan migrants within the New Zealand labor market. All had been exposed to similar cycles of demand from family and village and to similar forces within the New Zealand labor market that might be expected to influence their capacity to remit. They also had been resident in New Zealand long enough to have moved through any life stages that might have influenced their willingness to remit. Good data were available from close contact with the group over a period of twenty-five years.

I focus on their propensity to remit and on factors that shape the ways they have made decisions to remit more or less of their income to communities of origin. The central questions posed are: Do migrants' orientations to these communities change at various points in migrants' life cycles? How and what, if any, factors seem to influence orientation? Ideally, at least for a sociologist, a larger data sample would have been collected and subjected to multivariate analysis to establish the relative importance of various factors. This article is, however, primarily exploratory. It is intended only to identify social, economic, and cognitive factors that shape patterns and to suggest propositions to be more-systematically tested by others using more-sophisticated analyses on larger data sets.

### Some Data

If migrants' commitment is reflected in remittances, one would conclude that the general decline in the amount of money remitted suggests a weakening commitment to Samoa over time. In the early years after arrival in New Zealand, both men and women regularly remitted as much as 50 per cent of their net incomes in any given year to kin in villages.<sup>3</sup> Over a period this figure declined until by the end of year 10 people were remitting on average between 5 and 10 per cent of their net incomes. This decline is not a simple straight line, as Figure 1 shows.

Three phases in this process may be identified to explore certain questions: the period from arrival to year 3, years 4 to 7, and years 8 to 15. Does this pattern reflect fundamental shifts in attachment to home, and how do people explain this apparent decline in attachment to their community of origin?

#### *Phase One*

During the early years all of the migrants in the study group remitted significant and similar proportions of their incomes to Western Samoa. The remittances were made for one of two principal purposes: to provide major capital items for their families and either directly or indirectly to projects undertaken by the village. In the first category remittances were made to

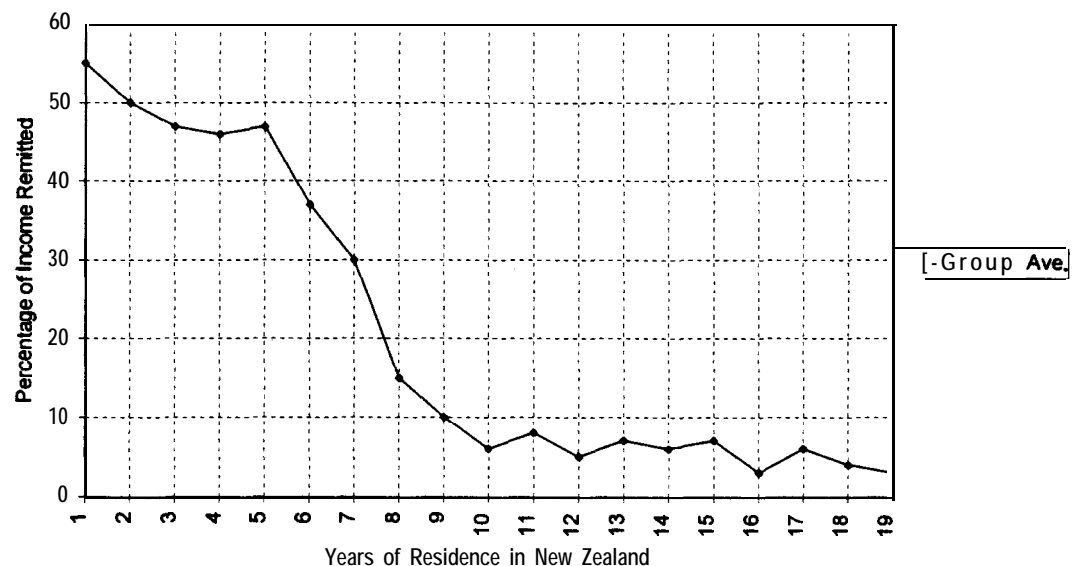


FIGURE 1. **Percentage of net income remitted by Samoans residing in New Zealand ( $N = 16$ ; average for group).**

provide such assets as European-style houses built of permanent materials (*fale papalagi*), freehold land parcels, pickup trucks, cars, water tanks, boats and outboard motors, agricultural equipment, and household appliances and also to meet recurrent costs such as school fees and church collections. Decisions were shaped by the perceived needs of their families, in particular parents and siblings, and explained in those terms. In the project category remittances were made to provide such assets to the village as schools and access roads, to subunits such as congregations for church buildings and pastors' houses, and to women's committees for women's committee houses.<sup>4</sup> Though useful to distinguish between the different destinations of remittances, in fact most remittances were made to nonmigrant kin who determined how they were used. All of the people involved remitted similar proportions of their incomes. Their explanations of these high early levels point to the importance of a combination of factors: propensity, opportunity, social dynamics, and supervision.

Most believed strongly that the primary purpose of their migration was to help or support their *'aiga* and only secondarily to advance their own personal interests. The service provided to their families was one of several types (Meleisea 1991) and was not seen as an issue of personal choice. They had been chosen by their families to go to New Zealand to work. It was no more or less than the service, *tautua*, that young, single people are expected to provide for their families. The physical distance between migrants and the family was of limited significance--they were simply serving their family in a different location. As one young man noted, "My brothers go to the plantation to collect coconuts for copra. I go to collect money in the factory. It's the same thing: another way to serve the family."

This sort of statement should not surprise the reader. The family is a central institution in Samoan social organization and service to one's family is a central value in Samoan culture. The willingness to support village activities, both directly and indirectly, can be explained in similar terms. Families' status within a village are matters of considerable importance. The family's ability to mobilize its members and their resources shapes its status within the village. Thus migrants are likely to accept the importance of contributing to village activities by one route or another, for reasons connected with maintenance or enhancement of family prestige. As one of the group noted,

If you don't take a part in the village things it reflects, not just on you, but also on your family. The contributions which my sister and I make to things like the pastor's house and the new women's committee house are really to be sure that our family can hold their heads up in the village. It would be embarrassing if a family with an

important title could not do these things. It would demean the prestige of our title and *matai* [chief].

But statements like those above are more than simply a reflection of Samoan "public culture." There are other good reasons why those who made up this group were genuinely committed to the support of kin and village. As noted elsewhere the heads of families, who at the time chose those who were to go overseas, were conscious that certain people were more likely to recognize and discharge their obligations to the group than others (Macpherson 1973; Shankman 1976). When opportunities arose to send members to New Zealand they sought out people who had proven willing to serve the family without public complaint (Macpherson 1973; Meleisea 1991). Single people, and particularly single women, were most often chosen because they were known to be more reliable remitters than their male siblings (Shankman 1976). Also, households could more readily accommodate single migrants in accord with New Zealand immigration requirements that decreed a certain amount of living space per person in the dwelling where migrants proposed living, and their incomes did not have to support a spouse's kin group or dependent children.

If migrants' propensity to remit was important, so too was opportunity during that period. The demand for semiskilled and unskilled labor was strong and the group's basic incomes at the time were reliable, if not high. Augmenting basic incomes was relatively easy by working additional hours paid at overtime rates and on public holidays. At the time less well-paid work in service industries was also available for those who wanted second, and occasionally third, jobs. Members of the group regularly worked very long hours to take advantage of increased rates and five of the group took either casual or permanent second jobs. Steady, elastic earnings were only part of the explanation, however.

Migrants' capacity to remit was enhanced by the living arrangements typically engineered by their parents. Most moved straight into and boarded in established households headed by an older person, usually a relative. These arrangements reduced both their establishment and living costs. The combination of high incomes and low living costs insured relatively high discretionary incomes. But the living arrangements may have been important for another reason: a social dynamic that operated in this setting. These households often contained other young, single migrants, so that new migrants necessarily spent much of their time with people in similar situations. An established commitment to remit was the norm because remittances, as many noted, were regarded as tangible evidence of one's claims to love one's family. Competition between members sometimes acted as an additional

incentive to maintain high levels. Those who had lived in these households mentioned the informal competition that had developed and the lengths to which they felt compelled to go to keep up levels. Some had taken second jobs; some had started to work on Sundays; others had taken less-congenial and in some cases more-dangerous jobs that paid higher hourly rates or jobs in which more overtime was available. These accommodation arrangements provided a situation in which high discretionary incomes could be generated and in which social pressures to remit this income existed. But these factors alone could not on their own guarantee the high levels maintained over the early period.

Many parents believed that close supervision of young migrants' activities was necessary for both social and financial reasons and sought out migrant relatives whom they believed could and would provide it.<sup>5</sup> Many of the households were headed by such a person; usually an older relation acted *in loco parentis* and effectively controlled members' social and financial activities. In some households people surrendered unopened pay packets to the household heads, who deducted various charges and set aside a sum to be remitted, another to be banked, and returned a small sum in pocket money. In others people were simply required to provide proof that certain savings and remittance commitments had been met weekly. In yet other households less-formal control was exercised over income, and peer pressure seems to have produced much the same result in terms of commitment to remit.

Such supervision was not seen, at least initially, to be an unreasonable restriction on freedom by either parents or their migrant children. Most migrants accepted that supervision was appropriate at the time and that it was no more or less than they would have expected in Samoa. Most acknowledged that they could not have migrated without the assistance they received from the families to which they went and accepted a degree of control over their economic, religious, and social freedom in return for relatively inexpensive accommodation, access to employment, and social and emotional support. There were exceptions and these were cases where people believed that their "hosts" or sponsors were exploiting them. These accusations were usually muted (as one would expect) since there was often no formal agreement about what was "reasonable." In several cases people simply put up with the situation until they persuaded their parents to allow them to form, or move to, another household. But two of the group had, with the support of other kin, left households in which they felt that their income was being misappropriated.

For the first three years a commitment to family and village consumed considerable amounts of new migrants' time and money. The combination of commitment to parents and siblings who had remained in the village, rel-

actively high wages, low living expenses, peer pressure, and supervision led migrants in this group to invest considerable amounts of time and capital in their community of origin. This was true of both men and women and was reflected in the relatively high level of remittances maintained over the period.

### *Phase Two*

In years 4 to 7 the proportion of net income per capita remitted declined, although the extent of this decline varied from case to case. Did this decline reflect a changing orientation to the community of origin and a reduced commitment to family? Not according to those involved. Members of this group remained committed to the idea that as unmarried members of the family they were bound to serve the family and that remittances were tangible expression of that service. It was also accepted as the means by which their family's prestige, and therefore their own, was maintained and enhanced within the village. Contributions were also justified by reference to the biblical injunction to care for parents and the Samoan belief that one is obligated to those "whose sweat one has eaten."

Stable, full-time jobs and reliable incomes were available throughout the period, as were casual and part-time work to supplement basic earnings. Many remained in households in which a commitment to support was both the attitudinal and behavioral norm. Some, who were required to move out of households to make room for newer arrivals, established similar arrangements and assumed leadership roles in them. A young woman created a household for her newly arrived sister and cousin and simply reproduced, with minor modifications, the arrangements in the household she had left. Her age, greater experience, and the dependence of newly arrived kin ensured that her management of the household and of their social and financial affairs was accepted without resistance. A young man who had resented what he considered excessive supervision adopted a different strategy to achieve the same end when forced to establish his own household. In place of the complex supervision of fare repayments, banking, and remittances, instead he led by example and used peer pressure to persuade members of his household to meet their commitments.

If people remained committed to their families in Samoa, earned good incomes, and were in situations in which tangible recognition of these obligations was the behavioral and attitudinal norm, why did per-capita remittance levels fall? Accounts suggest that the decline was the consequence of more-effective exploitation of families' resources in the early part of phase two and of declining demand in the latter.

Most of the migrants realized quickly that generating on their own the amounts of capital required for major projects would take a very considerable time and would force them to postpone certain personal plans. Some, for instance, wished to marry, to study, to travel, and to buy property but were reluctant to do so until they had met their family obligations. In an attempt to shorten the period required to meet their obligations, those who could brought relatives to New Zealand to work and help increase the rate of capital accumulation.<sup>6</sup> A typical example and explanation of this strategy ran,

It's more use having a sibling working in the factory than in the plantation because we can build the new house [for their parents] more quickly, so when a vacancy occurred at work I brought her [a sister] here to work. It was much quicker with both of us working for the same end. We could earn more in one hour in the factory than in one week in the plantation cutting copra.

During phase two, migrants also sought to reduce the number of households that they were supporting. In phase one, migrants were supporting their parents' household and, either directly or indirectly, various related households in the village. The larger the number of related households supported in this way, the greater their potential to consume capital intended for particular projects. In an attempt to shift responsibility for the support of these households to others, most migrants brought members of those households to New Zealand to work. As a young man noted,

I really respect my father's sister. She was like a mother to me when I was growing up. I got on well with her children, too, because we grew up together. So I was happy to help out with their expenses when I came. But I couldn't build the house for my parents because my parents were always giving the money I sent to my aunt to help her with some *fa'alavelave* [celebration of a life crisis--death, marriage, and so forth] or other. So after a while I brought her daughter F. here so she could support that side of the family. After that I brought my brother. Then F. brought her sister to help her. We were all staying together at that time and we decided to pay a fare for one of our other cousins so that he could look after his own parents.

Thus, the investment in a relative's fare was offset against a higher rate of savings and a shorter period needed to meet commitments. In the short



term cocontributors' remittances could be reduced and in the long term relief from high levels of commitment could be achieved earlier. This strategy represented a more-efficient exploitation of the families' resources and lay behind the rapid growth in the size of the Samoan population in New Zealand during the 1960s and 1970s. This was, however, only one of several factors that underlay the declining levels of remittances within the group during this phase.

Many of the large projects that had consumed large amounts of members' incomes in phase one were being completed and absolute levels of demand were falling. People spoke of the feelings of satisfaction on the completion of projects.

When my cousin returned from Samoa with photos of the house we had built for my parents we were so proud. We were so happy that we cried. I don't want to seem proud but that house was one of the nicer houses in the village. Only the pastors house was better. In the photo, our parents were standing in front of the house and smiling. I know it is wrong but I tell you we felt very proud. . . . We thought we would have a break from saving, do T.'s wedding, and then try and buy them a car.

But people also spoke of the relief of being freed, even temporarily, of the continuous requirement of remitting and of the easing of interpersonal tensions that developed over time as individuals' personal plans were frustrated by the necessity of saving.

When we sent the final money to paint the house and put on the guttering, I believe we were also secretly relieved. It had been a long time and we had lived like slaves for that house.

Sometimes we had argued because one of us would buy something and not have enough for the *lafoga* [remittance]. You can understand how hard it is to go without new things when people around you seem to have everything.

At other times we would get angry with the people in Samoa because money we sent for the house was spent on other things and I asked myself if we would ever finish the house. That's why L. and L. were smarter. They bought the materials through Burns Philp here in Auckland, and sent the carpenter to build their parents' house. That way there was no humbug. All the money was used to build the house.

With more migrants supporting the nonmigrant family and various major capital expenditures completed, absolute levels of demand declined. But this did not signal, for most, any significant change in orientation to Samoa so much as a more-effective exploitation of opportunity.

*Phase Three*

Around eight years after arrival, remittances had declined to the level I call phase three. Did this reduced level represent a declining commitment to homeland and family? Not according to those centrally involved. There was still general agreement on the importance of support for parents, siblings, and certain communal projects. Most still considered that they were privileged to have had the opportunity to migrate and that this carried continuing obligation. But the exact nature of this obligation and the ways in which people discharged it were starting to diverge within the group for the first time. This divergence is masked in a measure of central tendency and is not evident in Figure 1. In Figure 2 the remittances of four people who represent different patterns are charted to show the range of patterns that emerged during this period.

In each case the nature and causes of the reorientation differed. Each of the four profiles reflects individuals' changing circumstances, which in turn shape, both directly and indirectly, orientations to their families and villages. The cases illustrate the range of factors that influence longer-term commitments to these entities.<sup>7</sup>

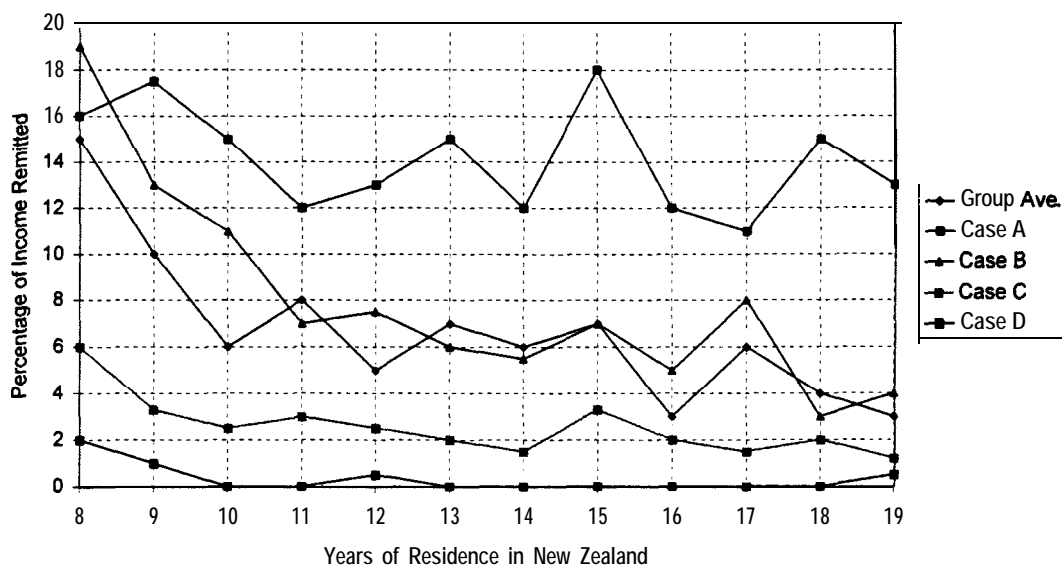


FIGURE 2. **Percentage of net income remitted during years 8 to 20 by four Samoans residing in New Zealand.**

### Four Case Studies

#### *The Case of A.*

A. was a bus driver and with regular overtime had a good, stable income. His wife, also Samoan, was employed full time by a food manufacturer. They were buying a home and car, and each was supporting parents, siblings, and other family in Samoa. Each had a brother living in the household. A.'s father held a respected *matai* title in the village and A. was committed to the idea of service to both his *matai* and his parents.

To meet these obligations he remitted a fixed sum weekly to Samoa. This money was used to meet his immediate family's living expenses. He also met periodic requests for additional money from his parents. This money was used to meet extraordinary demands on the family and those placed on his father as a *matai*. Meeting these demands is essential to the maintenance of his family's status within the village and therefore indirectly to his own.

However, as he explained, the timing of these demands could not be anticipated. When they had occurred while he was single, he had taken additional part-time work as a security guard to meet them. Later he and his wife set aside money regularly to meet these contingencies but still found that they periodically exhausted this reserve and had to borrow against their home. Later they had organized a bingo game with another Samoan couple to generate a larger reserve fund for these crises or *fa'alavelave*. With the reserve they had been able to contribute to *fa'alavelave* in both his family and his wife's.

A.'s orientation to the family and village is explained in part by his commitment to Samoan ideology and Christian belief, and in part by his personal ambition. He remains committed to the Samoan belief in the correctness of service and the Christian injunction to respect his parents, and in these he enjoys the support of his wife. His father, with general support from the extended family, has asked him to consider returning to Samoa and taking his title. He proposes to do this and sees the invitation as recognition of his past service and of the truth of the proverb, "*Ole ala i le pule o le tautua*, The path to power is service." To insure that the family continues to support his claim he must prove that he is an appropriate candidate and his generosity to his parents is part of this process. In this course his wife, who is also the daughter of a ranking *matai*, is supportive.

The couple try to make regular vacation trips to Western Samoa, and A. has attended important village events like the opening of the new church. When he has been unable to attend he has made generous gifts through his parents. He has also taken a leading role in village fund-raising activities in

Auckland and has placed his home and resources at the disposal of *matai* visiting New Zealand in the course of fund-raising.

A.'s two children speak Samoan fluently and the Samoan language is used in their home and church. The children are taken to family activities and are encouraged to listen and observe. The children have attended a Samoan Congregational Christian Church congregation in which the Samoan language is used and take an active part in its activities. They have been taken to Samoa and encouraged to think of A.'s village in Western Samoa as their home in Samoa.

*The Case of B.*

B. is a supervisor in a manufacturing concern. He is married to a Samoan woman and had bought a home in a West Auckland suburb. Until year 10 both had worked in full-time jobs and had supported their respective families and villages. As a supervisor B. had access to employment openings in the company in which he worked and had been able to place siblings he and his wife had brought to New Zealand at various times. With their assistance B. and his wife had reduced their commitments over the ten years that he had been in New Zealand.

In year 10 B.'s wife became concerned about her widowed mother's situation and had brought her to New Zealand to live with them. The couple was required to enter a covenant with the government making them solely responsible for most of the costs of her care. When this became very expensive, B.'s wife brought her sister to live with them to share the physical and financial demands of caring for her mother. The sister has since become unemployed because of a factory closure and can contribute only labor to the mother's care. B.'s wife has since then only been able to find part-time work and much of her wage has gone to pay medical expenses. In the meantime B.'s hours at work have been reduced and his income has declined by 20 percent. In the past when additional money was required, B. was able to get part-time work as a doorman or security guard with his cousin. This extra work is no longer available and he now has periodic difficulty making the mortgage repayments on the house.

This reduced earning capacity has altered B.'s attitudes to the money he sends to his parents. B. would like to send more to Samoa but finds that increasingly difficult. In the past B. was content to send money to his parents and was not concerned by the fact that a significant proportion of the money was spent by his parents to meet their various commitments in the village, finding its way indirectly into village projects rather than the projects he would have preferred. When that happened he and his siblings

regularly had to “replace” money intended for one purpose and used for another. Then, he said, ‘We never worried. It was easy then. I never really wanted to tell my parents how to spend the money. You know what Samoan children are like. It doesn’t matter how old they are, they still don’t feel able to give advice to their parents. I just thought it was their money to spend as they like and left them to it.’

He admits that the amount his parents spend on village commitments has now become a serious problem. The brother and sister he brought to New Zealand are in similar situations and they have discussed bringing the parents to New Zealand. Although primarily concerned with the quality of care available, cost is also a major consideration: They believe that it would be less expensive to have their parents with them because they could control their expenses. The money would be spent directly on the parents and not leak into the village economy. As B. noted,

You want to see how much they spend going from one *fofo* or healer to another. They spend a lot to hire taxis and give gifts to the *fofo* and then hire taxis to go to the hospital and buy medicines. If they were here we could just insure them and then take them straight to the medical center and claim back the money. We could save a heap. . . . And look at the old lady She is always giving money to this and to that. It’s partly because she’s such a generous and kind old thing. But I shouldn’t say it but she is really a bit of a show-off and can’t resist splashing her money around the village, which is a problem now.

Such an arrangement would also reduce certain other costs, such as the NZ\$2,000 B. and his New Zealand siblings each spent twelve months ago to fly to their fathers bedside in Samoa when an overanxious sibling told them the old man was dying (in fact he had the flu) and the telephone charges incurred assuring themselves that the parents are well.

Neither B. nor his wife have political ambitions in the village. Their children are doing well in New Zealand schools and both believe their best interests are served by remaining in New Zealand. The children were taken to Samoa as infants but have little recollection of either the place or the relations there. They speak some Samoan, know many of their migrant relatives, and are active in Pacific Islands Presbyterian Church activities.

#### *The Case of C.*

C. is a forty-three-year-old male. He is employed as a salesman and specializes in selling to Samoans. He moves from one sales field to another as op-

portunities present, and his income fluctuates but is generally high. He married a part-Samoan woman who works part-time. They live with their four children and his nephew and niece. They are buying a house in a lower-middle-income suburb and expect to trade up to another area when their equity increases and when they are more confident about the New Zealand economy.

His father is dead, and his mother and all but one of his siblings live in New Zealand. His sister in Samoa has sent two of her children to live with C. and his wife and to attend school in New Zealand. C. and his siblings in New Zealand take turns looking after their mother. They have a very active and congenial family life, meeting regularly to eat, relax, hold family devotions, and discuss family matters. His wife's parents also live in New Zealand.

C., his wife, and their children have become very active members of a local Samoan Congregational Christian Church congregation. Both he and his wife hold office in church-based associations, and his children are active in the choir, Sunday school, and youth club. The local congregation has just built a new church and is now building a multipurpose hall. The church activities consume a lot of their time and income. The church has become the focus of their social and religious life and a source of personal recognition and status for both.

Although his connections with his sister in Samoa remain strong, his linkages with the village have weakened over time. He said that his aim always was to bring his whole family to New Zealand and that he has accomplished that. His sister wishes to remain in Samoa but he has brought her children to insure they get a good education and regards that as his most useful service to her family. He occasionally sends money to his sister but says that her husband is reasonably well off and should be able to afford to "support things in the village." He looks to his sister and her husband to "look after the *fa'alavelave* at that end" while he and his migrant siblings look after the *fa'alavelave* at the New Zealand end. As he noted wryly, "There's always plenty of *fa'alavelave* to go around. Beside that, the ones here are so expensive now we're really struggling without worrying about the ones there as well. Besides, S. [his sister] and her husband have more of an interest in what goes on there."

C. and his wife do not expect to return to live in the village although he notes if they lost everything they would still have a place to go. Their plans are shaped by their children, two of whom experience acute allergic reactions to an unidentified plant in Samoa and would not be able to live comfortably there, even though they identify strongly with Samoa, speak Samoan, and are committed to Samoan voluntary associations in New Zealand. His wife sees her future tied to that of her children and expects she will always be near them, so she has little reason to consider permanent,

long-term residence in Samoa. Her parents' presence in New Zealand also shapes her attitude to Samoa. She likes "to be able to help my parents and I do so. I usually take them food or some money to help out. But I don't send much to Samoa because there's not many of my family still there. Most are either here or in the U.S. or in Australia. We're all over the place."

*The Case of D.*

D. was employed as a clerk-receptionist and had remitted regularly during her first eight years. During that period D. also brought a brother and a foster sister to New Zealand and they had between them provided a piece of land, a house, and various household appliances for their parents. She had then married a European coworker and they were buying a house in a middle-income suburb and an expensive car.

D. still has siblings in Samoa and believes that now the migrants have provided the security of land and house, it is up to the resident siblings to provide for the day-to-day needs of their parents and family. She sends occasional small amounts of money directly to her parents for their use and sends regular gifts.

D. has little interest in the village. Her father has a title but she has little interest in village politics and no intention of returning permanently to Samoa. Although she once contributed directly and indirectly to village projects, she now sends nothing and has clashed with her parents and siblings over the use of money that she had sent them for a village project. Her attitude to the village has been shaped over time by her observation of village organization. In her early years in New Zealand D. had become increasingly angry with the way village projects had been managed and, in particular, with evidence of regular misuse of funds. She had formed a fairly negative view of the competence of village administration and was fond of noting that if she "ran the household the way the chiefs ran the village, her family would have been on the road and starving years ago." She has little to do with village activities in New Zealand, which she says are plagued by the same problems.

D. and her husband have high material aspirations. They hope to travel and to trade up in the housing market and expect to take on more debt to do this. These plans will consume their discretionary income for the foreseeable future. Her husband has little use for Samoan custom and discourages contact with relatives and contributions to *fa'alavelave*. He visited Samoa once and, though he liked D.'s family, did not like the country at all and now refers to it in disparaging terms. Her own feelings about Samoa largely mirror her husband's.

The couple's children have not been to Samoa though they have vacationed in Australia. They do not speak Samoan, have little contact with their Samoan relatives, and are in schools with few Samoan students. Although they acknowledge that their mother is Samoan, they have much more to do with non-Samoans and think of themselves, with encouragement from their parents, primarily as "Kiwis." D. and her husband attend a predominantly European church but their children do not.

### Discussion

Various end uses of remittances have been distinguished in the cases discussed above. There are two reasons for making such distinctions. First, it is useful analytically to know whether commitments to various elements of the community of origin vary independently of one another and this may be reflected in remittance patterns over time as the above cases show. Second, planners may find it useful to know where remittances will enter the economy and for what purpose. Accordingly, the following end uses can be distinguished. Remittances are sent to family members to acquire capital assets and for personal use as living expenses. Migrants initially all remitted to a range of relatives but all sought in the early stages of residence to reduce that range to immediate family by sponsoring new migrants who would assume responsibility for the maintenance and expenses of more-distant relatives. These expenses include the costs of participation in village activities. Some of the money sent to individuals "leaks" into the village economy in the form of contributions to projects. Remittances were also contributed directly to village projects, at least in the early stages of residence in New Zealand.

Over time the migrants remitting patterns diverged. In the first three to four years of New Zealand residence a combination of factors produced similar remitting patterns, characterized by relatively high proportions of income contributed to kin and, both directly and indirectly, to villages in which close affective kin lived and in which the migrants had usually lived before emigrating. The kin groups and villages often referred to as a person's strong side, *itu malosi*, received the largest shares of all migrants' remittances. Varying amounts were also sent in the early phases to kin groups and villages with which migrants had weaker connections, known often as the weak side, *itu vaivai*.

During years 4 to 7 the proportions of income remitted fell as expensive major projects were completed, the number of migrants increased, and the responsibility for both major projects and living expenses was spread over a larger number of contributors. Throughout the period, however, the



migrants' views of their obligations to their families and villages remained remarkably similar and generally strong. This may be due in part to the fact that the range of kin for which they now remained responsible was in most cases shrinking as new migrants assumed financial responsibility for kin for whom they had formerly been responsible. By this time most were primarily responsible for a smaller group of affective kin that generally included parents and siblings. During this stage, however, some were starting to review the importance of maintaining their links with their villages and thus the scale of both their direct and indirect contributions to village projects.

Beyond years 7 and 8 migrants' circumstances and views of their obligations to their nonmigrant families and villages started to diverge markedly. In this period we see an increasing range of factors influencing decisions to remit. Though the range of factors varied with individuals and are unique, others were significant in all cases. The remainder of this study focuses on those factors of broad significance. The emphasis here is on the events and reasoning that seem to explain individuals' responses to these factors. No attempt is made to suggest how such orientations might be distributed in the Samoan population at large.

#### *Capacity to Remit*

Capacity is the central issue and must precede all other questions of whether migrants will be disposed to remit. Migrants' capacity to remit will be influenced by the general state of the economy and of the labor market in the state to which they have gone. These facts raise questions about the long-term viability of remittances. However, in the above cases, though each migrant has found discretionary income shrinking recently, all had, and still have, the resources to remit. This is significant because change in remittance patterns is, in each case, a reflection of shifts in willingness rather than in capacity to remit.

#### *Distribution of Family*

Probably the most important single factor in determining patterns of individuals' remittances was the distribution of family and, most particularly, parents and siblings. Where money may once have been sent to the *matai* in his or her capacity as head of the family, for a long time now it has been sent directly to migrants' parents and siblings (Shankman 1976). This is partly a consequence of the rapidly increasing numbers of *matai* titleholders created since independence (Schoeffel and Meleisea 1984), which means that many migrants' parents are in fact *matai*, and the increasing individualization of

resource control. Furthermore, as O'Meara notes (1987), there is an increasing tendency to de facto individualization of land tenure, which means that individuals may no longer be as dependent on *matai* for access to land. A private market in freehold land further frees individuals from dependence on *matai* in this respect.

The migrants in this study remitted money to Samoa to support parents and siblings. The rationale for this rested in part on Samoan custom and was embodied in Samoan proverbs quoted in support and in part on biblical injunctions, typically passages from Exodus 20 and from Deuteronomy 27:16. In some cases the Bible passages were quoted to justify a decision to support only parents and siblings by people who had formerly supported *matai* and a wider range of kin. One woman described the change in her thinking over time:

After I had brought my cousins to New Zealand and helped set them up, I thought I would concentrate on looking after my parents and my grandmother. When I first came I also sent money to our *matai* but that was because he was my grandfather. When he died I stopped sending money to the family's *matai*. People said I should support the *matai* but I thought, why should I support him? He has his own children here and they should support him. When people criticized me I argued that the Bible says those who dishonor their parents will be cursed. It doesn't say anything about the *matai*. . . . People would say it's part of our custom. At those times I would argue that our family had created so many titleholders and argued about them so much that no one knew who the real titleholder was any longer. That's true in our family and it made them angry but they couldn't say anything.

The commitment to parents is significant because it means that support for parents will be spent where the parents are residing. Thus, in A.'s case, A. and his siblings will remit to their parents in Samoa for as long as his parents remain there. The high level of A. and his siblings' contributions to their parents reflects their awareness of the importance of ensuring that their father, as a *matai*, is adequately supported in this role. In A.'s case, his contributions to his parents are further intended to demonstrate the qualities of service the extended family expects in those aspiring to titles. B. has no such aspirations and his contributions to his parents in Samoa do not reflect this longer-term political interest in the way that A.'s do.

Levels and patterns of commitment to parents in Samoa may also be shaped by where one's siblings live. D. and two siblings in New Zealand

bought land and built a house for their parents. Then they left the expense of the day-to-day maintenance of their parents to their siblings remaining on the island. That option existed because there were enough siblings in Samoa to insure that their mother's needs were adequately met. Such an option did not exist for those like C. who had brought most of their siblings to New Zealand and were unable to depend on people in Samoa for their parents' day-to-day expenses. The commitments to parents meant that when those parents moved to New Zealand, or some other metropolitan center, individuals' remittances often dropped dramatically. Migrants remained committed to their parents but spent money in New Zealand rather than remitting it to Samoa. Thus, for instance, B.'s wife brought her mother to New Zealand and supports her. She now has greater control over her mother's expenses and is no longer being asked to replace money that her mother spent on other projects. Because she is able to support her mother in this way she no longer regularly remits to kin in Samoa. Furthermore, B. can now see the possibilities of this arrangement and is considering bringing his parents to New Zealand. If he does, his remittances to Samoa will drop as he assumes responsibility for his parents' maintenance in New Zealand.

As migrants' parents grow older their children will be faced with the choice between joining them in the village or having the parents join them in New Zealand. Many migrants are, for a variety of reasons, unwilling or unable to return permanently to Western Samoa (Macpherson 1985). New Zealand immigration regulations make family reunification one of relatively few grounds on which Western Samoans can now enter New Zealand permanently, and the number of migrants in families in which the "center of gravity" has shifted may lead increasingly to attempts to bring parents to New Zealand. This would result in a continuing process of family consolidation in New Zealand and eventually in a shift of the primary focus of family interests, activities, and expenditures.

Even those migrants who continue to support parents in Samoa are likely to stop remitting when their parents die. When C.'s father died his mother chose to move to New Zealand to live with C. and his siblings. At that point C. stopped remitting money to Samoa because, as he said, "I have no reason to go there any more. Our family is mostly here now. While our parents were there I was conscious of the need to look after them. But when our father died and our mother came here, that was it."

For a number of reasons, then, a significant proportion of the funds presently remitted to kin in Samoa will likely dry up as parents move to metropolitan locations and centers of family gravity shift. For a number of reasons this fact is significant and may be a source of concern to those in Samoa who presume that remittances will continue at existing levels for the foreseeable

future. Politicians, for instance, argue that people will still continue to support their villages even when parents and close kin no longer reside there. But this may not be the case for several reasons.

Parents, and to a lesser extent siblings, are the conduits through which a certain amount of remittances finds its way into the day-to-day exchanges and transactions that make up the village economy. As long as migrants' parents and siblings remain in the village some part of remittances will continue to enter the village economy, albeit indirectly and sometimes involuntarily. Migrants with close kin living in a village have more information about, and more occasion to think about and to become involved in, village affairs, albeit indirectly. Events in the village may have more-direct consequences for their immediate families. Migrants are bound to consider the impacts of various decisions on their family's material interests, on their short- and longer-term political interests, and on the family's social status within the village. Maintenance of the status quo will have costs and the enhancement of the family's sociopolitical prestige will have higher costs. Conversely, as a family's center of gravity shifts in consequence of migration, less and less of the resources migrants contribute to family find their way into the village economy.

Villages have, however, always approached migrants directly for support for village projects and have in the past found it. The most popular current means of tapping this support is the *tusigaigoa* or census. On these occasions village representatives visit those towns in New Zealand, and occasionally Australia and the United States, in which migrant villagers reside. The purpose of the fund-raising is explained at a series of meetings. On a specified day, after a short period in which people raise the necessary money, migrants bring their gifts to a central location and "register" them publicly. The amount raised at these events depends on the size of the expatriate village population and the degree of support for the project; it can be considerable. It is not unusual for large villages to raise around NZ\$20,000 in Auckland on a single day and similar, though generally smaller, amounts in Wellington and Christchurch. For some years the amounts collected on these occasions rose steadily. Some argue that this was a consequence of informal intervillage competition fueled by the representatives from Samoa who urged village migrants to remember what other smaller, less-significant villages had raised in recent similar events. There is some evidence, though, that these events are not raising the amounts they once did. People explain the declining returns as a consequence of the economic recession in New Zealand and argue that these will be reversed when and if the New Zealand economy rebounds. But the decline may be more than simply a temporary dip. It may also reflect attenuated connections with the village and

a growing selectivity among the migrants about which projects will be supported.

In New Zealand an individual's links with the village may become attenuated. Village collective activity in these circumstances is typically episodic and for much of the time the village remains a latent entity. Few migrant village associations have a long, stable existence. Village-based activities have tended to be occasional, recreational, and connected with fund-raising. In most cases, ad hoc village-based groups are formed to organize particular projects. These activities may raise interest in and commitment to villages in the short term but they tend not to lead to sustained interest and commitment. Many attend only to meet people they do not normally see and to relax. Many whose interests have shifted over time have little interest in and tolerance for the political formalities that are part of these events.

The reluctance of some migrants to become involved in projects run by people with a history of mismanagement of funds may make it more difficult for village groups to organize projects that can tap the migrant population. D. is a case in point. She compares the requirement that she manage her money carefully with the village's reluctance to do so. Another young woman's comment reflected both this new selectivity and a more-critical attitude to the management of village activity.

I didn't give anything to the last fund-raising because I knew the people who were running it. They are crooks. No more, no less. They have been in charge of projects in the past and things have always gone wrong. Money, or raffle tickets, or materials have gone missing and we have been asked for more to make up the shortfall. They have played games with us. The people [in the village] don't have the courage to confront them because they are chiefs. When I was younger my parents asked me to support them and I did. Now my parents are dead and I know more and I think more carefully about these things.

#### *Spouses' Attitude to Remittances*

Where spouses share, or at least understand, the commitment to family and village, individuals' remittances need not cease after marriage. The level may decline as the couple faces basic costs of establishing a home and family. Spouses may accept the importance of family and village but wish to separate the two and to assign different priorities to each. Some spouses may wish to distinguish among members of the descent group on, say, the basis of genealogical distance. One woman explained the approach she and her husband had taken in the following way.

I'm a Samoan so I understand why he wants to do all of the *fa'alavelave*. His father is a *matai* and is always ringing from Samoa with something else that needs support. But I don't want to be broke for the rest of my life. So we talked and agreed that for the close family, our strong sides, we would do things but that for the others, our weak sides, we would just make a token gesture. You have to do something like this in the end.

Not all Samoan spouses, however, share these commitments to family and village; some may wish to minimize remittances. Thus, a man who had married a New Zealand-born Samoan was surprised when his wife objected to the level of his support for his family, her attitude being more like a European's than a Samoan's in that respect. Given the rate of outmarriage in the Samoan migrant population, spouses' attitudes are likely to become more significant as a constraint on remittances. Studies have shown that even from early on, when ample Samoan spouses were available, one in three Samoans contracting formal marriages were marrying non-Samoans (Macpherson 1973). Non-Samoan spouses who do not appreciate the cultural importance of contributions to kin and village may discourage remittances. There are variations, of course. The two people in the group who had married other Pacific Islanders found that although their spouses, a Cook Islander and a Niuean, were not remitting, they appreciated the rationale for contributing and made no attempt to prevent them. The two in the group who had married Europeans had mixed experiences. D.'s husband discouraged remittances on the ground that it encouraged people to do nothing for themselves. L.'s husband was relaxed about remittances on the ground that his interpretation of the scripture required him to share with others.

The levels and patterns of remittances to villages will also be shaped by spouses' attitudes about the importance of villages. The Samoan spouses were predictably more aware of the importance of contributing to village projects than non-Samoans but, as the cases show, not all were equally relaxed about contributing. A. and his spouse have strong, positive feelings for their villages and are involved in a variety of ways. A. is encouraged to participate in village activities that will keep his claim to the family title alive and anticipates a central role in the village in the medium and longer term. His wife encourages his visits to the village and participation on the grounds that he should be as well known as the title to which he aspires. By comparison, B. and his wife are also aware of the significance of the village and hold strong, positive feelings for their respective villages. But as their incomes have contracted their interests and life-style have focused on New Zealand, their long-term plans have crystallized, and remittances have been curtailed in ways that reflect their lack of political ambition.

Spouses from other Pacific islands were more aware of the significance of participation in village affairs than those of European origin, although not always happy about the level of calls on income made by the villages. A Niuean spouse commented:

We have villages too but they are not always doing things like Samoan villages. We have associations and choirs and that sort of thing. The village is important for me because it's a part of myself. The Samoans' villages seem to be doing things all the time. This year a new school, next year a church, next year a house for the pastor, next year a new organ for the church, next year a set of robes for the choir. . . it goes on and on.

European spouses were more cautious about the villages' demands for support. One was uncertain about contributions to village projects because neither he nor his spouse intended to live there and they could not see the value of investing in village amenities. The other held similar views but added that contributions to villages discouraged effort on the villagers' part and led them to unrealistic aspirations in view of their income and ability to construct and maintain such amenities.

#### *Migrants' Aspirations*

The third set of factors that shapes migrants' orientations to their village is connected with their residential and political aspirations. Remittances may be seen as a form of investment in some longer-term plan. Those who plan to return to the village are more likely to "invest," either directly or indirectly, in the village. Thus A., who has aspirations to office within the village polity, continues to contribute to village-sponsored activities whereas B. has no such aspirations and does not contribute. The most obvious investments are a person's physical presence and contributions in cash and in kind made in person. But even a proxy presence is evidence of a person's continued interest in the village. These investments keep the person "alive" on occasions when the village meets to celebrate itself. While all with kinship connections in a village can claim land-use rights and land on which to build a house, those who have shown evidence of commitment will have both a stronger claim and fewer reservations about pursuing such a claim.

Migrants who aspire to leadership roles within the village polity also know that contributions to the village will strengthen that claim. The strength of their claim within the family will be determined to some extent by evidence of their willingness to serve, *tautua*, the current *matai*. Service

consists ideally of both labor and the proceeds of labor. But migrants like A. may provide labor in family activities in New Zealand and cash for family activities in Samoa.

The future status of the titles to which they aspire will be determined to a large extent by the way in which the current incumbent conducts himself or herself in the position. It is in a migrant's interest to insure that the incumbent has the resources necessary at least to maintain, and preferably to enhance, the status of the title. This typically requires money that, in the hands of a competent *matai*, can be converted into sociopolitical capital in various public exchanges. Over time a competent *matai* with a combination of resources, skills, and personality can improve the status of a title within the village. Thus, those who aspire to titles will generally accept the value of cash contributions used to maintain the status of that to which they aspire.

Conversely, migrants who aspire to membership and eventually leadership within local activities may choose to invest in New Zealand. They will use their social and financial resources to enhance their status, and eventually their political power, within a local church congregation, for instance. For many the village of origin is being displaced by the urban church congregation--the new urban village--as a focus of attention and a source of status and identity. These congregations meet regularly and provide opportunities for fellowship, worship, and a variety of religious, economic, and political roles. But, like villages, they too exert calls on members' funds to acquire land; build or acquire churches, pastors' residences, and ancillary buildings; and pay pastors' stipends. People who become involved in migrant associations often find that these provide a more-relevant center to which to contribute their energy and resources than the village. All that has changed in effect is their reference group, but this necessarily has a marked impact on remittances.

The growth of demands from local churches and associations causes certain conflicts for migrants who must now choose between their village of origin and new urban associations that have come to have increasing relevance for them and their children. One forty-four-year-old explained it in the following way:

It's difficult for me. There is the *lafoga* for the church at Papatoetoe in which I am a deacon, and then the *matai* come from Samoa with another request for money. I still feel strongly about our village because I grew up there and some of my family are there still. But I have been supporting that place for a long time. Sometimes when I have been back to Samoa, I see the young ones just sitting around or playing cricket and I think why should I be getting up at five in



the morning to work for the *palagi* when they just sit around. I want to support our pastor and church here because I am a deacon, my wife and I are in the choir, my children are in the Sunday school and 'au *talavou* [youth group]. It is like our new village.

There is, of course, nothing to prevent people from expending resources in both home village and in migrant voluntary associations. There are, however, limits to the discretionary income available to invest, and individuals may decide splitting that income is ultimately counterproductive. Eventually people are forced to make judgments about expenditures and to decide where and on what basis to invest, as the following comment indicates.

When we were asked to provide funds to reroof the church I asked myself, Why should I do that? My children are in school here. My brothers and sisters and their children mostly live in Apia or overseas and their children will not attend that school. L. and T. and I talked about it and we decided we would give something but just a token because things are tough here and we have to think of our own children and their future.

But this ambivalence to the village can be transformed where latent interests there are perceived to be threatened. Considerable amounts of money and effort may be invested to reassert influence in the village. The strength of this latent commitment may become apparent when, for instance, a titleholder dies and candidates for the vacant title are indifferent, or worse, hostile, to one's family's interests. One of the men involved in this study had withdrawn from his church and had resigned his job to travel to Samoa to contest the *matai* election and to protect his family's interest, which he believed was threatened. Although it is possible at any time for a given number of persons to reverse their orientation to the village, it is also unlikely that this involves large numbers of persons on a continuing basis. In cases that occurred during this study, there was typically a period of intense activity in which human and financial resources were mobilized for a specific purpose. When the crisis was resolved those involved typically resumed their former scale and pattern of giving.

Whether their children will see fit to replace them as remitters is a different issue, however.

### **New Remitters for Old?**

The basis and strength of New Zealand-born children's attachment to their parents' communities of origin have diverged. The nature and causes of the

differences have been outlined in detail elsewhere (Macpherson 1984, 1991). It is sufficient, in an exploratory essay such as this, to examine the children of the migrants in the case studies to establish how their personal attributes and experiences might influence their attachment to Samoa.

Two sets of children, those of A. and C., speak Samoan well, participate regularly in Samoan family and church activities, and identify with Samoa. Both sets are potential remitters, but there is reason to believe that they will behave in quite different ways. In one case the children will almost certainly settle, at least temporarily, with their parents in Western Samoa. They have, through more-regular visits, a more-comprehensive and detailed knowledge of their family and village connections in Samoa. Links with these people and with the village are valued highly and are likely to be even more important to them in the future. A.'s working-age children send money both directly to cousins and to a half brother in Samoa and indirectly by giving money to their parents to send to both family and village in Samoa and by subsidizing household expenses.

An allergy will prevent C.'s children from settling in Samoa. Their knowledge of family and village connections in Samoa is limited. Much of their information comes indirectly from people passing through their home and is necessarily secondhand. Links with members of the family and the village are valued but have limited long-term significance. C.'s working-age children do not send money to cousins in Samoa because they do not have personal bonds with them. They will give their parents money to assist with family and village projects in Samoa when asked, but they do this out of respect for their parents rather than a personal attachment to the family and village. They do not usually take an active part in the activity and do not use opportunities it presents to extend their knowledge. They are, however, enthusiastic supporters of local family and Samoan church activities, and like their parents see these as their communities of interest.

B.'s children could settle in Samoa but seem unlikely to. Their knowledge of family and village connections is limited and comes largely from visiting relations. However, this does not reflect a lack of interest on their part. Unlike A.'s and C.'s children, B.'s children do not know enough Samoan to be able to follow the discussions of family and village affairs that go on around them. Their parents are happy enough to give them information when they ask. This lack of extensive knowledge is not a problem for them for their reference group comprises English-speaking children of migrants from Samoa, the Cook Islands, Niue, and Tokelau and is presently based around evangelical Christianity. In this group status is defined to a large extent by people's commitment to church organization and youth mission and by formal academic achievements. While these children contribute to the family indirectly, their parents encourage them to spend their money in

education and church activities. They acknowledge their Samoan descent but tend to see themselves as Pacific Islanders in relation to other New Zealanders.

D.'s children have little knowledge of their Samoan relations or their mother's village. D. attends some family activities and the very occasional village project meeting but does not take the children. The children's contact with local Samoan family is confined largely to D.'s cousin married to a European, her children, and occasional visits from D.'s siblings. They have neither the information nor the language skills to gain much from these occasional contacts with kin. This became apparent to the children during a visit of D.'s parents. The grandparents and children could not communicate easily and each became frustrated and somewhat embarrassed by their inability. When they have sought information about the village and the Samoan branch of the family from their mother, they have been told that such knowledge is largely irrelevant to them, that their futures lie in New Zealand, and that they would be better served by improving their English and academic performance. Their attitudes toward Samoan society are shaped to a large extent by their parents, who tend to be critical of the *fa'a Samoa* (Samoan culture and custom) and depict it as a communalistic activity that makes all poor. This attitude to Samoa and Samoan society is shaped to a lesser extent by their peers, who are mostly non-Samoans and whose interests are in modern music, socializing, and dating. These children have little interest in remitting or reason to become remitters.

### **Conclusion**

Over time migrants' orientations to village communities change in various ways. This is reflected by a decline in the proportions of their income remitted to people in those communities. A range of orientations is evident among long-resident migrants and is reflected in the pattern and scale of remittances. It is useful to distinguish between remittances to kin living in the community and those to the village community as an entity. Some migrants remit primarily to kin while others remit both to kin and community projects. Declining remittance levels do not signal declining support for Samoan custom and practice; they may simply indicate increasing expenditures on the same sorts of activity in New Zealand.

This is not to suggest that people must decide between one and the other or that the choices are mutually exclusive. It is, however, impossible for most Samoans to invest large amounts of time and energy in both locales. Most must decide where their primary interests lie and where their resources will be most effectively invested. The cases outlined above suggest some of the factors that may influence choice.

Those who have close kin in the village community remit more to those relatives for support and to permit them to take an active part in village activities in which funds are needed. When close kin join migrants in New Zealand, remittance levels tend to drop as money once remitted to support these people in Samoa is now spent on the same people in New Zealand. Money that once found its way into the Western Samoan economy is now no longer available.

Those who aspire to residence and leadership in Western Samoan village communities tend to remit a higher proportion of their incomes to those communities to create a stock of sociopolitical capital on which they can draw. Those who expect to continue their residence in New Zealand and to take an active role in Samoan activity there are forced to decide where to invest their time and resources. As the range of Samoan activities in New Zealand expands, an increasing number of opportunities are available to those migrants willing to invest in New Zealand.

Migrants' children represent a source of potential replacement remitters. They could, if they choose, remit money to either family or to villages in Western Samoa with which they have links. As with their parents, the prospects of New Zealand-born Samoans remitting to Western Samoa will differ markedly and will be determined by their parents' attitudes to Samoa, the nature of their links with family and village, their ability to communicate with kin and to build on their knowledge, the reference groups that they adopt, and the importance that Samoa assumes in their personal plans.

The next task for research is to gather a larger data sample and to subject some of the hypotheses suggested above to more-rigorous statistical analysis to establish the relative importance these factors assume in different groups' assessments of the value of investing time and money in Samoa. The next task for planners is to devise strategies that will reduce Western Samoa's dependence on remittances. It is not clear that the stock of new remitters who typically send large proportions of their income home will be replaced. The loss of a relatively small number of these new remitters could have a significant impact on the level of remittances to Western Samoa in the near future.

## NOTES

I am grateful to the Rockefeller Foundation for a Rockefeller Fellowship in the Humanities, the Center for Pacific Islands Studies at the University of Hawaii, and the University of Auckland for the opportunity to research and write this article.

I am grateful to the following for reactions to a version of this article presented at the XVII Pacific Science Congress in Honolulu in 1991: Dennis Ahlburg, Department of Economics, University of Minnesota; Iosefa Maiava, United Nations Development Pro-

gram, Apia; Malama Meleisea, Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury; Jan Rensel, Department of Anthropology, University of Hawaii; Stuart Rosewarne, Department of Economics, University of Sydney; Dr. Penelope Schoeffel, Crown Research Institute, Christchurch; and Caroline Sinavaiana, East-West Center, Honolulu.

1. One problem with synchronic studies of remittance patterns is that they are subject to periodic distortions. In the wake of Cyclone Ofa, which devastated Samoa in 1989, many people who had not remitted for some time sent money to friends and relatives. The result was that remittances to Western Samoa in the two months after the cyclone ran 70 percent ahead of the same months in the previous year. Although in this case the distorting factor is readily apparent, this is not always so.

2. In fact, it is misleading to separate orientations to community of origin from those of destination because orientations to one are shaped by experience-of the other.

3. These data come from annual income-tax returns filed between 1970 and 1986, which require people to indicate and to verify the amounts of cash remitted to support dependent relatives. The money was transmitted as postal orders in most cases and the names of the payees/recipients were listed receipts. Since the author was related by marriage to most of the remitters, the relationships of remitters and recipients were well known to him. Since a taxpayer was entitled to deduct one-third of the value of such contributions from his or her takable income, there is a clear incentive to provide evidence of all payments. The author helped complete the tax returns involved and routinely discussed patterns of remittances and purposes for which they were used. During the period the author was also party to protracted and unsolicited accounts of remittance activity and uses of remittances. The data do not include payments in kind or airfares paid and therefore understate the true value of remittances. The removal of tax deductions for such support of relatives from New Zealand tax regulations has since made it more difficult to trace individual remittances by this means.

4. During the 1960s and 1970s village work parties used to come to work in New Zealand. Their fares and living expenses in New Zealand were met by their families. Their wage packets were surrendered to the trustees each weekend and became the property of the project; work party members were given a token amount as pocket money.

5. This was considered especially important in the case of young women, who were considered especially vulnerable to the predatory interests of young men in the city. Many had been reminded of the symbolic importance of their conduct for their families and of the implications of "falling from grace."

6. Delays in bringing relatives occurred because offers of work were necessary to sponsor a relative's migration, and employees often had to establish a good work record before they were offered an opportunity to sponsor a relative.

7. These calls from villages to contribute to village projects and from families for smaller contributions to recurrent expenses come at the same time. Because these people are related and from the same village, the calls on their income in years 10 to 15 have tended to coincide. The call in year 10 was for the refurbishment of the pastor's dwelling, in year 12 for replacement of the church's organ, and in year 13 for the reroofing of the village school.

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**FROM SEA AND GARDEN TO SCHOOL AND TOWN:  
CHANGING GENDER AND HOUSEHOLD PATTERNS  
AMONG POLLAP ATOLL MIGRANTS**

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POPULATION MOBILITY in many parts of the world is not a simple matter of migration, with permanent movement from rural to urban areas. Nor are recent movements necessarily a radical change from some previous stage of equilibrium or stability. The term "migration" has typically implied a permanent move and a new process contrasting with a sedentary past, yet movement patterns often show considerable continuity with the past, even when factors such as foreign administrations, growth of urban areas, and entry into the world economy affect population movement. Furthermore, movement in many situations and among many migrants is not permanent; people return home, though perhaps only after a long sojourn away, and in other cases, they circulate between two or more sites.

The term "circulation" has been proposed for this latter process and is a common pattern in the Pacific (Chapman 1985; Chapman and Prothero 1985; Prothero and Chapman 1985). This applies to the case of people from Pollap, one of a group of three atolls known as the Western Islands of Chuuk State, part of what is now the Federated States of Micronesia.<sup>1</sup> They also have a heritage of mobility, so that in many respects today's movements are continuous with past ones. Yet this is far more the case for men than for women; mobility is part of male but not female gender ideology. A male focus on travel and adventure appears, in fact, to be a widespread Micronesian cultural factor involved in migration (Rubinstein 1993:260). In recent years, however, women have increasingly participated in these movements.

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For Micronesia as a whole, women and men tend to migrate in approximately equal numbers, although the rate is higher for men over longer distances (Connell 1983:22). One analysis of gender differences in Belauan population movement suggests that fewer women return home because of outmarriage and high demands on their labor if they were to return (Nero and Rehuher 1993:251). This study of Pollapese movement argues that current patterns offer more continuity for men than for women, with consequences for gender relations and household patterns. The following cases are illustrative.

### **Case Histories**

Cecelia left her home on Pollap atoll when she was seventeen to attend a junior high school on a neighboring atoll to the north. By the mid-1970s, pursuing a secondary education and leaving home had become expected of most Pollap young people, men and women alike. At her new school Cecelia met and interacted with students from several outer-island areas, and she befriended a few. Although she was identified as "Pollapese," she was also a "Western Islander," and thus a person from the most traditional area of Chuuk. Most of her friends came from those islands. During the school year she lived in a dormitory, although she spent several hours on weekends with a sponsor in the community, someone who was a member of her same clan. Two years later Cecelia continued her secondary education at a high school on the island of Weno, the administrative center of Chuuk. This school drew students from the entire state. Cecelia again lived in a dormitory, but she spent much of her time in the afternoons and weekends with Pollapese living in a migrant community in a nearby village. During those visits, she met a man from another island to the west of Pollap in Yap State, a man related to other Pollapese through his own and his father's clan. The two young people eventually married and settled on Pollap to raise a family, following the common practice of uxorilocal residence. Like other women on Pollap, Cecelia works in the taro gardens to provide food for her family. She lives with her mother, other female kin, their husbands, and some younger brothers and sisters. She considered attending college in the United States, following in the footsteps of an older sister, older brothers, and many other Pollapese who had recently graduated from high school. Her family persuaded her, however, that she was needed to tend to family concerns, especially the land and taro gardens.

Luisa left for school along with Cecelia, attending both the junior high school and the high school. Like Cecelia she wanted to attend college in the United States, but she managed to convince her family to allow her to go. At

the time, in the late 1970s and early 1980s parents were agreeing to allow at least one child to leave to attend college, eager for the employment, money, and prestige it could bring. They knew, however, that it would mean their children would probably have to look for work on Weno or even farther, because the only paid jobs on Pollap were at the elementary school, and those jobs had been filled for years. Luisa stayed in the United States for several years, attending a college together with some other Pollap women, although she later transferred elsewhere. Before she completed her program, however, she married a man from another Chuuk island, returned to Weno, and started raising a family. Her husband has a job on Weno, and they live in a village with kin of her husband rather than in the village of Iras among the Pollapese in the migrant community. Luisa would like to get a job, but her husband discourages it, and she spends most of her time in the house cooking, cleaning, and caring for children. She does not tend taro gardens, and she and the rest of the family rely on her husband's income for food.

Josepha went to both secondary schools with Luisa and Cecelia and initially attended college with Luisa as well. She, too, returned to Weno. Because of her college training, she was able to find a job teaching at a local school on Weno and lives in the Pollap migrant community in Iras. She has to rely on her monetary income for most of her food, as do others living in the migrant community.

### **Patterns of Mobility**

The situations of these three women illustrate many critical aspects of contemporary migration from the atoll, especially ways in which current patterns differ from past ones. Field data and interviews reveal that women are leaving in larger numbers than before, a desire for schooling and employment are common motives, and many are going farther and staying for longer periods than in previous years. The people of Pollap--like their neighbors--have a history of mobility, but today's population movements differ in significant ways from those in the past.

These differences need not imply there are no continuities, however. In certain ways contemporary mobility patterns, including circulation to and from Pollap, dovetail with older frameworks, since Pollapese historically traveled to other islands in pursuit of social and economic opportunities (Alkire 1978:112-131; Flinn 1992:21-27; Lessa 1950). A web of social, economic, and political ties connected Pollap with neighboring islands and atolls, and islanders--especially men--transformed the ocean from a barrier to a road.<sup>2</sup> They traveled widely, with roots nonetheless still at home.

Pollap is part of a coral complex linking atolls throughout the Central Carolines previously part of the Yap Empire (Alkire 1978). Tribute payments to Yap involved contact with the other atolls in the system and thus provided further opportunities for trading and maintaining social ties through marriage, friendship, and adoption (Lessa 1950). Smaller systems of tribute as well as reciprocal trade existed within the system, including one involving Pollap and its neighbors.<sup>3</sup> A system of matrilineal clans links the islands throughout Chuuk and the outer islands of Yap, with food, shelter, and companionship expected from fellow clan members. Survival in the midst of periodic typhoons and other disasters on these tiny atolls presumably required such ties (Alkire 1965).

Pollap oral tradition brims with stories concerning the adventures of its people in contact with other islanders, with tales of sailing, trading, visiting, and fighting. Some involve only the nearest neighbors; others tell of far-flung sites. The art of navigation, in fact, is essential to Pollapese pride, because they believe it originated with them. In addition, for men mobility is a defining characteristic and part of male gender ideology. Accordingly, not only do Pollapese in general pride themselves on their heritage of mobility, but they believe that men by their very nature are inclined to travel.

Thus, movement today is not a thoroughly radical change from the past. In fact, it fits the Pollapese sense of history and identity. Nonetheless, specific reasons for mobility have changed, as have the numbers of migrants, their ages, the proportion of women, and the destinations. These in turn are bringing in their wake other changes, some of which negatively affect women, especially women like Luisa and Josepha.

Whereas mobility in the past centered on trading opportunities and social obligations to kin living elsewhere (Alkire 1978:112-131; Flinn 1992), more recent versions of this pattern involve pursuit of education and jobs. This process has involved higher proportions of women than did previous patterns of movement for trade or battle. Furthermore, many moves are longer term and more permanent than before, with young people moving to Guam and the United States rather than to a neighboring atoll. As part of this process, a migrant community has been growing on the island of Weno, the port town and capital of the state of Chuuk. In this migrant community, Pollapese have made conscious attempts to assert and practice a way of life and identity as Pollapese, resisting some changes but embracing others. Pursuit of employment and reliance on a money economy are affecting gender relations and household patterns, putting them at variance with those found in the atoll community.

The home atoll consists of two inhabited islets, Pollap, measuring 0.262

square miles, and Tamatam, measuring 0.096 square miles (Bryan 1971). Pollap's population was close to 450 in 1980 and has continued to grow. Islanders have not felt the full brunt of this increase because so many people are off the island for schooling or work. The economy on the atoll is still essentially subsistence oriented, with women tending taro gardens and men fishing. Little cash is needed for everyday life, although everyone is now dependent on at least a small amount of money for goods such as cloth, tools, and kerosene. Furthermore, purchased materials are increasingly taking the place of indigenous ones, especially for building houses. Thus, there is an increasing need and interest in earning money. A few people are employed as teachers at the elementary school, people sold copra until a few years ago, and in recent years they have begun selling fish, but otherwise most options for earning money are on Weno or outside the Federated States of Micronesia. With the population growth, people are also aware that eventually resources will be strained.

The other major reason people leave, however, is to attend school. In many respects this is related to an interest in obtaining employment, but leaving to attend secondary schools has also become an expected part of the life cycle now. This was certainly the case for Cecelia, Luisa, and Josepha. Initially, boys outnumbered girls, who traditionally traveled far less than men and left home less often, but today girls are almost as likely to leave for secondary school as boys are.<sup>4</sup> The first secondary school they attend, for ninth and tenth grades, is on a nearby atoll about sixty miles to the north, but for the final two grades they go to Weno.<sup>5</sup> In the 1970s, several then left for college in the United States, and some have not returned--and may never return. Of the nine women away at college in 1980, all but one have returned, however, including Luisa and Josepha. In recent years, as parents realize the cost of sending students to the United States and as they see how few actually obtain a degree, they are increasingly reluctant to allow their children to go so far. So Guam and Saipan are now more popular, as are other choices closer to home such as Micronesian Occupational College in Belau and Community College of Micronesia, which has an extension center on Weno. The goal for many of these students is to obtain a job. Many now are looking on Guam, but a popular choice is still Weno, where they can both earn money and be a part of the Pollap community.

This is possible because Pollapese have formed their migrant community on Weno, close to the downtown area, situated on land purchased by Pollapese in the 1950s. Weno became the district center during the American administration of Micronesia following World War II, making it also the center for training teachers and medical personnel. This attracted outer-island migrants, including some Pollapese men. These men, including two receiv-

ing medical and teacher training, were able to stay with kin on Weno, following a very old pattern of clan hospitality, but they wanted a place of their own. In the late 1950s the two Pollapese purchased land in Iras village from fellow clan members, and a few years later a third Pollapese man purchased a contiguous plot. This was adequate for about twenty years. Increased migration began to strain resources, however, and in the 1980s Pollapese bought additional land. One is a large plot purchased by the Pollapese municipality with community funds rather than by an individual, but as yet no houses have been built there. The land is to provide additional food, primarily breadfruit, though Pollapese still have not purchased land suitable for growing taro, a critical staple food at home.

The presence of monetary exchange notwithstanding, stories people tell of the initial land acquisition and migration during the American period are consistent in several ways with older stories about migration, mobility, and settlement. Some of these older stories tell of mobility bringing new clans to Pollap. Others tell of movement from Pollap, taking its clans elsewhere. A similar process has established Pollapese clans on Weno. Even the clan said to be autochthonous to Pollap has as part of its tradition a heritage of mobility and connections with people elsewhere. These connections imply kinship and potentially can be the basis for claims to land rights. A kinship claim implies at the very least access to food and shelter, both of which depend on kin land. Furthermore, both kin and island identities are linked to land; the land on Weno belonging to Pollapese is in effect a piece of Pollap, so that Pollapese remain connected with both land and kin even while not on the home atoll (Flinn 1990).

Furthermore, the two clans most involved in this land acquisition are two critical ones: one generally accepted as indigenous to Pollap and thus the original chiefly clan and the other the current chiefly clan. A lineage claiming to be descended from Pollap's autochthonous clan is also the founder of the community on Weno, adding a layer of legitimacy and continuity. Furthermore, the present *de facto* leader in the migrant community is a member of the current chiefly clan. At the same time, his father was one of the original buyers who helped spearhead the purchase of Pollap community land. Allowing other Pollapese to use the land is consistent with the obligations of a chief to care for his people. Thus, despite the appearance of radical change from the past, the establishment and growth of a migrant community is nonetheless grounded in established frameworks for movement, kinship, and identity. At the same time, however, it provides a basis for further change; the existence of a land base and shelter, with the security of living with kin, facilitates migration and the pursuit of higher education and employment.

The community in Iras village has been growing rapidly as young people attend school and then look for work on Weno. Rarely do these migrants plan permanent residence on Weno, however. They periodically return to Pollap, at least to visit, although more people are increasingly spending more time in the migrant community. One indication is the increase in the number of houses built on the two plots of land that form the center of the community. In 1980 (during my first period of fieldwork) each plot had only one house, but by 1986 (a second period of fieldwork) six more had been built. In addition, a meetinghouse, to be used in part as housing, was under construction.

In 1980 the houses typically held quite temporary visitors, who were on Weno to buy supplies, seek medical care, prepare to apply or leave for college, tend to municipal affairs, or pursue other similar tasks. Few families lived for long periods on Weno, and those that did lived nearby rather than on the land belonging to the original buyers. With government jobs, they had access to government housing and money for rent. The Pollapese land was used by the more temporary migrants. Nine years later (during a third period of fieldwork) the case had changed considerably, with many more families living more permanently on Weno (for years rather than months), and more of them living on the Pollap land. These included Pollap men who brought their wives as well as a woman whose husband was a non-Pollap sailor often away from the island. More people had jobs on Weno that they considered permanent, and several Pollap women--like Luisa--were living permanently elsewhere on Weno with their non-Pollap, employed husbands. Furthermore, it was far more clear to Pollapese that young people were likely to remain for long periods of time abroad, some perhaps permanently. Some of these young people living abroad used Weno as a place to visit kin. Other young people were also longer-term residents because of attending college classes offered through the Community College of Micronesia. Thus, more people were on Weno and for far longer periods of time, with more families settled more permanently on the Pollap land. At the same time, however, more women were settling with husband's kin elsewhere, living away from their own female kin. In the future, perhaps other female kin will marry into the same families, but as yet that has not happened.

Pollapese were also perceiving more stress on resources. That was a primary incentive behind purchasing more land and for building a meetinghouse. The meetinghouse could shelter more people and the extra land could provide breadfruit, coconuts, and bananas. Nonetheless, people still had to rely heavily on those with incomes to provide rice and other imported goods.

More consumer goods are also evident in recent years, with refrigerators, fans, TVs, VCRs, and the like more apparent in some houses, taking advantage of the existing electricity. There is also increasing differentiation among the houses, some made of more expensive materials, such as cement blocks and louvered windows, and furnished with more goods; others are made of cheaper, flimsy materials, such as plywood and corrugated iron, and with fewer consumer goods. This reflects not only increased access to consumer goods, with more available each year in Chuuk, but also increasing differential access to these goods because of heavier emphasis on a monetary economy, with many on Weno without employment. In fact, many Pollapese temporarily in the migrant community are seeking medical care or other services, not working for wages, and thus rely on their kin for temporary support.

Throughout Chuuk part of being kin involves sharing food, shelter, and other goods (Marshall 1977). Those with money providing access to resources are expected to help provide for others. Although this represents continuity over time in some aspects of kinship beliefs and practices, it nonetheless entails a shift: Much of this assistance cannot be reciprocated in as balanced a way as would be the case at home, where equal access to critical resources is still essentially intact. Since most food on Weno must be purchased, Pollapese in town have unequal access to some basic resources. Those with monetary incomes are therefore permanently more able to give money and goods, receiving prestige in return. Those earning money incomes, then, not only have differential access to the new resources but also to the traditional ones of respect and prestige, because these are tied to generosity. Inequality is consequently growing.

### **Migration, Gender, and Household**

Shifts in gender relations are also taking place. Part of the explanation lies with employment options: Men are more likely to obtain employment on Weno, and they are also more likely to obtain better paying and more powerful positions than women, a common story worldwide (see, for example, Brydon and Chant 1989; Engracia and Herrin 1984; Khoo 1984; Little 1973). The employed Pollapese men have jobs in areas such as administrative government work, secondary and elementary school teaching, sailing, mechanics, and health. Women work as elementary school teachers, secretaries, or health aides.

Pollapese men for years have migrated off-island to take jobs as sailors on government ships and freighters, work that has required little formal education. Sailing on a ship is consistent with the male role of sailing canoes,

Pollap's ideological association of men with mobility, and Pollap's heritage of voyaging. In the past, sailing certainly provided men with access to ties and resources throughout a wide area, and the paid jobs added the resource of money. A more dramatic change from the past, however, is that the base for sailing is not Pollap but Weno, encouraging more permanent residence there rather than on Pollap. That, in turn, encourages women married to these men to settle on Weno rather than Pollap.

Other jobs require more formal education. Although both men and women are attending school, more men than women have found employment. Both the female pattern of employment as well as choice of college major fit Pollapese beliefs about women as nurturers and supporters of others. Nursing, education, and secretarial skills are the common interests expressed by women going to college. Women find it harder to find a paid job, and choosing to be a housewife, even when it does not involve gardening, fits traditional gender patterns for women in the way that sailing fits the male image.

Only a few Pollap women are currently employed, and most of these work at the island's elementary school. A more dramatic impact of women leaving the island in pursuit of formal education has been the marriages to non-Pollap men. On Weno, although a few Pollap women have paid jobs, many more are living in the capital because they are married to employed men. The lives of these women, including Luisa and Josepha, differ in striking ways from the lives of their sisters and mothers at home (women like Cecelia). Changes in household patterns are emerging, despite conscious attempts to remain Pollapese and retain Pollapese customs on Weno. This is happening in part because the women married to non-Pollap men are being pulled away from the Pollap community and their kin. Rather than live in traditional uxorilocal residence, the husbands--in large part because of their work on Weno--are able to have their wives join them in virilocal residence, taking the women away from the support of their own kin and in effect constraining their lives.

Women like Luisa contribute no food or money to the families they live with and are subject to the authority of husbands and husbands kin. Women on Pollap reside with their kin, but Luisa needs permission and transportation even to visit relatives living on Weno. Josepha is under the authority of those she works for and subject to constraints of relatively low wages, but at least she has her own kin for emotional and practical support, and she can contribute a modest amount to the financial support of others in the migrant community.

In many respects, Pollap women on the atoll live secure lives, living with their female kin with whom they have close emotional ties. They can sup-



port themselves and their children from their own land and even supplement their diet with marine animals caught within and along the reef. This situation is not unique to Pollap but common wherever women make substantial subsistence contributions; migration, wage labor, and other changes often bring a decrease in women's abilities to control their own lives (see, for example, Bossen 1975; Schlegel and Barry 1986). Pollapese speak of the respect women must show their brothers, who have authority over them, but the authority is muted in a variety of ways. First, their brothers do not reside with them. Second, the brothers themselves have obligations to safeguard their sisters. And even when a brother has made a decision regarding his sister, she has recourse to change his mind, primarily through her mother, who can influence him. Some women say they can obtain what they want if they just keep asking, and they point out that mothers can be influential allies. The women living with their husbands are subject to the demands of his family but without the regular, daily recourse to their own kin. The longer Luisa and other women in her situation talked, the more examples I heard of places they wanted to go or events they wanted to participate in that a husband or husband's relative made impossible. They rarely have opportunities to go home to Pollap--or even to visit the migrant community on Weno. They do not participate in dancing, an activity that is open to all Pollap women, and even for public performances cannot come.

A Pollap man married to a non-Pollap woman living with her kin does not face the same set of difficulties.<sup>6</sup> He must attend to demands of his wife's kin, but he also has considerably more freedom to visit and maintain ties with Pollapese as well as with other islanders. According to Pollapese gender ideology, a man traditionally "moves," whereas a woman "stays." He needs little reason to wander and visit, whereas she needs a reason and often permission to do so. She easily has reason on Pollap considering her daily work responsibilities, which take her away from home to work the taro gardens, gather pandanus, or help her father's sister make a new sleeping mat. But these are atoll activities. On Weno, the couple subsists primarily on purchased food, and the wife is much more confined to the home caring for children, cooking, and cleaning.

Thus, a man can more readily maintain a position within his own community and establish and nurture ties with others. For example, when Pollapese dance on Weno for public occasions such as a church dedication or governor's inauguration, Pollap men dance with a much wider group of Western Islanders (their geographic and cultural neighbors), whereas the women dance only with fellow Pollapese.

Another difference for women concerns household patterns and land use within the migrant community. On the atoll young people receive rights to

land from their matrilineage when they marry. A man in effect gives his land over to his wife to care for, to provide for their children. It is viewed as a resource for the woman's descent group; Pollapese speak of land moving out of the group through the men and into the group through the women. This notion, however, of the land a man brings to the marriage being for his children, combined with the diminished female subsistence role and the heightened ability of men to find jobs and have higher incomes, has helped to promote in the migrant community a land system that is leaning more in a patrilateral, male-oriented direction. Pollap men purchased the land; they neither received it from their matrilineage nor turned it over to wives for caretaking. Their jobs provided the money for the land and houses, required them to reside on Weno, and allowed them to bring their wives to live with them. Consequently, the residential core is beginning to center on sons and other male kin with jobs rather than matrilineally related women caring for descent-group land. They speak in fact of the land as belonging to the men; those with jobs seek their own houses, bringing in their wives. The wife does not use the land to provide sustenance for her children but as a residence for the nuclear family. That certainly is essential, but it does not provide her with autonomy comparable to that of her kin on the atoll. The other pattern is not completely gone: One house is said to be for a group of "sisters," but that has not led to the development of a matrilineally related core of women in residence, and none of these women appears likely to bring a husband there to live with her for more than a temporary visit to Weno.

Women with more freedom are either those who work themselves, like Josepha, or those married to employed men who are often not in residence, such as sailors. Employed women have a fair amount of freedom of movement, especially compared with women living with their husband's kin away from the Pollap community, and those with access to cash have more control over their lives, including the simple ability to pay for a taxi ride to travel downtown.

Even the work of those not employed is far different from that on Pollap where women bear responsibility for providing the staple foods, an essential subsistence role. On Weno they may spend a certain amount of time on such work, gathering food on some of the newly purchased land or from land belonging to kin, but these are not regular, daily activities and do not provide adequate food. Instead, people rely heavily on purchased rice for their staple food. In addition, they have to rely much more on men not only to "gather" the food but to provide access to it, since men are more likely to own and operate a car or truck. Women are more self-sufficient on the atoll. They need men to gather breadfruit and coconuts on Pollap, and they can call on a variety of kin to do so. They have fewer choices on Weno. Most of

their time in the port town is taken up with cooking and washing clothes at home. Those with money play bingo, but the life is much more sedentary. They may have more places to go and more diversions, but they cannot take advantage of them the way men do.

Most of the women on Weno say that they enjoy a break from subsistence work, and women who have returned from college speak ambivalently about returning to the atoll. Men who have returned from college often speak rhapsodically of an atoll life where food is abundant and free, whereas women speak of the hard work of laboring in the taro gardens. Yet the seemingly freer and easier life made possible by formal education and the hope of paid employment move women away from interdependence with kin to dependence on other people and impersonal institutions. Some marry men who appear to be promising mates because of their jobs, only to find themselves isolated at home with affines rather than their own kin and with little control over their movements. Those who still live in the migrant community are experiencing a patrilineal shift in emphasis on land rights and usage. Those with jobs have most control over their lives on Weno, but it puts them nonetheless at a relative disadvantage to men who are able to earn more money at better jobs, and they have to rely on money and the goodwill of supervisors for their livelihood.

From the perspective of Pollapese in general, however, these islanders are exploiting as best they can the existing opportunities and available options. The system of formal education provides access to many of those options, even though Pollapese are aware that a diploma is no longer sufficient to easily obtain a job. With the Compact of Free Association, islanders can easily migrate out of Chuuk, many to Guam, for work rather than just for schooling. Thus another option has been opened. Pollap families for the most part try to allocate members across these options, encouraging at least one younger person to return to the atoll to tend to descent-group affairs. This is what happened with Cecelia, since women more than men are encouraged to return home. In this manner, the group as a whole ideally maintains access to the various opportunities. The decision-making process is not a simple, individual one, but a group concern.

When a decision is made to move, the existence of the migrant community on Weno allows pursuit of these options while maintaining a connection with kin, rights to Pollap land, and an identity as Pollapese. Pollapese on Guam and Saipan, for example, can readily return to Weno when needed. If they want to visit with kin but cannot take the time for a visit to Pollap, they arrange for their kin to travel by ship from the atoll to town, where they meet and visit. In addition, those wanting to look for a job, take some college courses, or even work at a job that pays poorly can all do so because of

access to housing and food provided by others in the community. The result, however, is that even though Pollapese are attempting to obtain land for gardening on Weno, they are moving away from the self-sufficiency of atoll life towards dependence on outside forces, and the toll falls unevenly on men and women even as it creates other differences between the employed and the unemployed and between Pollapese in town and Pollapese at home.

### NOTES

1. In 1989 a Chuuk State Constitutional Conference changed the spellings of place names to more closely match the indigenous pronunciation. Chuuk previously was Truk, Weno was Moen, and Pollap was Pulap.
2. For specifics about this navigational system, see Gladwin 1970 and Lewis 1972.
3. For a description of the Woleai system, see Alkire 1970; for a description of the system involving Lamotrek, Satawal, and Elato, see Alkire 1965. Both areas lie to the west of Pollap and were part of the Yapese Empire. Damm and Sarfert (1935) mention the West-ems and Namonuitos paying tribute to Polowat. See also Flinn 1992:24.
4. The following figures are from a census I conducted in 1980; birth dates before the late 1940s are only approximate. Of the twenty-eight people (twelve women and sixteen men) probably born in the 1920s and thus of age for schooling under the Japanese administration or very early American years, five of the men but none of the women had off-island formal schooling. Among the twenty-eight people (seventeen women and eleven men) probably born during the 1930s, none of the women but four of the men attended off-island secondary schools; four women did, however, spend at least a few years at an off-island Catholic elementary school. Of the twenty-two people (ten women and twelve men) probably born between 1940 and 1947, none of the women but seven of the men attended a secondary school; three of the women attended the Catholic elementary school. Those born beginning in 1948 were eligible to attend Weipat secondary school on a nearby atoll, the opening of which was a turning point; parents felt more secure about sending their children, including daughters, to Weipat (see Flinn 1992:107 for a more extended discussion). Of the 124 students eligible for Weipat, only fifteen did not attend. These were women, but their reasons for not attending were because of marriage, severe illness, or failure to pass the entrance test, not because of parental reluctance to send them. The stated expectation is that all elementary school graduates will continue for secondary schooling.
5. Transportation to and from school is provided by a government ship that carries the students to school in September and returns them home in June.
6. Nor has suicide plagued Pollapese men as it has others in Chuuk.

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## THE TRACK OF THE TRIANGLE: FORM AND MEANING IN THE SEPIK, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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THIS ARTICLE deals with the relationship between morphology and meaning in art, focusing on the triangle implemented as a preferred shape in visual art by Sepik cultures. It is an inquiry into how far the triangle conveys meaning that cannot be communicated by any other form, meaning thus determined through itself. By means of the triangle, fundamental values associated with gender, men and women, skull and vulva, killing/death/the creation of ancestors and women's sexuality, and women as in-marrying wives, as well as the generation of life, become expressed simultaneously, depending on the orientation of the triangle. Thus, what might be called dualism is in fact complementarity contained and united in a single form.

Moreover, in structuralist anthropological theory the triangle is often used as a model to visualize ternary structures and to explain the mediating process between dualisms and oppositions (Lévi-Strauss 1963:143-162, 251-266; Wagner 1986). I shall demonstrate that the Abelam (as well as other Sepik cultures) use the triangle as their own cultural expression rather than as a model created by outsiders, though the basic idea of the triangle or ternary structures as mediating between oppositions seems to be underlying both.

Anthony Forge was among the first who argued that "Abelam painting could be regarded as a form of language operating on its own rules and communicating things that are not communicable by other methods" (1970: 288). In a later article he elaborated this topic by speaking about cultural sign systems that may or may not choose art as a medium. However, all

“‘meanings’ are all overt and basically sociological; they do not explain why certain forms are chosen or elaborated” (Forge 1979:281). Since Forge’s pioneering article other scholars (also those working on the Sepik, like Bowden 1992) have taken up the notion of art as a communications system of its own. Hanson (1983), for example, has examined the organization of lineal space, its dual forms, and the principle of symmetry in order to reveal structural principles of basic Maori culture in general: Kaepler (1978) has demonstrated that different categories of art (music, dance, and tapa decoration) have the same underlying structure as also seen in social organization. In both cases, art communicates something by using its own means of expression, though the way this communication is structured follows patterns found in other domains of the culture as well.

Recently, Forge’s argument has been reconsidered from a new angle. O’Hanlon suggests that scholars working on Pacific art have too quickly accepted the conclusion that an absence of exegesis is the same thing as an absence of verbalization. “For while the Highlanders . . . do indeed offer very little exegesis of the significance of the wigs, they *do* talk about them” (O’Hanlon 1992:590).

In this article I shall take up, in a modified way, Forge’s argument concerning art as a system of communications with a specific structure. Moreover, I shall try to answer the question he raised: Why have Sepik cultures chosen a specific form or morphological sign for a whole complex of meanings?

In a first main section I will present a detailed ethnographic study of the triangle, implemented with different materials, in Abelam culture. As already mentioned, Forge has pointed out that the Abelam give no verbal exegesis of the forms and motifs they paint or carve and of the artifacts displayed during initiations in the ceremonial house. Furthermore, indirect hermeneutics, in other cultures often supplemented by myths, are, with only few exceptions, lacking as well.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence, my approach includes hardly any verbal statements by the Abelam themselves because such statements are almost nonexistent. My analysis, therefore, is based on the study of the cultural context and the way in which the triangle is used both as a specific form and implemented with specific material.

In a second step I shall expand the study to other Sepik cultures in order to examine the use and context of the triangle and its inherent meaning there. It will be demonstrated that obviously similar concepts are expressed through this same conspicuous form and its specific orientation. In a conclusion I shall try to answer the question why Sepik cultures have chosen the triangle as a sign to communicate messages and thus cultural values.



### Regional Studies and Art

Regional studies of New Guinea art have, since Haddon (1894), a long tradition of mostly focusing on questions of style rather than meaning. According to Tiesler (1990), analysis of styles and the attempt to delineate style provinces have, so far, failed because the more detailed the studies become the less possible it is that any clear boundaries can be drawn. Recently questions have been raised by several scholars relating to a specific form of art within a broader area not a priori defined as a cultural area or region and what this form “means,” for example, Smidt in his article on one-legged figures (1990) and Strathern (n.d.) on the one-legged pearlshell. Such studies concentrate on form and meaning rather than regions.

However, the Sepik as a region has been considered a more or less homogeneous area by almost all anthropologists since Margaret Mead (1978). Without the fundamental assumption of “Sepikness” that all these cultures share (Lutkehaus and Roscoe 1987), the two Sepik symposia held in the eighties (in 1984 and 1986) would not have been possible.<sup>2</sup> Within the Sepik are areas of intense interaction, trade, and exchange with clearly visible effects on the cultures involved.<sup>3</sup> There are other areas with only occasional interactions; accordingly, similarities become evident only after prolonged and profound studies. Quite a lot of cultural elements, both material and nonmaterial, are shared by many Sepik societies. This does not imply that these elements (of which there are probably dozens or even hundreds) have the same structural position, importance, and meaning in one Sepik culture as they have in another. Nor does it suggest that they are embedded in, part of, or even producing identical cultural processes. It is surprising, however, that the Sepik as a region or even as a cultural area was not addressed at either conference but was rather implicitly assumed by participants. In contrast to “the New Guinea Highlands” (Hays 1993), the way in which “the Sepik” has been used in anthropological literature as a concept and the questions of what the Sepik and “Sepikness” *are* have never come into the focus of anthropological debate.<sup>4</sup>

It is beyond my aims here to answer such questions, although, indirectly, this study will reveal a certain basic “Sepikness” represented and contained in the triangle. I shall not follow any definite way through Sepik cultures but follow a kind of track of the triangle. Moreover, I shall limit myself to the outline of a “cultural complex” and its various transformations I consider typical for Sepik cultures, which I have extensively described in an earlier publication (Hauser-Schäublin 1989a: part 2): the ceremonial house. The triangle in one of its main aspects is closely associated with the ceremonial

house and its transformations. I shall give evidence of transformations of the triangle according to the different cultures with their men's houses, men's associations, and rituals. However, as Tuzin states, "given the ease with which cultural traits appear able to move through this general area," he must conclude "that transforms [are] related to one another at deep cultural and temporal levels" (1980:158n. 33).

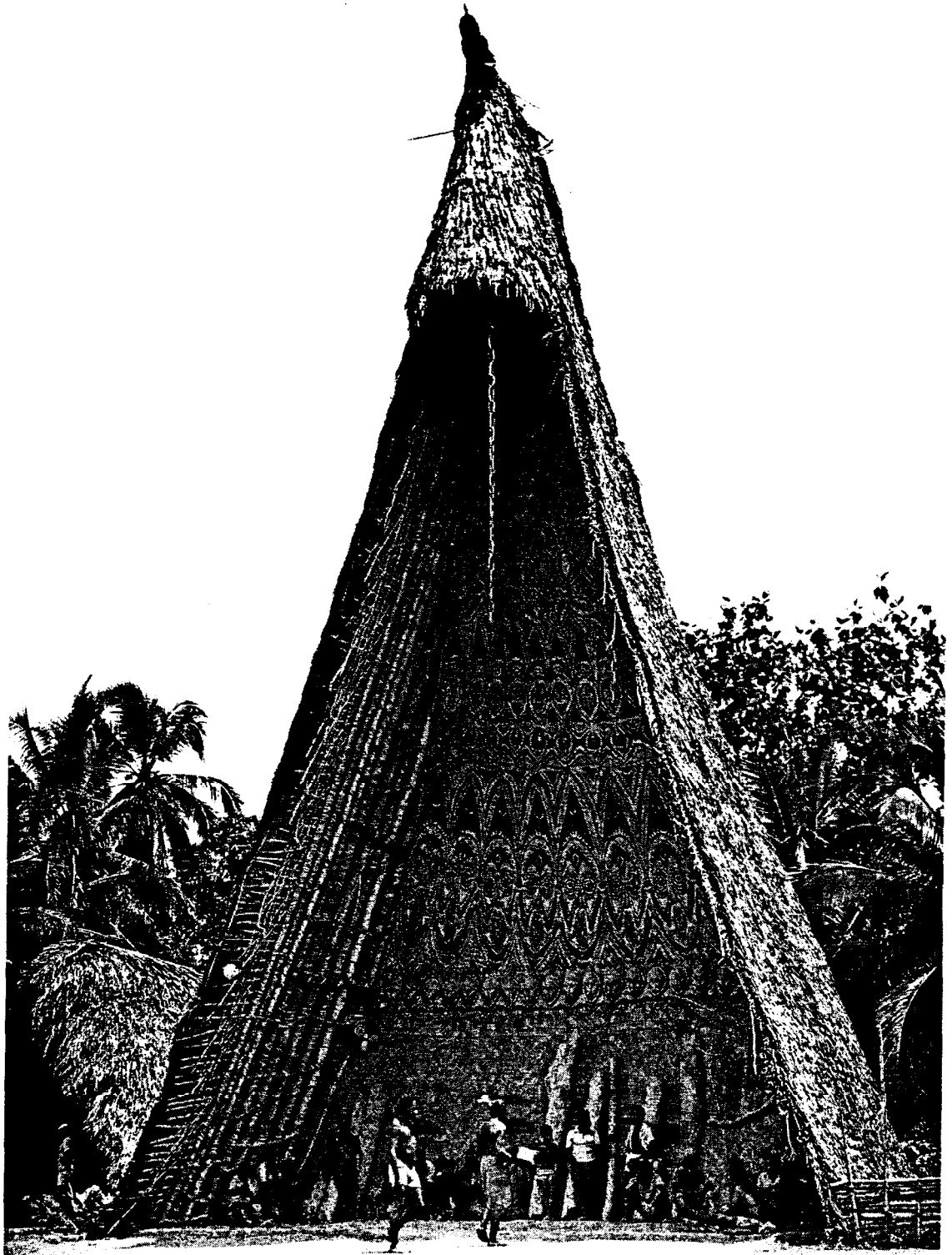
I suggest that the triangle is one of these "transforms," a typical form met in different Sepik cultures, and, ultimately, a conveyor of the same meaning. Therefore, I shall deal with art as a metalanguage shared by many Sepik cultures; it defines boundaries of its own right.

### **The Triangle: Form and Orientation among the Abelam**

In Sepik cultures the triangle is used in a wide range of objects, all of which can be classified as art. Sometimes it is the determining form of a whole artifact; sometimes it is only an element or part of a more complex whole. The best known of these artifacts, often represented in museum collections, are headdresses like the *wagnen* of the Abelam (Hauser-Schäublin 1989b:19, 62-65) or canoe shields and skull racks of the Iatmul (Kelm 1966, 1:237, 496; 1968, 3:501-503).

Obviously every culture has some predilections toward forms that clearly bear particular connotations. The triangle is not the only one that Sepik cultures constantly use.<sup>5</sup> There are many others, of course, such as the circle and rectangle and so forth, but they are less conspicuous. Similarly outstanding as the triangle as a two-dimensional form is the specific way the Abelam often present the form, which is, I think, less common in other Sepik cultures. This is the sloping position preferred in many ritual contexts.<sup>6</sup>

The triangle is the prevalent form element of Abelam spirit houses with their huge, triangular, painted facades (Figure 1).<sup>7</sup> The facade is constructed as a triangle by the Abelam before being affixed to the house. For this purpose, large amounts of *panggal* (sago spathe) are collected and sewn together on a frame so that they finally constitute this spectacular form. Only when the triangle is completed does it get painted and attached to the front.<sup>8</sup> Not only is the painted facade as such triangular, but also the whole front of the house, including the painted gable triangle and its lower part covered by a plaited mat, as well as the ground plan of the building. Together with the sloping ridgepole a three-dimensional triangle, a tetrahedron, is created. The Abelam, however, have no expression for this striking shape, only for the objects for which the triangle is used. Therefore, the tri-



**FIGURE 1. Abelam spirit house with its triangular front, Kalabu village.**  
(Photo by Jörg Hauser, 1978-1979)

angle is an etic notion, one of geometry implying that a triangle remains one even if it is turned upside down.

In contrast, the Abelam do make a distinction between a triangle that has the base at the top and one with the base at the bottom. In the first case it is readily called a representation of the vulva and the pattern as such, if painted, is called *kitnya*, "vulva." It is almost always painted in black with white dotted lines along the edges. On flat paintings *kitnya* is used as a motif even for figures otherwise thought of as male. Penes are never represented on paintings, though they are prolifically carved on sculptures.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes the triangle called *kitnya* constitutes a part of women's body decorations for ceremonies, painted on their cheeks when ritual dances take place (Figure 2). Following puberty rites girls are painted with these distinctive marks for the first time. Old women never use the pattern. *Kitnya* for women is always a temporary body decoration, never permanent or one that could be removed and stored. *Kitnya* as women's facial painting is interpreted as a symbol not only of the vulva as such, but also of their active sexuality and fertility and, in the case of young unmarried women, the fact that they will soon become wives.

The same design is used as a specific form of men's body decoration, not as painting but as a hairdress. Forge mentions adult Abelam men who plucked out or shaved the hair above the forehead to leave a bold triangle (1973:184). This was explicitly identified with the female pubic triangle. Interestingly, *kitnya* as a painted motif either on ceremonial paintings or on women's cheeks is representing the pubic triangle, especially *hair*, whereas when used by men on their own bodies--the head--it is a triangle achieved by *eliminating* the hair. Therefore, it is boldness not frizzy hair, an opposition in material, that defines a significant difference.

Only with the base of the triangle at the top is it called *kitnya*, never when it is turned the other way round.<sup>10</sup> When the tip is at the top, the triangle completely loses its meaning of "femaleness." It is the orientation that defines the distinctive meaning and its quality as a gender attribute. The triangle with its base at the bottom is always used in the context of men's ritual lives, associated to varying degrees with sacredness and secretness. As already mentioned the Abelam ceremonial house, *korambo*, consists, if analyzed from the point of view of form and shape, of a whole series of triangles. There seems to exist a kind of hierarchical order of sacredness and secretness within the triangle. Concerning the triangular ground plan of the building, the base is linked to the entrance, giving space to the open (round!) ceremonial ground in front of it. The tip of the triangle is at the back where the two sides of the roof meet with the lowest point of the ridge-pole about two meters above the ground. This is also the place where a small



FIGURE 2. Young women with *kitnya* cheek painting (at an opening ceremony of a spirit house), Kimbangwa village. (Photo by Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, 1978)

exit leads to a small, secret ceremonial ground accessible only to initiated men, well hidden from women's sight. During the opening ceremony for a new ceremonial house, women take part in the cycle of singing and dancing (which lasts for weeks) in the building. Women's and men's space are well defined: Women may dance and sing only in the front part of the ceremonial house, the men in the center where hand drums are attached to ropes hanging down from the ridgepole. The slit gongs are kept in the back of the building, hidden by a screen that separates the rear third of the ceremonial

house from the front part. This rear area is--on the level of horizontal organization of space--the most sacred during the opening festival. It becomes obvious that the area near the front, that is, the base of the triangle, is definitely women's space; that in the center and the tip of it, men's. Later, when the opening ceremony is concluded, the building is ritually cleansed. Women no longer have access to the interior. Access to the whole triangle as space is then the prerequisite of the men.

Similarly, on the front side of the ceremonial house the lower part covered by mats is considered less sacred than the upper painted part (which in itself forms a further triangle). The plaited mat and the way it is produced is shown to the initiates during a lower grade of initiation. The secret of producing the large *panggal* front, which is painted with standardized patterns, is revealed to them only later. The spot where the tip of the painted triangle touches the ridgepole is one of the most sacred places of the whole building. Even when the house is under construction, as soon as the ridgepole is put into place it is covered by cane wound around it and finally by big leaves.

A similar hierarchy of sacredness and secretness is present in the building's interior. The whole interior space constitutes a three-dimensional triangle. The whole upper part is more sacred than the lower. During certain stages of initiation an upper floor is built. There, initiators produce the sounds of spirits (by singing and playing musical instruments) while the initiates crawl into the building. These older men are the spirits during that stage of the ritual.

At other stages of initiation the upper part of the building is separated from the lower by a painted ceiling (also triangular in shape). The upper part remains empty; it represents the endless space of the cosmos inhabited by spirits only. In the lower part the huge *nggwalndu* sculptures are displayed, manifestations of ancestral clan spirits. They are shown to the initiates but the still more sacred part of the world of the spirits remains hidden above. It is a dark void in the form of a tetrahedron. This is revealed only during the last stage of initiation. Then an anthropomorphous ceremonial house in miniature, with its many triangles as constituting elements, is built in the center of the ceremonial house. At the highest point of the triangular front of this structure (to which bent "arms" and "legs" are added) a wooden mask is attached. It is the head of an anthropomorphous being. On its head it carries a huge headdress like an aura; it is a feather shield in triangular or slightly elongated form. The "body" of this figure is constituted by a kind of plaited basket in the shape of a ceremonial house. This multi-triangular being that cannot be classified as male or female is the most important of all, otherwise clan-specific, spirits. It is, like the ceremonial house, a further, personified, representation of the cosmos. In this ultimate

revelation initiates learn that this body shaped like a *korambo* contains nothing, only a kind of endless void.

### **Triangular Headdresses for Spirits, Men, Yams, and Stones**

Apart from the ceremonial house and its contents,<sup>11</sup> the triangle as a form is characteristic of a specific type of headdress called *wagnen*. It consists of painted *panggal* attached to a triangular, sometimes slightly elongated, frame. For the most precious pieces of *wagnen*, feathers (instead of paintings) are used (as for the figure of the most sacred spirit displayed during the highest initiation grade). Other headdresses are made from different kinds of material and in different forms; only *wagnen* may have the shape of a triangle.

Head ornaments are badges of the stage of initiation a man has attained. The simplest form, typical for the lowest stages of initiation, consists of unpainted fronds of the *bendshin* palm wound around the head. The most common headdress is made of plaited cane strips; it is roundish, disklike in form. Before a performance it is repainted and white feathers are stuck into the rim. These headdresses, called *noute*, are worn by initiators and initiates at varying stages of ceremonies as well as by older women when performing dances in certain sequences of the initiation. Headdresses of the *wagnen* type are typical for the highest initiation grade.

The canon of forms for headdresses and the context in which individual forms may be used is therefore clearly defined. I once witnessed a dance at an initiation in Malmba where one man had an elongated *noute* on his head; in its form it resembled a *wagnen*. After some quarrels about it the man had to leave the ceremonial ground and remove his head ornament because its form did not fit the event. The form was probably also a contradiction to the material, basketry work, usually used only for roundish *noute* headdresses.

*Noute* are also used to decorate outstanding *ka* yams displayed at festivals called *hipim mami* in pidgin. *Ka* yam is clearly inferior to *wapi* yam, both varieties of *Dioscorea*. For *ka* yam displays, long specimens of *ka* are decorated with a wooden, anthropomorphous mask and a *noute* above the "head." The tubers are parallelized to the human body and their parts are named after this model. The vine and new shoots are growing on the head of the yam, clearly the growing point. It is there that the *noute* is fixed. The middle part of the tuber is called "body" and the lower "legs." When the tuber end has split into two the yam is regarded as female; one compact body without protuberances is conceived as male. At *ka* festivals the yams are presented "like men" in an upright, "standing" position.

*Noute* headdresses are typical for a specific type of sculptures called *wap-*

*inyan* displayed in low-grade initiations. These relatively small, brightly painted sculptures are presented, like the *ka yam*, in an upright position.

*Wagnen* are always triangular in shape; sometimes they are a little elongated and do not fit the geometric definition in the strict sense. Nevertheless it is the same category of headdress; Abelam men consider the form that I have called a triangle as a set of possible variations within a frame of reference. *Wagnen* headdresses are preferably painted with the design of a huge face with staring eyes consisting often of concentric circles (Figure 3). This type of face is called *nggwalnggwal*; the name is given to the same design on facades of ceremonial houses, too. *Wagnen* are an emblem of a high-grade initiation in general as well as of senior initiators in particular. *Wagnen* are the most sacred of all headdresses, especially when they consist of feathers assembled into a huge feather image. A *wagnen's* size sometimes exceeds that of the man who is carrying it. A *wagnen* dancer carefully balancing the headdress is admired by everybody watching the ceremony.<sup>12</sup> His face is completely painted and he has to dance with his eyes shut tight. The headdress is fixed both to a horizontal pole the dancer carries on his neck and to his head. Owing to its size (up to two meters high) a *wagnen* can be extremely heavy, so special scaffolds are built at the borders of the ceremonial ground. There the dancers may deposit the main weight of the headdress by leaning against the scaffolds and resting before they continue their nightlong dance.

A dancer fully decorated and carrying a *wagnen* is called *narendu*, a term generally applied to a man with body decorations taking part in a ceremony, be it with a *noute* or a *wagnen*. More specifically, when a *wagnen* dancer appears from the initiation enclosure and dances in front of the spectators, it is said, "*Nggwal nde kyak*, The *nggwal* [*wagnen* dancer] dies." On one hand this is just an expression for his finery, considered to be so beautiful that it is assumed to have originated in the other world. On the other hand it means that the dancer himself with his eyes closed appears like a spirit from the other world--conceived as a world of utmost beauty and abundance--and is therefore as beautiful as a *nggwal*. These *wagnen* dancers are men's products, the production achieved by senior men during the initiation whereby they re-create the ancestors, namely the *nggwalndu*.

*Wagnen* are used as attributes of the most highly valued tubers, the *wapi*, the so-called long yam. These tubers are called "the child of men only" (implying without women's contribution, the products of only men's endeavors); they are considered humanlike beings, representations of the spirits, symbolizing men's utmost potency to create life. For festivals the longest tubers (sometimes over two meters long) are abundantly decorated with almost all the elements used as body decorations for male dancers





FIGURE 3. **Triangular headdress (*wagnen*)**. (Photo by René Gardi, 1955-1956, Museum of Ethnography Basel)

during initiation ceremonies. Like *ka* yams, *wapi* tubers are compared to the human body and decorations are applied according to the same principles of body classification. *Wapi* yams are tied to poles and displayed in a slanting position. With their *wagnen* headdresses, the masks, and the shell ornaments the tubers look like beautifully decorated men tied to poles. To the longest specimens are attributed the name of clan spirits, *nggwalndu*. And, again, the large anthropomorphous sculptures also called *nggwalndu* that "sleep" on neck rests in the ceremonial house are decorated, too, but only with *wagnen*. These huge, wooden *nggwalndu* sculptures are displayed in the center of the ceremonial house with their feet pointing towards the front side, the heads towards the rear. Before they are put up for an initiation, the sculptures are newly painted and decorated with flowers, shell rings, and cassowary-bone daggers. For especially elaborate initiations they do not receive "ordinary" *wagnen*. Instead a big, triangular ceremonial painting, which in motif and form is identical with the painted facade (only smaller in size), is placed like a slanting ceiling above them. This ceiling with mostly *nggwalnggwal* faces on it is said to be the *nggwalndu's wagnen*.

There are also sacred stones kept in a separate "stone house"; the stones are cylindrical and used in rituals to promote the fertility and growth of the *wapi* yams. These sacred yam stones are also decorated with a *wagnen* before the planting season; they look "like a decorated man" then. Again, these stones, the most sacred of Abelam ritual paraphernalia, represent one further aspect of the kaleidoscopic picture of the *nggwalndu* (which literally means "grandfather"). The picture varies each time one looks at it but its elements are clearly recognizable by the way they are put together, according to the context. For the Abelam the most sacred aspect of the ancestral spirits is the decorated dancer carrying a *wagnen*; he is to some extent a living representation of the *nggwalndu* and a testimony of the existence of the spirit world. And it is through the spirits' assistance that men are able to procreate long yams, another form of reproducing ancestors and spirits.

### **Form as a Charter of Meaning**

*Wagnen* headdresses thus seem to be an attribute that marks all facets of *nggwalndu*.<sup>13</sup> Or to put it the other way round: It is *wagnen* that embraces all aspects of these spirits, sculptures, stones, yams, and men. But why is it that the spectacularly shaped headdress is used to mark at least a partial identity between all these aspects?

I have already mentioned that the painted, triangular ceiling above the prostrate *nggwalndu* sculptures was explained to me as being the *wagnen* of these wooden clan spirits. But actually the painting is called *narut*, "orna-

mented netbag.” This expression alludes to the fact that *nggwalndu* sculptures are kept in an initiation chamber decorated over and over again; it is this specially created room that is called “netbag.” In everyday life netbags are receptacles produced by women. Among the most common patterns used for their decoration are lines arranged to create triangles of both sorts: those with the tip at the top and those reversed. Netbags are *the* containers par excellence, mostly associated with women. The metaphorical use of “netbag,” though, alludes to one of the eagerly kept secrets of men’s life.<sup>14</sup>

The esoteric name given to such a painting is *nyit tshui* or *nyit tshui yu*, “shooting star.” This refers to the fact that the interior of the ceremonial house is a model of the cosmos. The painted ceiling, the *wagnen* of the *nggwalndu*, is like a shield dividing the world beyond the experience of man from that of the experienceable, at least during initiations. Shooting stars originate in the mysterious cosmos and come down to the earth. The same is true for the *nggwalndu* whose home is in the other world and who come to visit the village during initiations.

The exoteric name of the painted ceiling above the *nggwalndu* sculptures in the ceremonial house is *wagnen*. This implies that the ceiling is their beautiful headdress. These sculptures represent the more durable, material aspects of the *nggmalndu*. The spirits’ permanent residence is located outside the village, in water holes and swamps. Before a ceremony takes place slit gongs are beaten and their names are sung. They are implored to leave their swampy place and to reside temporarily in the *nggwalndu* sculptures in the ceremonial house.

In another context closely linked to the ceremonial house the expression *wagnen* is also used. When a *korambo* is being built, erected first is a scaffolding called *nyangga* (literally, “child house”; the *nyangga* has the shape of a small ceremonial house). In front of the *nyangga* a huge ladder is put up. It serves as a base for the construction of the highest part of the house. The two vertical poles to which the steps of the ladder are attached are called *wagnen yau* (*yau* also has the meaning of a garden used for a first planting season). *Wagnen yau* is an expression applied also to the construction of a big *wagnen*: the vertical sticks in the middle of the frame that stiffen the whole headdress along its vertical axis are called by this name also. The scaffolding of the ceremonial house thus seems to parallel the frame of the *wagnen* headdress. In fact, when the structure is completed the triangular, newly painted facade is hoisted into place and affixed, and the slit gongs are beaten to announce the big opening ceremony. The signal is called *wagnen ula*, “the *wagnen* is set in place.” The term *wagnen* for the huge painting fixed to the front of the ceremonial house is used in ritual contexts only. A further parallel between ceremonial house and headdress can be seen at the

place where the plaited lower part of the ceremonial house meets the painted facade. There, a carved and painted crossbeam is fixed horizontally. Similarly, a decorated man carries a kind of "crossbeam" on his neck to keep his huge *wagnen* in place.

The most dominant motif on the ceremonial house painting is the *nggwalnggwal*. When asked what these large faces with the staring eyes represent the Abelam readily call them *nggwalndu*. But it is no individual spirit in particular that is called by the name but the category of *nggwalndu* in general. Their eyes are fixed to the ceremonial ground where almost all public events take place and where all rites of passage are held. The ceremonial house is the *nggwalndu's* space in a hamlet. In everyday life not even initiated adult men enter it; the interior is the place where spirits may dwell temporarily unseen by people. Nobody dares to disturb them by intruding into the building. Thus, a ceremonial house remains deserted for most of the time of its existence. The huge faces on the painting are intermediaries between the interior of the *korambo*, the space given to the spirits, mainly the *nggwalndu*, and the outside world, that of everyday life, of men, women, and children. The painting is a kind of border that separates the interior from the exterior. But it is also a threshold that unites both worlds. At the same time the world of the *nggwalndu* gazes into the world of the village life; thus, the Abelam are in continuous visual contact with them,

A *wagnen* dancer, therefore, is a man of the two worlds,<sup>15</sup> of the living and of the dead. He has been with the spirits and is on his way back by crossing the border. This is why people say "*nggwal nde kyak*" when he returns. He is carrying the other world into the actual one; the world of the past (of those who had formerly lived, died, and joined the spirits) invades the present. This is also true for all nonhuman representations--yams, sculptures, and stones--of *nggwalndu*. The man of the past is also of the present: He crosses borders not only of territories but also of time. Thus, *wagnen* communicate important messages concerning concepts of time and space and man's role in rituals during which all these borders are suspended, when the two worlds become one and the past is the same as the present.

A further question concerning meaning remains unanswered yet: Why are *wagnen* obviously linked to heads of men, sculptures, yams, and stones and how does the triangular, painted facade fit into this context?

A comparative study of spirit houses in the Maprik area revealed that pictures taken in the fifties give evidence of skulls displayed on the crossbeam below the facade (see Hauser-Schäublin 1989a: plate 227). On one ceremonial house photographed by the missionary A. Knorr, a row of wooden masks, one beside the other, was affixed to the front instead of to a crossbeam (see Hauser-Schäublin 1989a: plate 230). Nowadays the most com-

mon motif carved on crossbeams is *ndumagna*, “head of man.” These heads are not associated with any living or dead person. Like the *nggwalnggwal* these heads stand for a whole category of beings, not individuals. The Abelam usually maintain that these heads represent “big-men” in general. In those cases where people still remembered skulls being displayed there, they recollected that the names of the big-men were called out when the skulls were discussed. Sometimes one or several skulls were trophies brought home from raids. Usually the skulls came from big-men of the village, though, important men of the hamlet where the ceremonial house was located.<sup>16</sup> Skulls disappeared from the *korambo* while gradual changes took place in Abelam culture. When the Maprik area came under the control of the Australian administration after World War II, warfare was forbidden as was the burying of corpses within the settlement and the removal of bones from graves. It appears that, generally speaking, an “evolution” took place in several steps. At its beginning was the display of skulls, gradually replaced by wooden mask substitutes, and, finally, by a fully sculptured crossbeam with heads on it.

Bedecked with skulls or individual masks, the painted facades must have looked like a huge *wagnen*. The analogy of the front of a ceremonial house to an anthropomorphous figure can be pushed even further. The lower part of a *korambo* consists of a plaited mat. The patterns on it are all named. The most prominent appear like two parallel rows of continuous bands of W's. This pattern is called “bent limbs,” meaning arms as well as legs. It is also used in paintings and always serves to represent bodies. This would imply that the whole front of a *korambo* consisted of anthropomorphous figures with the bodies forming the lower part of the building, the skulls in the middle, and above them their *wagnen*. It demonstrates as well how deceased big-men and spirits are closely linked and how together they constitute the kaleidoscopic picture of *nggwalndu* in general.

This perspective leads to a congruence of meaning of the differing contexts in which *wagnen* are used: They are all linked to heads. Although the Abelam were not head-hunters like their neighbors in the south, the Iatmul, the cultural contexts where ideas about heads are important convey the notion that fertility is linked to the head. This is easily recognizable in the context of yams where the “head of the yam” is the growing point of the tuber; it is treated in yam-growing rituals as the source of life. And the “head” of the yam stone is “washed” with sacred water from spirit places in the swamps to promote the yam’s fertility. For all beings, spirits, men, yams, and stones, the head is the most sacred of all body parts. The pointed *wagnen* emphasizes, like an aura, the singularity of the head, symbol also of the conversion of death into life and vice versa.

It is at this point that both types of triangles are identified with each other, that with the tip at the top and the other one turned upside down. In its broadest sense, the triangle is related to fertility. But there are two ways of attaining it, a "male" one, associated with the head, and a "female" one, associated with the vulva.

### **Circle and Sphere versus Triangle and Tetrahedron**

The *korambo* has to be considered in a wider frame of reference than what has been explained so far. We have seen that the ceremonial house represents in itself half of the cosmos, the world of the spirits bound to the land of the dead. This is expressed in Kalabu also by the orientation of most ceremonial houses. With one exception that faced west, all were oriented with their facades towards the east. This is linked to the Abelam's concept of orientation, the notion of the sloping path of the sun from the zenith at noon towards the west, where the sun disappears in the evening. This path of the sun is represented by the slanting ridgepole of the spirit house. In the Abelam's conception of space the horizon "narrows" towards the west, that is, the "walls" or rather the "borders" of the cosmos meet in the west, at the point where the sun disappears--in order to rise, during the night, in the land of the dead. The ceremonial ground, *amei*, where all major social events take place, is circular. It represents the platform of actual life lit by the full sun and the full moon. This world of actual life has the shape of a sphere (unlike the tetrahedron shape of the spirit world), and it has a definite orientation, too: At the top is the zenith and at its lowest point the nadir (the notion of the latter is important only in specific categories of ceremonies).

This idea of different shapes of space representing two "worlds," separated but at the same time intrinsically connected, is ritually emphasized. For the opening of a new ceremonial house a sun painted on a round *pang-gal* is hung above the center of the *amei*. On the ceremonial ground, right in the center below the "sun," a round stone is placed. The stone is called "moon" and is classified, in contrast to the male sun, as female. This is the ritual focus of life in the actual world.

During the opening ceremony, when the sun is fixed in three directions to coconut palms and in the fourth to the ceremonial house, the men in the *korambo* seize the hand drums and start the initial singing. Then the sun begins to hop up and down; it is linked to the hand drums by a rope hanging down from the ridgepole. Thus, the sun wags as if being moved by unseen hands. It is the way the two worlds are bound together. Therefore, the tetrahedron of the *korambo* is the other world and the round, open ceremonial

Found--a space conceived as spherical with the zenith at its highest point --is the world of living men. The front of the ceremonial house facing the actual world is a border between the worlds, between life and death as well as between past and present.

### **Sepik Variations:**

#### **Heads, Skulls, and Paintings in the Context of the Men's House**

Having discussed the triangle as a characteristic form used by the Abelam in specific cultural contexts and conveying meaning concerning two kinds of fertility, a "male" and a "female" one, I shall now proceed to other Sepik cultures. I shall start by examining the context in which the triangle is most likely to be used: men's houses and men's rituals. As mentioned earlier, the Abelam ceremonial house is not a meetinghouse for the men but used almost exclusively for storing carvings and for the display of initiation scenes. In many other Sepik cultures the men's house is actually the focus of men's life, in everyday as well as in ritual uses. Men not only used to spend most of the day there but casually spent the night there as well. All major rituals were held on ceremonial grounds or within the men's house. Many of the rituals were related to head-hunting and warfare and the representation of ancestors as a moving force in the process of promoting the well-being and fertility of the village community, that is, of people.

Among the Iatmul who, in contrast to the Abelam, were regularly carrying out head-hunting raids, the human skull was prominent in many rituals; skulls were displayed in the context of the men's house. As will be demonstrated, this is also the context of the triangle in many Sepik cultures. There were principally two ways in which heads or skulls were displayed: (1) on the outside of the huge men's houses and (2) in the interior,

(1) On the front side, overlooking the large dancing ground, heads or skulls were put in small, windowlike holes, one beside the other, but each of them individually. Actually the skulls were put--from the point of view of the construction of an Iatmul men's house--at the same spot as on the Abelam ceremonial house: on the lower end of the gable triangle.

On some Iatmul houses masks were displayed instead of skulls but obviously their function was the same. The gables of traditional Iatmul men's houses had no large painting but only what is called a gable mask just beneath the top of the front. Sometimes this gable mask consisted of a triangular painting on *panggal* (Reche 1913: plate 31, 1) or of plaited fiber, sometimes covered with *panggal*; sometimes it was a carved wooden mask.

These elements are all present among the Sawos, too. But in addition to men's houses with "windows" and skulls or masks (e.g., in Torembi), others

have a carved crossbeam instead, resembling those of the Abelam. The triangular gable is sometimes covered with palm leaf bands cut into various patterns (as among the Iatmul) but others have a gable painting (see Hauser-Schäublin 1989a: plate 148). Most of the houses are additionally decorated with a gable mask. As only a few photographs of traditional Sawos men's houses are available and all of them were taken long after head-hunting had ceased to exist, nothing further is known about the display of skulls there.

On several men's houses, mostly among the western but also among the central Iatmul, one can discover at the very top of the gable a human skull attached to the wall, sometimes immediately above the gable mask (as, e.g., in Kaulagu, photographed by Roesicke in 1913 [see Hauser-Schäublin 1989a: 403, plate 162]), sometimes on the little overhanging roof beneath the finial (e.g., in Kanganamun, photographed in 1930 by Speiser [see Hauser-Schäublin 1989a:388, plate 143], Shurcliffe [1930:242-243], and Bateson [(1936) 1958: plate 7a]). This highest part of the building was associated with homicide carried out during initiations (Hauser-Schäublin 1977:190).<sup>17</sup> The Manambu displayed a skull at the same spot as did the Iatmul (photographed in Awatip and Malu by Roesicke in 1913; see Hauser-Schäublin 1989a: plate 165). Unfortunately, I do not know if the Nggala or Kwoma, their immediate neighbors, also displayed skulls on their ceremonial houses. As these buildings share many elements with those of other middle Sepik cultures (one of their leitmotifs being ceremonial houses), one could expect such displays, though for Bowden head-hunting among the Kwoma is an open question (1983:165).

(2) The Iatmul and the Sawos had a second way of displaying skulls. In the interior of the ceremonial houses, coated with clay and painted, skulls were put on special racks. The racks consisted of a cane frame to which pieces of *panggal* were attached. These were painted mostly with big faces or whole figures. Quite a large quantity of racks were triangular in form with a skull put on the top (Figure 4). Others were rectangular, sometimes supplemented with a triangle on top to which arms and a skull were added, the triangle forming the body of the figure (see Kelm 1966, 1: plate 237). It seems as if the Iatmul had transferred the display of skulls on paintings into the interior of the house. Perhaps this has to do with distinctions between exoteric and esoteric as well as with different functions of Iatmul and Abelam ceremonial houses. Although at a certain stage of initiation a triangular painting is displayed among the Abelam, it has--at least nowadays!--nothing to do with the presentation of skulls as such. (As discussed previously, that painting is the headdress of the prostrate *nggwalndu* sculptures.)

Whether the skull racks were used among the Iatmul only for the display



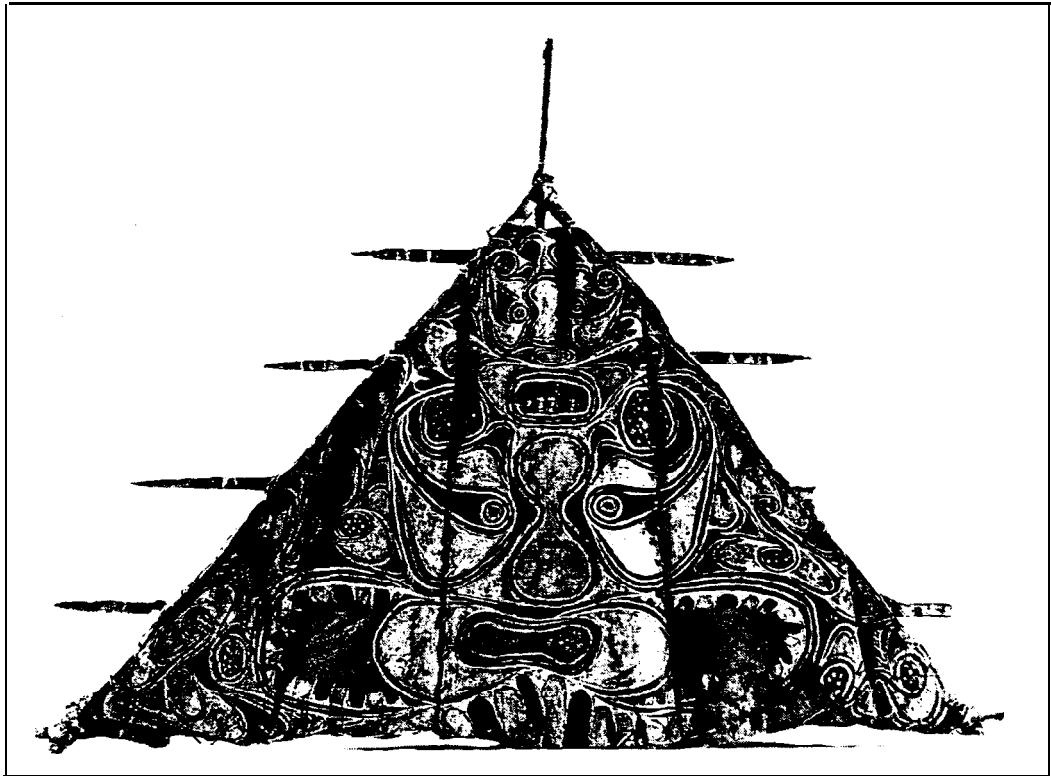


FIGURE 4. **Painted skull rack (Sawos).** (Photo by Peter Homer, Museum of Ethnography Basel)

of the heads of enemies or also for those of important men is unknown. At least in the “windows” it seems that, as a rule, heads of influential villagers were displayed, whereas on the gable top the skull of a victim was exposed.

I consider the combination of heads and paintings significant for Sepik cultures. I suggest that the triangular facades of men’s houses--painted, plaited, or decorated with bands of leaves--and head racks are variations, or rather transformations, of the same theme. Many Iatmul and Sawos skull racks are triangular; they are painted facades in miniature transferred to the interior of the ceremonial house. There are also cylindrical skull racks (see Kelm 1966, 1: plate 238)--again, I would put them in direct relation to the ceremonial mound with megaliths in front of Sepik men’s houses; they were often fenced and sometimes even decorated with carved masks. When the men returned from a raiding party, they first deposited the captured heads there.

For the Iatmul I know of only one document that shows a human skull with an elongated painted headdress similar to an Abelam *wagnen* (Reche 1913: plate 74). I take it as a proof that not only the form as such, but also similar ideas and meanings, exist among the Iatmul and the Abelam (and

most likely also among the Sawos). Among the Iatmul, there is no further evidence of headdresses similar to the *wagnen*.

Kelm has published pictures of two almost-triangular (what Newton calls leaf-shaped) Sawos "dance shields" collected in 1912-1913 (1966, 1: plates 141,142). Perhaps they were published upside down because as soon as one turns the pictures, they clearly appear as headdresses of the Abelam *wagnen* type (with some influence of *noute* in them).

### **Feather Pictures and Skulls in the Interior of Men's Houses**

On the Keram River, a southern tributary of the Sepik, the Catholic missionaries Kirschbaum and Girards photographed the interior of a ceremonial house on piles in Geketen near Gorogopa around 1930 (see Stöhr 1971: plate 177). The entire interior upper side of the triangular gable is decorated all over with beautiful, mostly two-dimensional artifacts: In the center, reaching from the raised floor to the tip of the gable, is a huge, more or less rectangular image representing a copulating couple. The image is entirely made of feathers. On both sides of this elongated picture are dozens of smaller rectangular feather images of varying size. The lowest row of these feather images shows big human faces. Above it are several rows of smaller figures, one beside the other. The very bottom row, which runs horizontally from one wall to the other, seems to rest on a horizontal pole covered by a mat. This row consists of many skulls, each topped by a feather image (with a face on it). In fact, the vertical combination of the elements--a mat, a row of skulls with *wagnen*-like feather headdresses, and rows of faces and figures above it--are reminiscent of the composition of the front of the Abelam *korambo*. If we accept the idea of cross-cultural transformation of form and meaning, we also recognize the main elements of the front of the Iatmul men's house, although the gable painting there is nothing more (at least nowadays) than a gable mask.

Here, at the Keram River, we meet not only the combination of skulls and feather headdresses, but also that of skulls and a whole "facade"--all arranged within the frame of a huge triangle in the interior of the building. The decoration, as already stated, consists mostly of feathers. Probably all the "feather shields" from the Keram come from decorations like the one described. Kelm mentions that the feather shields collected during the German Sepik expedition in 1912-1913 at the Keram were used during dances but he does not give any further details (1968, 3: plates 355-363). The only photos showing the exterior side of men's houses from that time were taken in Kambot village. An analogy seems to exist between the long, central feather mosaic with a copulating couple in the interior of the Geketen men's

house and the huge, triangular exterior gable painting of Kambot (Figure 5). Whereas the male figure on the interior feather mosaic is much larger than the female, only a male figure is represented on the exterior gable painting. This certainly fits the distinction between esoteric (secret) and exoteric (public) aspects of ritual visualization realized in ceremonial houses.

While nothing is known of the display of skulls on the front of men's houses in Kambot, evidence of it exists in another region that belongs to the Sepik area as well: Höltker ([1966] 1975) has documented a spirit house in the Bosman (Bosmun) village of Wemtak that had a triangular facade made of *panggal* and painted with big faces. Just below the facade, above the entrance, was a crossbeam on which painted skulls were displayed. Although

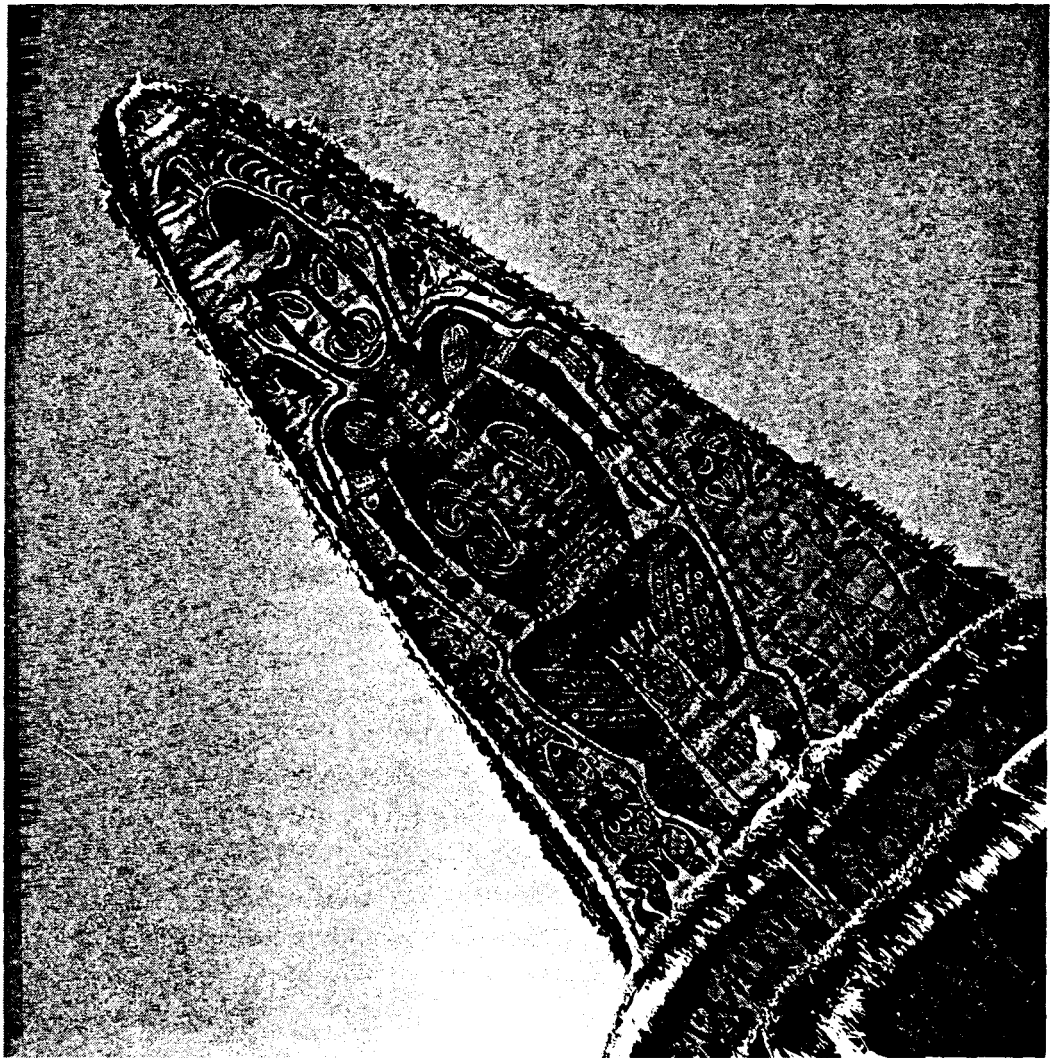


FIGURE 5. **Triangular gable painting representing a male figure, Kambot village.** (Anthropos Institute, Sankt Augustin)

Höltker has warned against drawing conclusions too quickly ([1966] 1975:245), he pointed out the similarities between Abelam painted facades and crossbeams with carved heads on them on the one hand and the paintings on the Bosman men's house and the display of painted skulls on the other. He called it an expression of similar ideas.

In the interior of the house Höltker saw and photographed a painting that was set up at some distance from the back side of the facade. The painting completely filled the triangle between the roof and the raised floor. In front of the painting some skulls overmodeled with clay were displayed. They were not deposited on a horizontal beam but were fixed on sticks leaning against a horizontal pole just in front of the painting. Höltker saw two skulls that were not only attached to vertical poles but also had crude anthropomorphous bodies. Some of the figures stood on a human or an animal skull. The display of skull figures in front of a large painting in the men's house interior reminded Höltker of the display of carved anthropomorphous figures among the Abelam. To support his suggestion he published a photograph of an initiation chamber of a *nggwalndu* performance where not only carved standing figures were displayed, but also a crossbeam with carved heads on it and above it the ceremonial painting.<sup>18</sup>

The Sepik region indeed seems to be not only an area of outstanding visual art, but also a region in which some fundamental ideas, though with variations created through transformations, have been realized across language borders. The ideas are expressed through similarity in form and material, the triangle being closely associated with the men's house and its rituals. A picture taken by Father F. Kirschbaum around 1930 shows the interior of a ceremonial house up the Korewori River, at Kaningra (Höltker [1966] 1975: plate 83; Stöhr 1971: plate 141). A row of large paintings with huge anthropomorphous faces, one beside the other, can be seen. They were displayed in the interior lower side of the gable. Directly above them was a painted crossbeam. Owing to the poor quality of the photographs no information is available concerning the display of skulls on the upper part of the gable triangle but, in fact, one could strongly assume it.

As among the Iatmul, the exterior facade of a Kaningra men's house was not painted. The front was covered with thatch cut into ornamented bands. There was only a large painted mask at the top of the gable; it had, below the actual face, three fingerlike extensions (which I will discuss below). These characteristics are identical with those of certain men's houses on the Sepik River itself. They are also typical for a building at a Korewori village that Kirschbaum called Moatschamai. There, in addition to the gable mask on the thatched facade, a skull was affixed just below the mask. This is similar to the ceremonial houses among the western Iatmul, Manambu, and the

Wosera village of Tjamangi. Thus, it seems that a display of skulls could also be expected in the interior of the buildings.

Since I have tried in this section to show relationships between facade paintings on ceremonial houses, skulls and feather mosaics, and paintings in the interior of the houses, I also have to mention the famous example of a huge, triangular painting that Mead described (1938:188, fig. 5): Among the Mundugumor (at the Yuat River) she saw a large, triangular painting used as a yam-feast decoration. She writes:

It is impossible to say whether these triangular sheets of painted sago bark sewed on a cane background originated as decorative elements in a feasting scene, or were borrowed from the design of the house front. The Mundugumor yam decoration could, with equal ease, be a lifted house front, or could serve as a basis about which a house could be built. These yam-feast decorations are structurally meaningless as used at present. . . . After it is painted, it is set up against a scaffolding in the center of the village to serve as a display element and afterwards stored as a memento in the rafters of the house of the feast giver. (Mead 1938:189)

#### **Transformations: Canoe Prow Ornaments and Gable Masks**

As the Mundugumor live in the Sepik area and are more or less surrounded by groups that have huge paintings on their ceremonial houses, it is not surprising that the Mundugumor also had such paintings, although their use seems to be quite outstanding. It has to be mentioned that the Mundugumor did not have men's houses, as almost all other Sepik cultures did. Therefore, the painting was an element in itself, linked not to facades but to yam displays.

When we have a look at other Yuat villages we realize that the paintings are more loosely connected with houses there than elsewhere. In Antofogua an oval-shaped *panggal* painting was fixed to the front of the house. It indeed looked like a painted headdress that, after use, had been attached to the house front (Hauser-Schäublin 1989a: plates 122, 123). From there the painting could easily be removed again, as Mead has presumed. Again, we know nothing more about it but it also reminds me of the Abelam who, after a dance held at an initiation or after the display of long yams, sometimes affix their headdresses (or those of the tubers) to the plaited mat on the *korambo* front. There they stay for years until decayed. The houses of Antofogua show a further possibility: that an object could interchangeably be used as a headdress or an element of house decoration.

Tuzin has noted similarities between Umeda headdresses and Iahita spirit houses, which are similar to Abelam ceremonial houses: "Gell's illustrations reveal a striking morphological resemblance between Arapesh spirit houses and Umeda headdresses . . . --or, at the very least, the crown portion of the former" (1980:158n. 33). I think that among the Iahita themselves (as has been demonstrated for the Abelam), there is an analogy between the painted "tall, pointed headdress rising from its point of attachment at the back of the man's head" (Tuzin 1980:220, see also plates 23-26) and the painted facade of the cult house. Obviously in ritual, too, an association between "the dancer [who] is transformed into a being akin to the Tambaran itself" and the ancestral spirit is established.<sup>19</sup>

Newton discovered a similar transformational relationship concerning headdresses and decorations on men's houses between the Nggala and the Kwoma. He writes about the Nggala front side of a ceremonial house: "Above the mask, projecting beyond the roof, is a long, leaf-shaped board decorated with shallow relief carving. The mask and leaf-shaped finial are together called *niyim* . . . ; while no explanation is given for the finial, both its form and placing are reminiscent of a Kwoma-Nuguma head ornament" (Newton 1971:34). From what has been described above, Newton's remark is quite correct and plausible.<sup>20</sup> Even Tuzin's conclusions fit the relationships discovered on the lower Sepik and its tributaries. However, the Umeda do not belong to the Sepik region in its narrower sense, often defined in terms of groups speaking a language of the Sepik Raum Phylum. The Arapesh do not either, though through the topos of their "importing culture" (Mead 1938) they have become included in "the Sepik." But as is well known, language borders are not impermeable to cultural elements, material as well as nonmaterial. The Arapesh presented Mead with an analogy between the facade decoration and a dancing shield that fits Sepik transformations very well. Mead writes: "Among the Mountain Arapesh the distinction between an imported dancing shield and a piece of sago bark used as a facade decoration for a *tamberan* house is very slight" (1938:189). Perhaps it is the Mountain Arapesh's skill of more easily incorporating new elements in the already existing patterns that led them to adopt dancing shields into the category of paintings. Perhaps another reason for this is that they took over the decoration of *tamberan* houses with paintings from their neighbors, the Plains Arapesh.

But the fact that in the Sepik generally there is a definite relationship between shields and facade paintings brings me back to the Abelam again. Perhaps the huge *wagnen* should be called a "dancing shield," too, rather than a "head ornament."

A special type of shield has to be discussed in this context, too. Most

groups dwelling at the shores of the Sepik River use “canoe shields,” that is, prow ornaments for their war canoes. Newton has noted that the front screens of Nggala ceremonial houses were formerly covered with paintings and “the prow ornament (*utukwei*) of the ward’s war-canoe was hung between the doors” (1971:34). In 1959, Bühler took a picture of such a house with a canoe shield still on it.<sup>21</sup> It consists of a wooden mask affixed to sago palm sheaths. Above the head is a narrow triangular extension. To the left and the right of it similar but smaller extensions are attached (see also Bühler 1960:9). The Kwoma, the Iatmul, and probably some of the lower Sepik societies also used prow ornaments of similar shape. In former times each men’s house had its own large war canoe. A special name associated with the men’s house was given to it. In the upper Sepik the prow ornament is a whole carved anthropomorphous figure with painted, winglike pieces of *panggal* on both sides (Kelm 1966, 2: plate 193, prow ornament from the Mai River, collected in 1912-1913). In Tsenap, a carved human figure constitutes the vertical axis of the prow ornament; from each side a painted triangular piece of *panggal* again protrudes (Kelm 1968, 3: plate 502).

In the entire middle and lower Sepik area a canoe shield consists mainly of *panggal* and a wooden mask. Sometimes the wooden mask is rather flat (e.g., Stöhr 1971: plate 165), sometimes plastically carved so that it looks like a human head (e.g., Kelm 1968, 3: plate 501). There are many variations from the upper to the lower Sepik; however, certain characteristic features are typical for all these ornaments: the representation of a human face in the center with a pointed oval rather than strictly triangular headdress above it; and to each side, further extensions that are sometimes even higher than the central one, sometimes shorter. It looks as if the whole ornament depicts a decorated anthropomorphous being with raised arms (Figure 6). Sometimes this representation is hardly recognizable (e.g., Newton 1971: plate 185, prow ornament from Yasin; Kelm 1968, 3: plates 502, 503, from Tsenap).

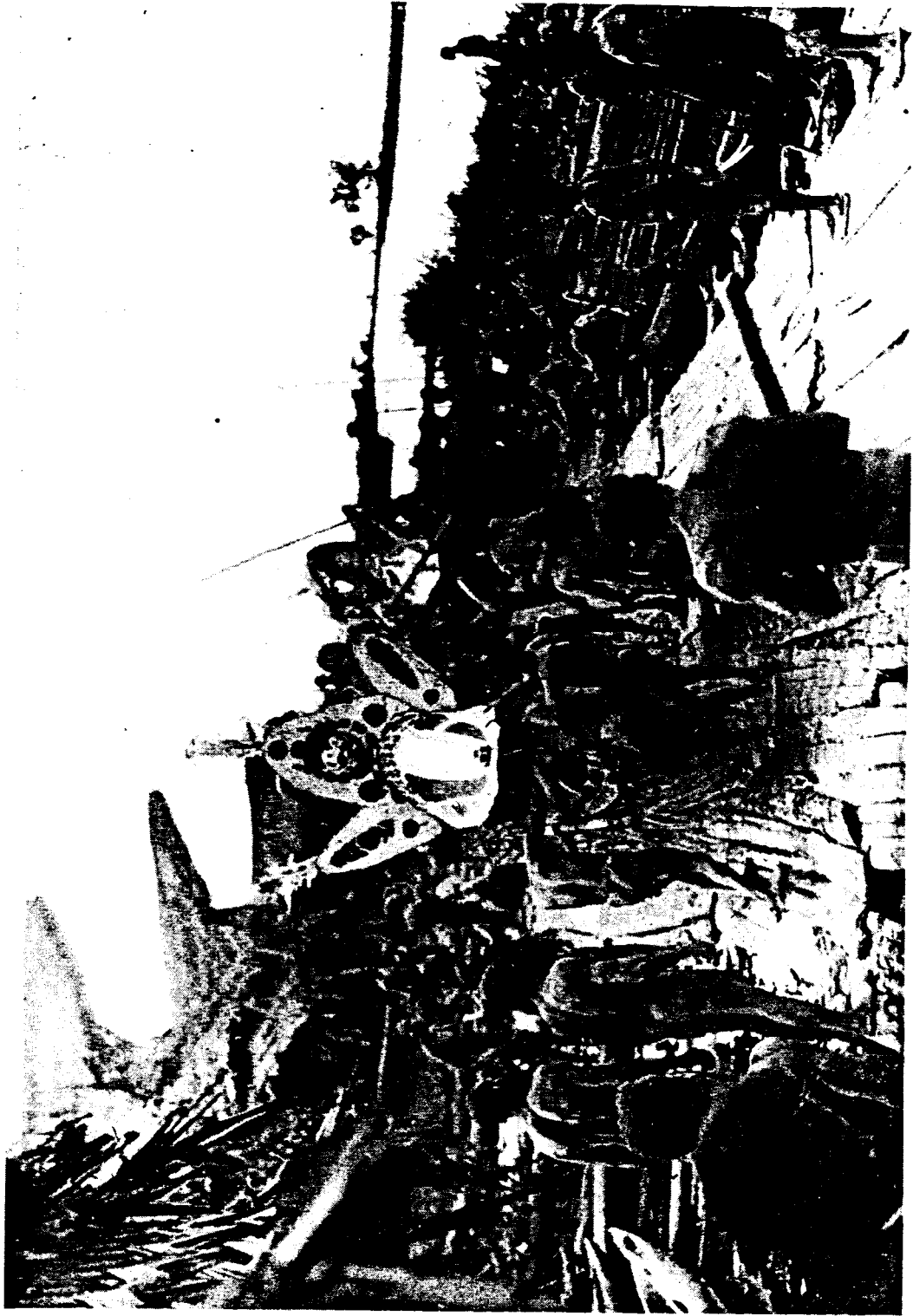
But sometimes this obviously basic idea is implemented concretely. In 1930 Felix Speiser photographed an initiation ceremony at the lower Sepik in Kambrambo, where a crocodile-like monster had been made to devour the initiates (Figure 7). On the top of the crocodile’s head a kind of a prow ornament was added, representing the upper part of an anthropomorphous body with an obviously overmodeled skull decorated with a painted headdress. To each side *panggal* paintings showing a shoulder, a raised arm, and a hand were attached (see Schuster 1968: plate 82). Although the crocodile was made for the initiation and the monster had movable jaws to “devour” the young men, the decoration on its head looked perfectly like a prow ornament of a canoe--and almost all Sepik canoes have a prow that ends in a



FIGURE 6. **Canoe shield, Kambot village.** (Anthropos Institute, Sankt Augustin)

carved crocodile head. Thus, there is not only a striking analogy in form between war canoe and initiatory crocodile but also a fundamental identity in meaning. The crocodile swallows the initiates as the war canoe “devours” (kills) the enemy.<sup>22</sup> The canoe prow ornament somehow reminds me--from the viewpoint of form, material, and decoration as well as of function and meaning--of an Iatmul skull rack. The prow ornament in this sense is the movable aspect of an object normally located in the men’s house.





**FIGURE 7. Crocodile-like monster with a kind of canoe prow ornament on the top, Kambrambo village.** (Photo by Felix Speiser, 1930, Museum of Ethnography Basel)

On the lower Sepik in Kerker, Reche took a picture of a men's house interior where sacred items were kept (1913: plate 16, 2). The picture shows an object that looks like a prow ornament. As I mentioned above, there is a direct connection between a men's house and a war canoe; they are mutually interrelated. One could also say that the canoe is the movable (and aggressive) aspect of the men's house. The prow ornament is used to show the enemy how his head will end up. The skull atop the crocodile the Kambrambo used during an initiation ceremony expresses this idea clearly. At the same time it shows where the head will stay--in the enemy's men's house.

In several parts of the Sepik a similar relationship between the facade of a men's house and a canoe prow ornament can be found, in others between the facade and a headdress. I have already mentioned the case of the Nggala who actually put the prow ornament on the front of the men's house--and probably took it off again and fixed it onto their canoe when they went on a raid.<sup>23</sup>

Other ceremonial houses apart from those of the Nggala show something that has been labeled by anthropologists as house or gable masks. A look at their distribution shows that they can be found from Tanbunum all the way up the river to Yamanumbu, that is, the whole territory of the Iatmul. House masks are also represented on ceremonial houses of the southern tributaries and in the north, among the Sawos. Generally it can be said (with the exception of the Sawos) that gable masks exist on ceremonial houses that have fronts covered with sago thatch, not painted. Many examples of house masks have three fingerlike extensions below the actual face. Some of these gable masks consist of painted *panggal*, others of wickerwork, and again others of both materials. An early photograph, taken around 1930 in Kaningra, depicts--right at the tip of the gable that is protected from the rain by a small, overhanging roof--a flat, painted *panggal* mask that, in fact, looks very much like a canoe prow ornament--turned upside down. Whereas this is a visually striking example, the same principle of structure can be recognized in most house masks, even those of wickerwork. But, as already said, they just are attached to the house the other way around than to the canoes.

### Conclusion

If we acknowledge a fundamental identity of form, material, context, and meaning existing throughout the Sepik cultures carefully examined so far, we have to consider again the question of orientation and form in this comparative study. Unfortunately, no systematic research has been done on body decorations in the Sepik; information on body paintings especially of women

is lacking. However, if we accept the notion of the Abelam situation as a possible clue to messages communicated through canoe prow ornaments turned upside down when displayed on house fronts, we are confronted with a completely different--opposite--concept associated with houses: that of displaying female connotations.

In fact, the idea of the house as a female being is not new. Forge has described it for the Abelam (1966:27) and for the Iatmul (according to Bateson [1936] 1958); Tuzin has confirmed it for the Arapesh (1980). It is the interior of the house, the belly, that is considered female. The sago fronds hanging down from the walls of the Iatmul men's houses and slightly hiding the sitting platforms the men use in everyday life are compared to women's pubic aprons. When crawling into the Abelam ceremonial house the initiates are reentering a womb from where they will be reborn. Ritual reproduction takes place in the womb of the ceremonial house. And the same is true for other Sepik cultures as well.

In former times some of the Iatmul and Sawos men's houses had triangular mats--with the bases at the top!--hanging down from the walls; on each side there were several of them, each at some distance from the other. The most beautiful example is the men's house of Kanganamun mentioned earlier and photographed by Bateson, Speiser, Shurcliffe, and others. I suggest that it does make sense to consider the triangle with its base at the top, not only in Abelam culture but in other Sepik cultures as well, as expressing "femaleness."

Therefore, the same dualism exemplified for the Abelam and the way it is contained in the triangle seems to be pervasive throughout the Sepik, though in different transformations. Plaited masks fixed on *panggal*, plaited mats, and *panggal* canoe prow ornaments turned upside down are the house elements associated with being female. Thus, we recognize also a limited range of material used for this aspect, though other material representations of triangles so oriented certainly have been neglected in documentations.

The representation of the "male" side of the triangle seems to be much clearer, as is the relationship between painted facades and equivalents in the interior of the house, made either of the same material (painted *panggal*) or another, more sacred one (feathers). This correspondence is primarily induced by the same shape and only secondly by the same or equivalent material. Feathers are ultimately associated with light, sky, maleness, and killing. Feather images as well as feather headdresses are considered, at least among the Abelam, more sacred and secret than the "equivalents" made of *panggal*. The relationship between exoteric and esoteric is expressed through shape and materials, too. It would be tempting to make a detailed analysis of the different materials used in relation to the form under

study. Shelton (1992) has demonstrated how certain materials and forms are associated with specific deities in Huichol society (Mexico). Similarly, a definite relationship between materials used for "male" and "female" triangles seems to exist. Basketry work, for example, seems to be restricted to female connotations, feathers to male. But, finally, much more data would be needed to pursue this track and would probably require substantial verbal exegesis from the people themselves.

The fundamental identity of material, form, and meaning of the triangle can also be traced in more movable forms: as ritual headdresses (painted or decorated with feathers) of dancers, of yams and yam stones, but also as prow ornaments of canoes, and then, again, as semipermanent decorative elements on ceremonial house gables. Most of these elements are associated with the complex of the men's house, head-hunting, and the meaning of the human head in general--be it that of a ceremonial dancer during an initiation, an ancestor, or a slain enemy.

But the question remains: Why the triangle?

It is, as noted earlier, a conspicuous form; it has three possible lines of symmetry, but they can be summed up as one: the one drawn from each tip right down to the base. All other two-dimensional forms predominantly used in Sepik cultures are multisymmetrical and fit the Sepik exigencies of (visually unmediated) dualisms or multiclassifications. Some forms produce other forms when divided symmetrically, for example, the rectangle. If a line of symmetry is drawn from one angle to the opposite, not a further rectangle is produced but a triangle. The triangle can be divided or split up into several equal and smaller units--but they all have the same triangular form. The triangle proves to be self-reproducing in form. In some Sepik cultures two further triangles have been added to the central one, thus creating a kind of dual laterality otherwise missing.

If form reflects principles of organization and structure on a broader level of culture than art itself--and I would strongly affirm that it does--the triangle as a form is not incidental. It is the only form that contains in itself one of the most fundamental dualisms existing in Sepik cultures. It is the direct material expression representing the dualism between men, killing, the creation of ancestors on the one hand, and women and the generation of life on the other. But the triangle encompasses the range of material objects it represents and the context it is used in. It communicates basic values of Sepik societies like men's exclusive associations, men's houses, rituals such as initiations, killing, and the procreation of yams. The triangle includes and contains notions not only about sexuality and fertility associated with women, but also about in-marrying women and wives, the domestic sphere

expressed in the female body of the house. Thus, it refers to an underlying pattern of Sepik cultures in general that is built on an opposition and complementarity among the genders but extends much further.<sup>24</sup> At the same time the triangle expresses complementarity of all these “opposites,” complementarity in its basic sense, not division and separation, because all these “opposites” are within the same form. It is the orientation of the form that signals the distinction or even the opposition of the two, not the form as such.

Surprisingly, in anthropological theory since Lévi-Strauss (who relied on de Saussure’s linguistic structuralism) the triangle has been widely used as a model to exemplify dualism and its cultural mediation. Writing about art, Lévi-Strauss has divided Caduveo facial decoration into four triangular sections in order to find its underlying symmetry achieved by two different axes of symmetry, a horizontal and a vertical one, creating a process of “double splitting” (1963:245-273). “Asymmetry serves the formal function of insuring the distinction between quarters, which would merge into two profiles if the fields were to be symmetrically repeated to the right and left instead of being joined by their tips” (p. 235). The most impressive demonstration of how this model is thought to work is Leach’s description of Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism (1970). He uses the example of a traffic light with its three colors as a metaphor. Moreover, it is the triangle Leach uses as a model to exemplify the process of mediation that lies in-between “green” and “red.”

Many more scholars have resorted to the triangle because of its unique properties. In his latest book about tattooing in Polynesia, Cell presents “a synoptic picture of the nature of the relationship between a theoretical variable--the intensity of tattooing--and a complex of contextual variables relating to the political complexion of various Polynesian societies and their social scale” (1993:289-290). To visualize the relationship he has chosen the triangle and explains why: “First this is a matter of geometry, because this is the only arrangement which permits the representation of two (graphic) dimensions of the theoretical postulate that Polynesian societies do not fall on a continuum, but are mutually opposed along a plurality of dimensions” (p. 290). Wagner used the triangle, with its inherent ability to split into further triangles, to create three-dimensional combinations to demonstrate “how this framing [cultural or contextual frames] occurs as a consequence of meaningful construction--how the frames are invented out of one another, so to speak” and how “the trope, or metaphor, as the unit of self-reference . . . expands the frame of its self-referentiality by processual extension into a broader range of cultural relevance--a larger frame, and a larger metaphor. A trope is no longer necessarily an instantaneous flash, but poten-

tial process" (1986:9). He arrives at a multidimensional triangular model (p. 123) to show how medieval and modern tropes each replicated the other as an internal, motivating factor.

In fact, the triangle in Sepik cultures has this multivocality, one "trope" expanding into the next, too. There are, of course, several major differences between the triangle used in anthropological theory to represent *models* of dualisms and their mediation, and the triangle used by Sepik peoples to *express* something through art, though the model seems to be strikingly apt to explain Sepik cultures' expression. One of the differences is the display of various orientations of the triangle Sepik cultures make use of. And within the range of possibilities existing they have chosen only two: the one with the tip at the top and the one with the tip at the bottom. Never is the tip on the left or the right side. Thus, the triangle has a definite axis, that of verticality, producing or displaying always a left and a right corner, each opposed to the other, once at the top, once at the bottom, but always mediated in the third corner.

The "male" triangle points upwards, like the gable towards the ridgepole, the headdress towards the sky. The "female," associated with the lower part of a female body, the vulva, points downward, towards the ground classified as female. Therefore, the triangle reiterates all oppositions associated with gender by summing them up within this unique, single form.<sup>25</sup> However, the relationship between the male and the female orientations of the triangle is not static, definite, or unmovable. Rather it is in flux, ready to switch from one position to the other and back, or to fuse in order to split up again. Dynamism is inherent in the system of orientation and the way Sepik cultures make use of the triangle. The uses result in temporary reversals of cultural values and social conditions if the triangle "flickers." Such reversals are described, for example, in Iatmul myths about the primeval women who resided in the men's house and the men who had to look after the babies until the men overthrew women's rule, thus creating the social conditions of the present (Hauser-Schäublin 1977:162-166). The separation of the triangle into two basic forms of orientation represents the actual social order with definite domains attributed to the genders, though in danger of becoming reversed again owing to identical form. Basic cultural values culminate and fuse in the triangle: ritual life, initiation, men's association, head-hunting, and killing, the world of the ancestors, women's sexuality, fertility, women as wives, and the generation of life.

This is, I think, the final message of the triangle.

## NOTES

1. Tuzin (1980:173) cites Scaglione, who suggested that the Abelam do have some myths, in contrast to Forge's statement. Compared to their neighbors in the south, the Iatmul, the Abelam in fact have only a few.
2. An earlier version of this article was presented at an international symposium of the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research on "Sepik Cultural History: Variation and Synthesis," chaired by the late Anthony Forge in 1986 in Mijas, Spain.
3. On the large exchange and trade systems along the Sepik River, see Gewertz 1983; Harrison 1990; and Allen et al. 1993.
4. In his admirable work on the North Coast (nowadays implicitly and at least partially included in "the Sepik"), Tiesler has managed to substantiate the North Coast as a cultural area held together by manifold forms of exchange and trade relations and displaying, as a consequence, not only similar cultural traits, but also cultural diversity at the same time (1969-1970).
5. For a discussion of culturally preferred forms among the Abelam, see Hauser-Schäublin 1989a:290-294 and 1989b:32-46.
6. The sloping position is used, for example, for the presentation of long-yam tubers or shell rings tied to poles for exchanges. It is also the characteristic position of the ridgepole not only (but most impressively) of ceremonial houses but also of all other types of dwellings. The huge sculptures called *nggwalndu* are presented to the initiated always in a slanting position; they look as if sleeping on a neck rest (see Hauser-Schäublin 1989a: plate 3).
7. Sixteen months of fieldwork (between 1978 and 1983) among the Abelam was carried out in Kalabu village. Most of the time was devoted to the study of ceremonial houses and art. Fieldwork was made possible by the Swiss National Research Fund, Berne, and the Fritz Sarasin-Stiftung Basel.
8. In this respect the Kwanga and Ilahita, for example, differ. Their gable paintings consist of a large number of single *panggal*, individually painted and then affixed, one after the other, to the front of the building (see Tuzin 1980:175-180).
9. Similar evidence exists from the neighboring Ilahita (Tuzin 1980:176).
10. Forge gives the interpretation of designs painted at his request on triangular pieces of paper (1973:181). He calls a black triangle with white dotted lines a vulva. The paper was certainly painted in a horizontal position, but is reproduced vertically, with the tip of the triangle at the top. Thus the triangle is given a definite orientation, that of verticality. I am sure that the Abelam would oppose such a presentation, at least concerning the pubic triangle.
11. There was an individual triangular painting with a *nggwalndu*-like face on it put up during a *manggendu* initiation in Kwambikum (Forge 1973: plate 3), which was displayed in the open.

12. See, for example, the beautiful photographs by Forge in the calendar of the Australian Museum (1982).
13. Forge writes about the three-dimensional art: "The identification of man, yam, and the *nggwalndu* provided by the stylistic unity of their several faces is one of the most important 'theological' functions of Abelam art" (1973:280).
14. Forge gives a different interpretation, saying the initiation chamber parallels a womb (1967:70).
15. Forge pointed out that the red *wagnen* headdress (he writes it *wakan*) "is used to 'anthropomorphize' and relate to the world of spirits" (1973:178).
16. Roscoe mentions for the Boiken that heads and figures carved on the crossbeam represented either enemies slain in battles or ancestors of the house's sponsor (1995).
17. Bateson mentioned that the top of the building with its finial embodies the most aggressive aspect of the men's house ([1936] 1958:140).
18. Blackwood mentions painted barkcloth similar in form and design to painted elements on the Bosmun's men's house (1951:278). They were used as perineal bands or aprons by men on special occasions.
19. Tuzin mentions that details of a dancer's costume, "including the headdress, appear in simplified form in the adornment of long yams and are rendered graphically in the painting of cult spirits. The costume announces the presence of a spiritual essence which, despite its plural contexts of expression, is ultimately monistic" (1980:222).
20. In Kelm two "dance boards" ("Tanzbrett") from the Kwoma are depicted (1966, 2: plates 122, 123). They are 33 and 54 cm high respectively, leaf-shaped, made of a light wood, and decorated with carvings and paintings. Kelm writes "that it was said the boards were brandished during dance." If they were not used as headdresses they were used as dance shields.
21. In his publication "Kunststile am Sepik," Bühler called the object collected from a ceremonial house in Suagab a "house decoration" (1960: plate 8). He explains that its form is identical with canoe shields from the middle Sepik; in Suagab, he concludes, these objects were probably used in a similar way.
22. This correspondence is expressed also on the linguistic level: The Iatmul I worked with called the crocodile/canoe *wara*, the Abelam call the aspects of *nggwalndu* located in waterholes *wale*.
23. This idea of removing a painting from a ceremonial house or affixing an ornament that has been used in a ceremony on the front of a house has already been discussed for the Yuat (see above).
24. Forge has suggested "that art communicates some fundamental values of Abelam society, and this communication is not fully conscious to anyone concerned" (1970:289).
25. Forge has emphasized that Abelam art is not depicting anything but is conveying meaning "about the relationship between things" (1973:189).



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## REVIEWS

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Alfred Gell, *Wrapping in Images: Tattooing in Polynesia*. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1993. Pp. xi, 347, 36 figs., bibliography, index. US\$49.95 cloth.

*Reviewed by Peter Gathercole, Darwin College, Cambridge, England*

A much respected Melanesianist, Gell says that he turned to the study of Polynesian tattooing while working up some lectures on the anthropology of art. Initial examination indicated "that the distribution of different types of tattooing . . . did not simply reflect the existence of a prior socio-political milieu, but, in certain instances, and in combination with certain other factors, was actually constitutive of it" (p. 3). At one level his book explores this proposition.

Gell has not written ethnohistory. Stressing how fragmentary are the data, "often maddeningly divorced from any kind of context" (p. 42), he defines his period of study, somewhat loosely, "as the Bibles-and-muskets epoch of Pacific ethnohistory" (p. 43), which, as he remarks, could have led to an efflorescence of tattooing, especially among the chiefly elite (a situation, incidentally, that might have enriched the historical record without illuminating it). This book, though, is much more than the application of certain contemporary anthropological theories to the study of an intriguing ethnographical phenomenon. Employing a sweep through the literature reminiscent of the writings of Goldman and Sahlins, Gell has produced a detailed examination of the major different manifestations of tattooing in "traditional" Polynesia, together with an often equally detailed consideration "of the wider institutional forms within which tattooing was embedded" (p. 1).

The book has a long theoretical introduction, developed from the proposition that Polynesian tattooing was "a species of political gesture" (p. 3), involving physical subjection expressive of an obligatory hierarchy and domination. The latter (a recurrent theme throughout the book) leads Gell to his major theoretical concept, that of an epidemiology of tattooing, "invoking Sperber's (1985) proposal for an 'epidemiology of cultural representations' " (p. 19). Gell's "basic schema of tattooing" is seen as amenable to this approach because its pattern of occurrence resembles the uneven but predictable incidence of an illness (pp. 19-20). Thus Gell can treat the skin as a symbolic form, to be correlated with the ideas of Anzieu concerning the "nine functions of the skin ego" (pp. 30-31), "a source of orienting ideas" that Gell uses as an "armature" to emphasize, for example, the Polynesian--specifically Marquesan--notion of being armored by tattoo: "And what tattooing reveals . . . is an inside which comes from the outside, which has been applied externally prior to being absorbed into the interior. The basic schema of tattooing is thus definable as the exteriorization of the interior which is simultaneously the interiorization of the exterior" (pp. 38-39).

Gell's ethnographic survey moves from west to east following the conventional sequence of settlement revealed by archaeology: Fiji with western Polynesia, then the main groups and islands of central and "outer eastern Polynesia." As I have indicated, his treatment is detailed and wide-ranging, inappropriate to paraphrase even summarily here except when specific comment seems called for. It is important to stress, instead, that Gell's overall intention is to develop a cumulative theoretical argument arising from his interpretations of the ethnography. So consideration of Fiji and western Polynesia culminates in the statement of six general principles to be carried forward for consideration in an eastern Polynesian context. For example, principle 6 includes as one of the functions of tattooing the inculcation "of a type of subjectivity adapted to the overall processes of social reproduction" (p. 121). This is later exemplified, for instance, by the position of the Tahitian Arioi, "a repressed subculture . . . encapsulated within the upper echelons of Moahi [*sic*] society" (p. 162).

These progressively integrating arguments are characteristic of the book. Tattooing is recognized not only for itself but also as a metaphor for, or echo of, other elements of culture, which can give Gell's text an intriguing freshness. Where the evidence is full, his analysis can shine, for example with regard to the Marquesas, representing "in striking chiaroscuro, one very intelligible configuration of the basic givens of Lapita-derived Oceanic cultures" (p. 164). One example of this configuration is the iconography of Marquesan sculpture, which "is particularly rich in doubled images of divinities. . . . There can be no doubt that the doubling of the person via the *mata*

*Komoe* [death's head] design stemmed from the same deep currents in Polynesian cosmological thought as produced the western Polynesian twins myths, and the proliferation of sculptural images of Siamese-twin divinities throughout Polynesia. In effect this motif represents the ideal of personhood" (p. 197).

The Marquesan death's head tattooing motif links with the themes of a synthesis of unity and multiplicity, of continuity and discontinuity within a single encompassing divine power (cf. the back-to-back position of the Siamese-twin design [pp. 70-72]). Allied to such pervasive symbolism is the idea of wrapping something valuable within a protective cover: hence "wrapping in images" (p. 163). For years, incidentally, I have puzzled over the meaning of Janus-headed Maori godsticks. Now, thanks to Gell's discussion of western Polynesian and Marquesan analogues, they make more sense, not least because their hafts were carefully bound (encompassed) with strings of flax. And this is the place to say that, with some reservations illustrated below, I find Gell's treatment of Maori tattooing (*moko*) generally sensitive to its cultural setting. "These masks of vengeance and vindictiveness were designed to impress and to overwhelm, and no doubt they did. . . . Of all Polynesian polities [the Maori] was the most confrontational" (p. 244).

Gell's last chapter signals a return to the concept raised in chapter 1: the epidemiology of tattooing. Is there evidence in the material reviewed, he asks, of "intelligible co-variation" (p. 288)? His answer is yes, demonstrated by what he terms an "abstract summation" diagram (p. 290: fig. 7.1; cf. pp. 295-296). Here an inclined "plane of maximal tattooing" is represented diagrammatically within a matrix of three polarities regarded as typical of Polynesian political systems: conical, feudal, and devolved. The latter are depicted horizontally, while variations of intensity are shown vertically (amplified: upwards; attenuated: downwards). But Gell then faces a dilemma resulting from this analysis. It "is necessary both to accommodate the multiplicity of tattooing as a symbolic form . . . and at the same time to preserve, as far as possible, the unity of tattooing as an externally recognizable category" (p. 303). Gell's solution is to set out the variations that he perceives to exist within "the basic schema" of Polynesian tattooing in terms of the technical processes necessary for the operation itself and their after-effects on the body. The latter, though always present, have different emphases of importance in different societies. Thus the variations can be set out under the sequential categories of (1) wounding/bleeding, (2) healing, and (3) indelibly marking; and each Polynesian society can be categorized according to its own particular emphasis. So Tahiti is placed in category 1, Samoa in category 2, and the Maori in category 3.

Inevitably a reviewer will have different interpretations or emphases from those maintained by an author, especially when considering such a comprehensive subject tackled so ambitiously. My concerns relate particularly to the ethnography, mindful of Gell's above-quoted comment of its frequent lack of context. At the same time I do find on occasion that Gell's determination "to range quite widely over the field of Polynesian studies" (p. 1) can be tortuous and over-elaborate. For example, he devotes much attention to demonstrating that the Kaeppler/Kirch model of tattoo distribution in Fiji and western Polynesia "is inconsistent with certain facts" (p. 114). But why make the counterargument (pp. 113-120) so complicated? Incidentally, when discussing the traditional origin of the Fale Fisi, Gell gives the Tu'i Tonga the name of his daughter, Sinaitakala (p. 115; cf. Bott 1982:32; Kaeppler 1971:182-183). He also characterizes the "institutionalized misalliance" between the Tu'i Tonga Fefine and the Fijian, Tapu'osi, thus creating the Fale Fisi, as a "status sink" where excess status is poured away "into a bottomless pit of Fijian inferiority" (p. 116). This is, I suggest, an emotive description, given that the name Tapu'osi means "termination of a prohibition" (Rogers 1977:178), signifying the freeing of the Tu'i Tonga Fefine from celibacy and that thereafter the children of the Tu'i Tonga Fefine and her "Fijian" husband "had higher rank than the Tu'i Tonga . . . but no political authority as rulers" (Bott 1982:33; cf. Bott 1981:32).

Tumakoha, the highest *tohunga* of the Arawa, possessed such high *tapu* to require no *moko*, illustrating Gell's "primary hypothesis" that "those who are close to the gods are not tattooed; those who prefer to keep them at a distance, are" (p. 261). This is an appealing argument, demonstrated by the examples not only of Tumakoha, but also of the tattoo-free sacred paramount chiefs of western Polynesia and the chief of Ua Pou in the Marquesas (p. 210). So Gell can write of "the hubristic motive, setting man, the tattooed creature, against the untattooed, clear-skinned gods" (p. 217). But, in terms of ethnographically defined practice, how far can one take this principle of opposition?

The Maori data are not as clear-cut as Gell thinks. He agrees that "there are plenty of instances of known *tohunga* who had *moko*-tattooing" (p. 262), so were *they* "close to the gods" or not? There seems no means of knowing, given the extent that nineteenth-century Pakeha disruptions rendered uncertain the reliability of Maori "tradition." In support of his case Gell cites two other examples of *tohunga* bereft of *moko*. In one he highlights the remarks of John Savage that Maoris "intended for the performance of their religious ceremonies have only a small square patch of tattooing over the right eye" (Savage 1807:47), "whose significance in the present context [says



Cell] can hardly be overestimated” (p. 261). Perhaps so. But it is hard to equate even limited *moko*, albeit not around the mouth, with non-*moko*. Moreover, Savage wrote of Maoris *intended as performers*, which could mean that they were trainees or acolytes—hence their limited *moko*.

Gell’s other example is also unsatisfactory. He says that Tarapipi, a Ngati Haua chief and clever Land Wars politician, was both a lifelong pagan and never tattooed (p. 262), and guesses that, he was a *tohunga*. I have not been able to obtain access to the only source Gell refers to, a biography by L. Rickard (which would seem to be one listed in other bibliographies with a different title). However, according to Stokes (1990:516), Tarapipi, or Tarapipipi, assumed the names Wiremu Tamihana (William Thompson) when converted to Christianity in 1839. He had been a considerable warrior, succeeding his father as chief for that reason. According to Simmons (1986:79, a source used elsewhere by Gell), Tarapipipi was depicted by the artist G. F. Angas in 1844 grasping a *tewhatewha* (club), his *moko* clearly visible.

Gell sees further support for his case concerning the sanctity of the peaceful and tattoo-free by reference to the Moriori (pp. 268-270, here called Moriri). They were not tattooed; according to their Maori conquerors (and so a biased source) they were highly *tapu*, and in their own estimation were a peaceful people. However, the last attribute was disputed by Skinner, in his authoritative study (1923), as “hard to reconcile with their traditions which are full of accounts of fighting, and with the accounts of their warlike behavior given by Broughton and Johnstone, the first Europeans to land on Chatham Island. . . . It would be easy for [the Islanders] to attribute their defeat to peaceableness, a virtue to which their conquerors could lay no claim” (Skinner 1923:42). Incidentally, Gell is incorrect to say that the Morioris were forcibly removed by the Maoris to the mainland (pp. 269-270). On the contrary, they were allowed to die off *in situ*.

I make these comments having in mind particularly Gell’s remark that his book is in part “a general introduction to Polynesian culture and society” (p. 1), which, if only for reasons indicated in this review, it is not. Certainly it contains valuable insights, especially at an interisland comparative level, and Gell’s arguments are often sophisticated, giving them a stimulating edge. At times, however, they are theoretically abstruse, while his command of the ethnography can be idiosyncratic, even unreliable. The book has a surprisingly high quota of textual errors, ranging from minor slips to mistakes in transcribed quotations, sufficient at times to read as paraphrases. It is frustrating, for example, to find that “Bloch 1988” on p. 207 is not listed in the bibliography (which also has its share of mistakes), the context of which suggests that this should be “Thomas 1988.” The errors in transcribed quotations usually do not affect either their integrity or Gell’s use of them (e.g.,

the Tahitian myths quoted on pp. 124-125 from Henry's *Ancient Tahiti* [1928:339-340, 364-366]). But on p. 243 he uses a quotation from an article by Sahlins, including part of a Maori *karakia*, which is rendered bizarre by having tagged on to it the first line of Sahlins's subsequent explanatory comment. And a lengthy, but inaccurately transcribed, extract on p. 139 from Banks's *Tahitian Journal* of 1769 omits enough of the ritual to imply that Banks described it incorrectly.

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Greg Dening, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language: Passion, Power, and Theatre on the "Bounty."* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Pp. xii, 445, illus., bibliography, index. US\$34.95 cloth.

*Reviewed by Karen Stevenson, UCLA*

Greg Dening's *Mr Bligh's Bad Language: Passion, Power, and Theatre on the "Bounty"* is a welcomed addition to the literature of this "historic" "ill-fated voyage." In his creation he produces a melange of contemporary theory, rhetoric, and the documents of history. His setting is the stage. The result is the historical reenactment of the *Bounty* drama.

On the one hand, the work appears straightforward, a history told. Yet Dening prefers the notion of a narrative, not one voice but many that create a shared invention. He places the work in the theatre, creating the stage on which the drama unfolds. Additionally, Dening walks us through the piece. He talks to his readers, allowing them to be part of his play. As his prologue sets the stage, he tells us of his role (p. 3):

By tradition, too, the deliverer of the prologue enters by a "stage door" that is not part of the scenery but marks a special entry place of someone who for the moment is neither actor nor audience, but in between, distant by being didact, dangerous by being ironist, disturbing by being a relativist. . . . The imagination he or she sparked was dialogic and by that the audience was enticed into the conspiracy of its own engagement of making realism.

In so doing he engages and challenges his audience. We must read critically and at the same time watch the drama play itself out. This is an intriguing way to offer up a complicated, yet well-known history.

We know that this tale is, above all, a history, for the characters have been a part of our lives. Hollywood has seen to this with its versions of the story. Nordoff and Hall have written the "*Bounty* Trilogy." There was at least one "ill-fated" theatrical piece that I had the (mis)fortune to see in London in 1985. But Dening's tale is more than these fictions turned histories. His creation is based both on the *Bounty's* historical documents and his critical interpretation of them.

We begin with dates. December 23, 1787, the *Bounty* sailed from Portsmouth. April 28, 1789, the mutiny took place. March 14, 1790, Bligh returned to England. These dates, their histories, and the myriad of historical implications are just the beginning. Actually, there are three beginnings to this book. Dening uses the notion of a prologue, which enables a multiplicity

of viewpoints. Bligh becomes an object whose everyday living creates the *Bounty* theatre. Denning states: "By long tradition theatre needs a prologue. The prologue is more than just a beginning. The prologue fills that marginal space between the conventionalities of everyday living and the conventionalities of being in the theatre. The prologue mediates one and the other, [and] educates the audience to its role" (p. 3). The "conventionalities" Denning speaks of address both the importance and banality of everyday experiences. How was Bligh to know that his "bad language" would result in infamy? In this work, Denning magnifies the everyday, studying the multiple meanings and interpretations of a variety of actions and relationships. Essential to this work is Denning's ability to make his play come to life--to interpret the drama of the *Bounty*. The stage where most of the action takes place is in what Denning terms marginal spaces. These spaces are not only beaches, but the ship, the launch, the courtroom, Pitcairn Island, the *Pandora*, Hollywood. Here, history and myth become one. Bligh is one actor, as is Christian, as is the beach of Matavai. By creating the set, by giving voices to all involved, these spaces come alive. Denning's drama teaches not only British maritime history and its complex ramifications, but the extraordinary theatre it created.

Denning's method, however, does have its shortcomings. As the play is built scene upon scene, they often are quite tangential. The audience hopes that it will all make sense in the end (as it does), but, in the meantime, wonders where the story is going. An example of this is found in the title--*Mr Bligh's Bad Language*. One expects that language will play a key role: that we will discover why Mr. Christian was in "hell," that we will be given evidence (explicit, hopefully) of Bligh's language skills and his abilities to demoralize his men with a cursed tongue. Instead we learn the etymology of such seafaring jargon as "shake a leg," "taken aback," and to be at "loggerheads" (pp. 55-56). The scene continues, however, and we are told that Bligh "cursed the Admiralty" and frequently used such potent words as "scoundrels" and "damned rascals" to berate his officers. The audience muses, for we have no context to understand the meaning of these words. Denning goes on to explain: "Bligh's bad language was the ambiguous language of his command. It was bad, not so much because it was intemperate or abusive, but because it was ambiguous, because men could not read in it a right relationship to his authority" (p. 61). It appears now that language has taken a backseat to the authority that Bligh wanted, and perhaps never earned. In the process, however, much information about the interrelationships among the men of the *Bounty* is revealed. The tangent has become an integral part of the play.

The drama, theatricality, and performances of the *Bounty* become the

leitmotifs of the work. These, of course, are played out against the theatre of the Pacific. Denning tries to give the reader the cultural knowledge to understand the ritual of interaction, the importance (or deification) of authority, and sacrifice. In so doing, another tangential monologue is performed. It concerns Hawaii and Sahlins's interpretations of Cook's death (1985, 1989). Denning comments that the Tahitians, like the Hawaiians, "were adept at seeing the divine in the human, whatever the contradictions" (p. 196). This direction is problematic. It only adds to the tendency to fuse the Hawaiians and Tahitians together without concern for the historical, social, political, or ideological specifics of different situations. Fortunately, only a prophecy is cited, as no scholar has written to confirm the "belief" in the coming of a canoe without an outrigger (pp. 192-197). I would assert that the Tahitians did not believe in the divinity of all British seamen. As Wallis deferred to Porea, Porea did to Wallis. The creation of an economic relationship and courtesy extended to visitors does not create or even suggest divinity. Again Denning's narrative reads as fact, not one man's invention.

Denning's proclivity to relate everything to the stage is countered by the proliferation of meticulously researched facts. This is both an engaging and baffling approach. The reader as audience must interpret the information without knowing if this is a well-written story or an academic novel. Denning adds to this problem when stating: "Reader, the years are too long already for me to spend more time being certain. Let me transfer the burden to your shoulders. Read my narrative. It will be then for you to decide how different my story would be if none of it was true" (p. 251). I find this disconcerting for two reasons. One, it seems to negate the importance of the research done. Not only has Denning gone through all the historical documents, he has reconstructed them in such a way that the *Bounty* becomes more than just myth. Two, Denning's history becomes narrative, which enables his interpretations to become fact. He rarely makes note of sources in the text, which allows the drama to play itself out. It also allows Denning to use artistic license. He talks of inventions (p. 277), a "sureness in my narrative," and a "vicarious authenticity to my judgements and interpretations" (p. 390).

Denning, however, takes responsibility for his drama. He acknowledges its creation. His actors play out their roles. In his epilogue Denning talks of "claptrap" (pp. 371-374)--the ability of a performer to elicit spontaneous applause, the audience losing themselves in the play. This is what Denning does. Historical accuracy and theatrical invention blend in *Mr Bligh's Bad Language* to create a performance "in which the audience--or the reader or the viewer--participates in the creative process of representing" (p. 372). The result is an entertaining, postmodern, historical novel where the reality of the *Bounty* becomes myth and the myth becomes history.

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Brij V. Lal, Doug Munro, and Edward D. Beechert, eds., *Plantation Workers: Resistance and Accommodation*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993. Pp. vii, 343, tables, bibliography, index. US\$38 cloth.

*Reviewed by Colin Newbury, Oxford University*

This collection of essays fills a need for a comparative overview of labor conditions on Pacific plantations during the period of the establishment of Western commercial enterprise and government. The editors would not claim that coverage is in any way complete. Rather, the aim has been to highlight the features of penal indenture and some other forms of legal constraint on workers, common to investment in tropical agriculture in the long aftermath of slave emancipation.

Arguing against the use of sociological models, Edward D. Beechert covers the well-documented history of labor recruitment for Hawaiian plantations, noting the reasons for the scarcity of indigenous labor, the rejection of American blacks and Chinese by the Hawaiian monarchy, and the consequent reliance by sugar and merchant capital investment on Japanese indentured immigrants. In practice, demand usually exceeded supply in conditions of weak legal constraints, giving rise to a mixed system of free, indentured, and subcontracted workers. Resistance techniques hardly evolved beyond desertion before penal contracts came to an end in 1898; planters chose to keep the sugar subsidy, rather than face rises in direct labor costs that may have encouraged greater efficiency; and wage bargaining, strikes, and equality of Hawaiian labor before the law from 1900 counted for more in the general strategies of resistance than the usual tactics of an oppressed work force, as the sugar and fruit industries moved into the intense deployment of worker power in the face of mechanization in the 1920s.

Brij V Lal's essay (already published in the *Hawaiian Journal of History*) demonstrates that the fewest acts of open resistance occurred in the worst conditions of indenture: Riots and strikes were in inverse proportion to the strictness of legal codes. Accommodation with the system to preserve health and a modest amount of savings was the optimal strategy among Indians on

Fijian plantations, given diversity of origins and lack of social cohesion, language difficulties, oppression by the *sirdar* (foreman), and frequent mobility between plantations. Little protection could be expected from Fiji's colonial government, at its worst so far as laborers were concerned under Thurston, and only mildly humane under Jackson and im Thurn. Despite this, life for some of the lower-caste recruits improved, a small percentage of complaints by laborers were upheld by the courts, and a large number chose to remain after indenture rather than face the miseries of Indian village life by repatriation.

Using the example of Queensland Melanesian labor, Clive Moore closely follows the model described by Lal, emphasizing strategies for survival rather than outright resistance or total accommodation. In so doing he deploys the concept of a counterculture among immigrant Melanesians in Queensland that is useful in explaining attitudes to abuse, insult, and punishment in alien, confrontational systems of justice, but of little help in accounting for the considerable social mobility among re-contracted workers or the strong political action mobilized after 1900 to avoid total repatriation. Some of the leadership underwent considerable cultural adaptation. On the whole, therefore, resistance was spasmodic, individual, and brutal, rather than collective and advantageous, prior to the formation of the Pacific Islanders' Association in 1901. From the statistical examples collected for the Mackay district, Moore argues for a typology of "open" resistance against the iniquities of penal indenture and a more "covert" type using Melanesian "social mechanisms." Details of the former category are easy to document from an analysis of the indenture system and court records. But it is difficult to see why recorded examples of absconding, murder, sabotage, and so forth should be classified as covert, although a good explanation is offered in terms of reactions to illness and death from disease rather than straightforward "payback." Even so, by 1883 about a quarter of the total Melanesian labor force was time-expired and re-contracted. This proportion rose to some 60 percent by the late 1880s, including independent ticket-holders, freed from indentures. In the end some twenty-five hundred were allowed to stay. Clearly, the pattern of survival strategies requires an account of differential wage levels over time, opportunities for improvement within the system, and job mobility to explain why so many who escaped death and jail may have turned the system to their advantage and wished to continue to work in Queensland.

Doug Munro and Stewart Firth's example of the twenty-five hundred Gilbertese who worked in German Samoa provides a clear analysis of the depravities of a badly administered indenture system and the support for worker resistance provided by British consular patronage from 1894. The

foundation of Samoan plantations in the context of mercantile investment and the vulnerability of Gilbertese to recruitment is thoughtfully explored from both the employers' and workers' viewpoints. Planters' law was bad law, and the reason is seen in the collusion between public authorities (including Samoans) and private interests, as exemplified by the Steinberger commission of 1875 and by German consular support, until British jurisdiction intervened from Fiji. The case also reveals how little labor could expect in a basically underdeveloped economy, compared with Queensland or even Hawaii.

Writing with a firm sense of the structural constraints on capital in the early plantation history of the Solomons, Judith A. Bennett explains why, despite low start-up costs, plantations faced a continuous labor shortage and a state of armed conflict with Melanesian societies. The usual abuses in an indenture system that paid relatively low wages (though not as low as New Guinea) and attracted only fractious young men were to some extent remedied by Colonial Office intervention, inspection, and the adoption of task work. The use of taxation as a stimulus to recruitment is thoughtfully analyzed and provides a basis for comparison with other Melanesian plantation systems not covered in these essays (New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea). Again, too, once indenture was abolished, mass resistance became possible, as in Hawaii, and labor protest passed into the phase of political protest in the shape of Maasinga rule.

The chapters on Central American labor are instructive for differences rather than parallels with the island Pacific and Queensland. In the absence of penal indentures, older forms of servitude arising from patronage and peonage provided the social and economic basis for recruitment for estates in Guatemala, Yucatecan (Mexico), and northern Peru. Constraint on workers' options had more in common with the Transvaal or the antebellum South in a transition from personal authority over indebted peasants to wage contract with the state acting as policeman and arbiter. David McCreery emphasizes the more subtle forms of resistance on the part of Guatemalan coffee workers, given to minor deceptions and flight to home districts or to Mexico and Honduras. The Yucatecan Maya investigated by Allen Wells and Gilbert M. Joseph similarly deployed the "weapons of the weak" until their situation was exacerbated by a financial panic, 1907-1908, and was seized on by radical politicians in the run-up to more widespread agricultural insurgency that prefaced the Mexican revolution. Sugar workers in northern Peru had more in common with Hawaiian workers after 1900: recruited by professionals, enjoying a rising daily cash wage, and open to forms of "social control" through improved housing and health. In this rela-



relationship Michael J. Gonzales considers coercion “unimportant” (p. 311), as debt peonage was undermined by the cash nexus.

So what can be concluded from the range of examples? Doug Munro, in an able introduction, summarizes the mechanisms of constraint and the limits of employer power in the face of the need to conserve an essential economic input. Penal indenture gave powerful weapons, if enforced by the state, and few remedies that could be equitably exploited by workers. If Lal’s model is followed, then the best strategy was to keep heads down and await repatriation or liberation into the normal wage-labor force. But if the Queensland, Mexican, and Hawaiian examples are heeded, then the paradox of resistance is that it grew in proportion to the legalization of contractual status under more liberal labor regimes and in the more general context of political conflict.

Moreover, two historiographical gaps in the examples need to be kept in mind. There were possibilities for social mobility even on Fijian plantations, and many more in Queensland. Work histories display a tendency for experience to improve the bargaining relationship with employers, even to the extent of cooperation (headmen, recruiters, brokers) and co-optation (independent contractors with their own labor). Secondly, the economic record for sugar, copra, coffee, or natural fibers was not uniform in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries--the period covered by some of these essays. The general survey would be improved by an exploration of plantation performance to differentiate between styles of worker management in relation to discontent. Some plantations could afford to be paternalistic; some could not. Plantation techniques were not identical, and some private companies fared better than others. A critical condition that might have been exemplified also by Papua and New Guinea was the fiscal relationship between state and enterprise, as Bennett has pointed out; given this close relationship, much of the indenture system outlived its time, as other economies moved (as in the American examples) into wage bargaining without passing through the penal indenture stage. A final consideration arising out of these points is the value of labor, which is not considered in the general conclusions. Labor was “cheap” only at unit cost, not in the aggregate; and its coercion was a feature of inefficient administration based on low-level investment. Once it became “dear” at unit cost (Queensland, Hawaii, northern Peru), very different labor regimes took over, based on specialization and alienation rather than standard task work and state/employer paternalism. But anyone contemplating a general or specific exploration of Pacific economic history will find these essays essential reading.

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## BOOKS NOTED

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### RECENT PACIFIC ISLANDS PUBLICATIONS: SELECTED ACQUISITIONS, FEBRUARY-MAY 1994

This list of significant new publications relating to the Pacific Islands was selected from new acquisitions lists received from Brigham Young University-Hawaii, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Bernice P. Bishop Museum, University of Auckland, East-West Center, University of the South Pacific, National Library of Australia, and the Australian International Development Assistance Bureaus Center for Pacific Development Training. Other libraries are invited to send contributions to the Books Noted Editor for future issues. Listings reflect the extent of information provided by each institution.

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## CONTRIBUTORS

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