

# PACIFIC STUDIES

SPECIAL ISSUE

PACIFIC ISLANDS DIASPORA, IDENTITY, AND INCORPORATION

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## INTRODUCTION

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ONE OF THE MOST NOTICEABLE TRENDS on earth, in addition to global warming, is the increasing frequency with which people move about from place to place. To be sure, people have always been a peripatetic lot, but the constraints of boundaries have been progressively stripped away in recent years by improved transportation, economic globalization, and more permeable national borders. One result of this trend has been a proliferation of studies under the rubric of “diaspora,” a term adapted from the dispersion of Jews from Israel beginning in the eighth century BC. This special issue is a contribution—a significant one we hope—to that burgeoning literature.

The collection is the product of successive annual sessions at meetings of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO), beginning with an informal session in 2006 and culminating with a symposium in 2010. Nine papers survived this process and constitute the substantive ethnographic essays presented. Geographically, they cover four originating Polynesian societies (Kapingamarangi, Rotuma, Samoa, and Tonga) and five originating Micronesian societies (Banaba [Ocean Island], Chuuk, Pohnpei, the Caroline Islands, and the Marshall Islands). The main destinations of migrants from these societies include Fiji, Guam, Hawai'i, New Zealand, Saipan, and the continental United States.

It is important to note that Pacific Islanders have been among the most mobile people in the world over the past several thousand years, during which they left homelands in Southeast Asia and dispersed over the entire Pacific Ocean. Minimally constrained by the ocean that surrounded the islands on which they settled, they voyaged great distances in well-crafted canoes, adapted their cultural knowledge to new environments, and generally thrived. As Epeli Hau'ofa observed in his brilliant article "Our Sea of Islands," for the people of Oceania, "their universe comprised not only land surfaces, but the surrounding ocean as far as they could traverse and exploit it" (1993, 5). He went on to contrast this view with that of westerners:

There is a gulf of difference between viewing the Pacific as "islands in a far sea" and as "a sea of islands." The first emphasises dry surfaces in a vast ocean. . . . The second is a more holistic perspective in which things are seen in the totality of their relationships. . . . It was continental men, Europeans and Americans, who drew imaginary lines across the sea, making the colonial boundaries that, for the first time, confined ocean peoples to tiny spaces. These are the boundaries that today define the island states and territories of the Pacific. I have just used the term "ocean peoples" because our ancestors, who had lived in the Pacific for over 2000 years, viewed their world as a "sea of islands," rather than "islands in a far sea." (Hau'ofa 1993, 5)

Despite many years of colonial overlay, one might argue that this view of islands as nodes in a web of connectivity persists among the peoples of Micronesia and Polynesia and that their current migrations are simply a new chapter in a long history of exploration, purposeful migration, and resettlement. Indeed, as Suzanne Falgout notes in her article on Pohnpean emigration to Hawai'i (2012 [this issue]), much contemporary migration within and from Micronesia is guided by traditional principles of voyaging. She paraphrases Micronesian historian Joakim Peter, noting that Chuukese voyaging is purposeful, planned, and with a distinct course of action. Voyagers are advised not to wander aimlessly and to maintain strong clan and trade connections for basic life support (Peter 2000). They should also have a connection or relationship to people in the destination. Indeed, Chuukese custom advises "walking in the footprints" of others, retracing others' movements. Without such connections, Chuukese travelers are said to be lost, or adrift, while away from home (Peter 2000).

This emphasis on maintaining connections is a central theme in the case studies presented in this special issue. Return visits by migrants to their

home island, sending remittances, gifts, and donations in support of churches and various events, are common occurrences that link expatriate Islanders to their homeland. Likewise, people from the islands regularly communicate with kinsmen abroad, send traditional valuables that are hard to come by in foreign lands, and may visit with some degree of frequency. And as communities emerge and expand abroad, visits, exchanges, and communication between them proliferate, strengthening connections in what has become a worldwide network for many Islanders. Indeed, if one were to map the flow of people, money, valuables (both tangible and intangible), and communication in real time, it would result in a most dynamic diagram.

This is not the first collection to address issues pertaining to the Pacific diaspora. It is preceded by two collections that have provided a solid foundation for understanding the issues involved. First came an ASAO volume deriving from an ASAO symposium on resettled communities edited by Michael Lieber (1977). Most of the chapters in the book *Exiles and Migrants in Oceania* are by anthropologists who participated in Homer Barnett's comparative study of resettled communities. It includes chapters detailing the migration experiences of Palauans, Kapingamarangi, Nukuoro, Bikinians, Banabans and other Gilbertese, Rotumans, Tikopians, Ambrymese in the New Hebrides, and the Orokaiva of Papua New Guinea. A second volume, edited by Paul Spickard, Joanne Rondilla, and Debbie Hippolite Wright (2002), is titled *Pacific Diaspora: Island Peoples in the United States and Across the Pacific*. This book, by authors from varying backgrounds, has a heavy emphasis on the impact of colonialism on Pacific peoples, with special sections addressing identity issues, migration issues, cultural transformations, gender and sexuality, social problems and responses, and Hawaiian nationalism.

The current collection adds to the literature both by amplifying themes in the previous two volumes and by introducing new issues to the conversation. The first article, by Ping-Ann Addo, describes changing conceptions of kinship groupings, including the very notion of "family," among Tongans in New Zealand as they cope with tensions between providing for their close kin and traditional cultural demands to support the broader Tongan community, both in New Zealand and in Tonga, with church donations and contributions of money and valuables to various ceremonial and fundraising events. Addo brings to light changes in the expenditure of money between generations of emigrants and describes the ways money is used to teach children about the boundaries of "family" through acts of gift giving. As she notes, the value of money articulates with the value of traditional wealth but within a changing political economy brought about by the

diaspora. Changing attitudes toward money have implications for the ways relationships are created and sustained, both within New Zealand and between emigrants and their kinsmen back home in Tonga. Insofar as the way money is used articulates with cultural values, it also implicates a people's sense of their cultural identity, in this case "the attitudes and beliefs that Tongans say guide them to do *anga faka-Tonga*, that is, to live in 'the Tongan way.'" For this reason, Addo observes, the way people use money arouses emotions like anxiety about how to navigate modernity without losing their traditions. She concludes that even though roles may be shifting in families and kinship networks, cultural values continue to be honored, if in circumscribed ways.

In the second article, Susanne Kuehling draws our attention to the invisible aspects of culture, what a previous generation of anthropologists termed "latent culture," that migrants take with them. Such "invisible belongings" include shared principles of spatial organization, understandings of kinship and gender, cosmologies, moralities, and the interpretation of sensate experience. As Kuehling puts it, "Many of these belongings cannot be 'unpacked' at the end of the journey, but some are elevated to symbols of shared experience and unity." For migrants from the Caroline Islands, a disempowered minority on the island of Saipan in the Northern Marianas, odors, particularly the smells of flower garlands, play a crucial role in maintaining their sense of identity. Culturally meaningful odors that waft in the air, Kuehling observes, constitute "a bonding element, a sense of shared experience that allows people to construct their sense of sameness." Among migrants, she argues, "this experience of communality appears to be an anchor of ethnic identity, as people make use of their invisible belongings to achieve a feeling of communality." From the standpoint of identity construction, a focus on the spaces between persons in which odors exist shifts us away from a bounded, atomistic conception of self, so prevalent in Western culture, to a concept of the self rooted in relationships. Just as the ocean ties Pacific peoples together, Kuehling maintains, "the breeze constitutes an invisible connection that informs their sense of place beyond the confinements of islands." Insofar as flower garlands play a key role in permeating the breeze with meaningful odors, women occupy a central role in the maintenance of Carolinian identity, as it is they who collect the petals, compose the perfume, and braid garlands for their men and children. The case of Saipan's Carolinians shows how deeply embedded and resilient "invisible belongings" can be when safeguarded within female spaces.

The third essay, by Wolfgang Kempf, introduces a discussion of the discourses that encompass diasporas. Although the case of the Banabans is

distinctive in some special ways, most migrant groups have generated conceptual frameworks for making sense of their circumstances. The focus may be on the homeland—a nostalgia for its alluring beauty, cultural purity, carefree lifestyle, and so on, or, alternatively, a sense of outrage at changes seen as corrupting the idealized culture (see Howard and Rensel 2012 [this issue], for examples). Their discourse may focus on issues within migrant communities, such as the stereotypes that people in the new society have of them, and the consequences for their well-being (see Falgout 2012 [this issue]; Carucci 2012 [this issue]). Or discourses may focus on relationships between a migrant community and the homeland, as is the case of the Banabans. The Banabans were forced off their home island of Banaba (then known as Ocean Island in colony of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands) by the Japanese during World War II and scattered over several islands. Banaba had already been despoiled as the result of industrial-scale mining of phosphate, rendering the traditional lifestyle nearly impossible. After the war, the British gathered up the dispersed Banabans and resettled them on Rabi Island in Fiji. Kempf reports that Banabans “link their founding narrative of colonial exploitation, war, dispersal, and resettlement to the biblical story (related in the Book of Exodus) of [the Jews’] liberation from Egyptian bondage and entry, after a period of wandering in the wilderness, into the Promised Land.” The Banabans have adapted the narrative from the Old Testament, with its allegories of liberation and survival, along with the notion of a people chosen by God. In reflecting on the strategic significance of this kind of narrative, Kempf points out that it not only permits the Banabans to organize their perceptions of the past but also allows them to justify their claim to Rabi as a God-given right. In addition, the narrative serves to encapsulate the past in religious metaphors that synchronize religious affiliation, historical awareness, and identity politics. Kempf documents the ways in which the narrative infuses festivities on the island as well as church services. More generally, he draws attention to the role that religion plays in shaping diaspora not only by providing ready-made narratives to justify politically sensitive positions and activities but also as a primary component in the construction (and reconstruction) of cultural identity.

The fourth article, by Manual Rauchholz, brings to light the contrast between formal legal principles and informal customary practices in diasporic settings. He focuses on adoption, child exchange, and fosterage practices among the Chuukese and especially on transactions between people living in Chuuk and their kinsmen abroad in Guam, Hawai‘i, and the continental United States. He presents three case studies of child transfers that illustrate the issues involved and the different ways the rights of children, their biological parents, and adopters are interpreted. Traditional

adoption was largely an informal process in which children were shared with close kin, just as food, labor, and other commodities were shared. Transfers of children between households were a way of redistributing assets and burdens as circumstances required. They were also a means, like other forms of exchange, of consolidating relationships between families and extending networks. In most instances such transfers took place within a geographical space that allowed the child to maintain meaningful relations with both families, and rights in relation to the child were diffuse rather than exclusive. The child's welfare was generally not an issue; the focus was on the relationship between the adults involved. When children are sent to live with relatives abroad, however, circumstances are very different, in part because the child's separation from its biological parents is much more extreme. Furthermore, the courts, both in Chuuk and the United States, focus on the welfare of the child and, in formal adoptions, require the assumption of exclusive rights over the child by the adopting parents. The contrast raises the whole issue of interpersonal rights and obligations, customarily and legally, in diaspora. It also draws attention to changing power relations both at home and abroad and on what this might mean for the refashioning of cultural identity as social networks expand beyond national boundaries.

Howard and Rensel demonstrate in their essay the value of the Internet as a source for researching matters that concern emigrants as they reflect on their homeland and its importance for their sense of identity. As the authors note, the epicenter of the now global Rotuman community exists primarily in cyberspace in applications such as Facebook and on the Rotuma Website, started by Howard in 1996. The Rotuman Forum is a section of the Rotuma Website in which people can request that their opinions be posted concerning issues of general concern to the global Rotuman community. Users are required to provide their proper names and where they live as well as to follow rules of civility. Howard and Rensel discuss seven clusters of interest to Rotumans abroad as reflected in forum postings during the past decade. These include concerns about the unreliability of transportation to and communication with the island, about environmental degradation on Rotuma, about the pros and cons of developing the island economically, about disputes over land, about Rotuma's sovereignty in relation to Fiji (of which it is a part), about Rotuma as an idealized and romanticized icon, and about issues associated with maintaining Rotuman identity abroad. What stands out in the authors' view is a tendency to relish an image of Rotuma as a pristine paradise that existed in an imagined past and is threatened by contemporary developments. The imagery is of a beautiful, bountiful island unsullied by rubbish of any kind, of a people who freely shared and cared for one another, of customs that were uniformly

uplifting. Howard and Rensel assert that it is against this image that complaints about environmental pollution, economic development, land issues, the authenticity of cultural performances, and many other expressions of concern must be understood. They maintain that vehicles such as the Rotuma Website facilitate the construction of an idealized, iconic image, which in turn reinforces a favorable cultural identity.

The next two essays concern the adaptation of Micronesians who have relocated to the state of Hawai'i. Suzanne Falgout contrasts the traditional Pohnpeian context of voyaging to the contemporary context. She maintains, however, that contemporary travel perpetuates aspects of traditional Pohnpeian voyaging, including maintaining a sense of place and family, settlement patterns, means of survival and adaptation to new environments, and ways of perpetuation cultural identity. While recent migration to Hawai'i has been encouraged by a sense of belonging to the United States, migrants have found something less than a welcoming reception and are largely unprepared for life in their new home. As a result, Pohnpeian identity is being refashioned in Hawai'i, in part as a result of altered cultural practices, in part as a result of perceptions of them by the non-Pohnpeians with whom they interact. Like others described in this issue, Pohnpeians abroad maintain strong ties to their home island while developing a new sense of community in their new homeland. And like other Pacific Island migrants, there are distinct generational differences in how these bonds are expressed. Falgout pays particular attention to the ways Pohnpeians are perceived by others in Hawai'i. Until recently, there has been little awareness in Hawai'i of Micronesians, the category into which Pohnpeians are lumped. Unfortunately, as a result of some negative publicity based on selected occurrences and inaccurate information, Micronesians have been branded as a social problem within the state. As Falgout points out, "Hawai'i's lack of good information combined with negative stereotypes about 'Micronesians' have had significant, yet varied, impacts on Pohnpeians identity."

The article by Laurence Marshall Carucci concerns the adaptation of immigrants to Hawai'i from Enewetak in the Marshall Islands of Micronesia. When the United States decided to expand the testing of nuclear bombs from Bikini to nearby Enewetak in 1947, the people on the atoll were moved to Ujelang Atoll, 130 miles from their homeland, and despite promises by the U.S. government to return the people to an inhabitable Enewetak, a complete rehabilitation has proved intractable. As a result, beginning in 1991 a substantial number of people migrated from Enewetak and Ujelang to the Big Island of Hawai'i, where they face a mixture of enhanced opportunities and hardships. Like the Pohnpeians described by Falgout, the

Marshallese also suffer from negative stereotypes of Micronesians held by other Big Island residents. They are particularly sensitive to the degree of surveillance they are subjected to by authorities and their neighbors. One result of these conditions is that people are much more conscious of their cultural identity than their kinsmen in Micronesia, where culture is unproblematic. They work hard at fashioning an identity, rooted in traditional cultural practices, that counters the negative stereotypes held of them by others. Taken together, the contributions by Falgout and Carucci raise some profound questions concerning the ways in which immigrant populations are affected by prevailing stereotypes and intrusive surveillance by less-than-receptive, more politically powerful neighbors. It is circumstances such as these that foreground issues of cultural identity for migrants who settle in substantial numbers in a new land. They are faced with continually refashioning who they are—for themselves, for the authorities, and for their neighbors.

Michael Lieber and his Kapinga coauthors, Willys and Rosita Peters and Mike Borong, focus their attention on Kapingamarangi communities in the United States in the eighth essay. Their focus is on which aspects of the cultural model that prevails on the home island of Kapingamarangi, a Polynesian outlier in Micronesia, are replicated in the United States and which aspects are not or cannot be replicated. There are multiple Kapingamarangi enclaves in the United States, with loosely knit networks in Florida, North Carolina, and the Seattle area. The largest community—the only one that has achieved a critical mass capable of organizing ceremonial events involving the entire community—is in the Salem, Oregon, area. These communities, along with enclaves in Hawai'i and Guam, have taken advantage of the Internet to keep in contact with one another, much in the way that Rotumans have (Howard and Rensel 2012 [this issue]; but note the ways in which Kapinga discussions on the Internet contrast with those of the Rotumans). A progression of websites used by the Kapinga people has included major discussion threads on topics relating to aspects of their adaptation to their new homes with various suggestions about what can be done to resolve problems. However, the most active forum topic in recent years relates to Kapingamarangi history, with a major concern for genealogies. This deviates from the home island, where genealogies are regarded as proprietary knowledge. For Kapinga abroad, genealogies are a means of connecting with kinsmen they would otherwise not know of, whereas on the home island they are instrumental in making and defending claims to land. For migrants living abroad, this is of lesser concern insofar as they are not dependent on access to land for their livelihood. The longevity of the genealogy discussion thread—over two years—speaks to its value for



migrants as a metaphorical vehicle for engaging in discussions of shared substance, the very essence of kinship and cultural identity. The authors conclude with a reconsideration of the very notion of “community” as it relates to the redistribution of a population in the electronic age.

The final ethnographic account, by Micah Van der Ryn, concerns the phenomenon of return migration, a topic little studied as yet in the Pacific and elsewhere. Van der Ryn’s focus is on return migration to American Samoa. He explores return migration to American Samoa as a cultural act within a transnationalized Samoan system of life that helps describe the Samoan diaspora and highlights how differences in governmental policy with regard to key institutions, such as Samoa’s indigenous system of chieftainship (*fa’amatai*), differentially impact patterns of return migration between Independent (Western) Samoa and American Samoa. The main destinations for migrants from American Samoans have been Hawai‘i and the West Coast of the United States, while migration out of Western Samoa have been mostly to New Zealand and American Samoa. Relying on “transnationalism” as a key conceptual framework, Van der Ryn sees return migration (following Cassarino 2004) as part of a circular system of social and economic relationships and exchanges in which returnees prepare for their reintegration by periodic visits and sending remittances while abroad. In this system, he envisions Samoa as the center and Pacific Rim countries—the United States, New Zealand, and Australia—as the periphery from which money is extracted in the interest of feeding a Samoan form of prestige. The matai system, including the dispensing of titles, plays a central role in this system and impacts the politics of return migration. In presenting case studies, Van der Ryn strives to rely on indigenous Samoan concepts to illustrate the dynamics involved. Exploring the reasons for return migration, he distinguishes between age-groups while emphasizing the importance of caring for relatives as situations (with children and the elderly) require and as opportunities (education, employment) present. Appropriately, this article concludes with a call for more research on the understudied topic of return migration and particularly on the impact of returnees on their home communities.

The afterword, by Michael Rynkiewich, places the Pacific diaspora in perspective and explores the contributions of the ethnographic accounts to the theoretical conversations taking place about the nature of diasporas in general. Rynkiewich reflects on the development of the diaspora concept in modern anthropological usage in conjunction with the terms “transnational” and “transnationalism.” He discusses variations in diasporas, ranging from the relatively simple, involving small numbers of people speaking a single language migrating to a few overseas destinations, to the extremely

complex, involving millions of people speaking diverse languages and spreading over many parts of the world. Rynkiewicz pays special attention to the significant roles played by identity politics and religion in shaping the nature of the migrant experience. He concludes the issue with a set of provocative questions raised by past studies of diasporas that may well set the agenda for future research.

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