

KAPINGAMARANGI PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES

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KAPINGAMARANGI PEOPLE, Polynesians who trace their ancestry to Kapingamarangi Atoll in the Eastern Caroline Islands, are no strangers to diaspora. They formed their first migrant community on Pohnpei Island in 1919, during the early years of the Japanese colonial administration of Micronesia. The community was located in Kolonia Town, the administrative and commercial center, on 21 acres (8.5 ha) in a place called Porakied (literally, “rocky place”) leased by the government to the Kapingamarangi (hereafter Kapinga) people as a place to stay while visiting, working, or living on Pohnpei. A homestead program initiated by the U.S. administration after World War II resulted in a second Kapinga community in Metalanimhw in the south of Pohnpei (Lieber 1984). By 1977, the Kapinga community on Pohnpei had grown to 750 people (compared with 485 on Kapingamarangi Atoll). By 1990, nearly 900 people resided in Porakied.

The growth of education and training programs under the U.S. administration (which had succeeded the Japanese in 1946) has been responsible for most of the travel of Pohnpei residents outside Pohnpei Island and Micronesia. In the 1950s and early 1960s, Micronesian Islanders, including a few Kapinga, were sent to Chuuk, Palau, Saipan, Guam, and Hawai‘i. In

the late 1970s, representatives of U.S. mainland colleges came to Pohnpei to recruit students. The first Kapinga to emigrate to the continental United States were students at places like Chemeketa Community College in Salem, Oregon; Oregon College of Education in nearby Monmouth; and Suomi College in Hancock, Michigan. Most of the Kapinga who came as students stayed in the United States, and those in the Salem area now form the oldest and most stable Kapinga enclave aside from Porakied. A second wave of recruitment began in the early 2000s, but this time it was care institutions seeking young people to work with seniors (and with disabled children). Sea World recruited Kapinga for a number of different jobs in Orlando, Florida. By 2002, there were enclaves of Kapinga, mostly people in their twenties and thirties, in Florida and North Carolina. At this writing, there are over 400 Kapinga people scattered across the continental United States, Guam, and Hawai'i.

A main concern in this article is with the formation and maintenance of diasporic communities, including face-to-face and virtual communities in the contemporary context of considerable mobility and the Internet. At issue are not only the dynamics of community formation and transformation, but the very definition of community—one that is suitable for diasporic populations that remain connected via get-togethers, e-mail, Facebook, and other available means of interaction.

Our essay focuses on life experiences in the United States for Kapinga as opposed to other immigrants. For instance, the experiences of Kapinga people who are ill and have no medical insurance, who are arrested for domestic violence, who try to get driver's licenses, and so on, are common experiences shared with many other immigrants to the United States. These are not unimportant, particularly from the standpoint of social policy and social justice, but they tell us nothing about what it is like to live in the United States as a Kapinga person.

Put succinctly, our project is cultural. It is about the culturally specific concepts, the unstated assumptions that the concepts entail, and the resulting cultural models (in the sense of Shore 1996) that filter personal experiences and make them sensible to oneself and one's compatriots. Our cultural focus logically entails two research questions:

1. What concepts, assumptions, and models do Kapinga people replicate in the United States and how?
2. What is the interplay between Kapinga cultural concepts, assumptions, and models and the formation and transformation of diasporic communities?

Homer Barnett, who authored a theory of culture change that echoes throughout the articles in this collection (1953, 1983), reasoned that emigrant populations, whether they have come to a new place for personal reasons, by recruitment, or as a result of relocation by some third party (usually a government), are all assumed to undergo change through efforts to adapt to the new location. This is why Barnett saw the comparison of resettled communities as the closest one could get to a laboratory for the study of culture change (Lieber 1977). Barnett initiated the Pacific Displaced Communities Project, which sponsored twelve field studies in Melanesia, Micronesia, and the Philippines between 1962 and 1970, and one of the groups was the Kapinga who had resettled on Pohnpei (Lieber 1977, 1984).¹ Barnett attributed most adaptive change to a process of recombining cultural traits, a process that is apparent in the interplay between Kapinga in their discussions about genealogy, the ancient religion, and the distinction between ethnic identity and ethnic community described below.

Researchers for the Pacific Displaced Communities Project (of which Lieber was one) began with the reasonable (if naive) expectation that resettled populations would more or less replicate their cultural models of relationships between people and their physical and social environments. They also assumed that people would attempt to replicate their social organizations with whatever expedient alterations their environments demanded. In short, they expected resettled groups to recreate their communities. Most of the groups in the study appeared to have done so, but in ways that challenged the researchers' understanding of the relationship between cultural models, social organization, ethnic identity, and, more importantly, our understanding of what "community" might mean.

An extreme example of the relationship among cultural models, social organization, and identity was the Tikopian population who had resettled in the Russell Islands (Larson 1977). Although they had established a village with a school, a church, and a functioning political decision-making body, these were only temporary expedients. Eric Larson found that Tikopians were obsessed with Tikopian identity and Tikopian "custom." This obsession made it impossible to obtain consensus on the organization and conduct of community projects in the resettled community (Nukufero), because no alternative, regardless of how convenient or intuitively sensible, was acceptable unless it exactly replicated the way it was done back on Tikopia. Adaptive expedients were seen as violations of Tikopian custom, resulting in political paralysis of the community (Larson 1977). Thus, to adapt to new circumstances was to cease to be a Tikopian person. Tikopians saw themselves as a community, but not a bona fide *Tikopian* community. In this case, the relationship between Tikopian cultural models ("customs")

and their manifestations or enactments was a one-to-one replication: the map *was* the territory.

By contrast, Nukuoro on Pohnpei failed to replicate the kind of nucleated village organization of their home atoll, even though they had the land to do so (Carroll 1977). Indeed, their social organization appeared to have fallen apart on Pohnpei, and Nukuoro seemed unconcerned with their relationships with other Nukuoro or with Nukuoro identity on an island dominated by Micronesians. Vern Carroll showed that replicating their cultural models of personal relationships on Pohnpei made it impossible for Nukuoro to replicate their social organization or, according to Carroll, anything resembling a community (1977). The cultural dynamic involved is based on the notion that migratory movements are a result of unresolvable interpersonal conflicts that promote a tendency toward isolation in new environments.

Like the Tikopians, Kapinga people on Pohnpei had to adjust to physical and social environments quite different from those of their home islands. They had to adjust to new ways of making a living and to the constant presence of colonial personnel. But necessary alterations in housing, water sources, food resources, household personnel, and so on, never threatened Kapinga identity. By 1920, Kapinga had established themselves on Pohnpei as deep-sea fishermen, lending them an identity that became part of the fabric of the larger Pohnpeian social and economic networks (Lieber 1990). By the 1950s, Porakied had become a popular tourist destination—Pohnpei's Polynesian village. Unlike the Nukuoro, the Kapinga on Pohnpei lived in a single village whose households were organized much like those on the home atoll, and their political organization continued to be modeled on that of the atoll long after the political organization there had changed radically (Lieber 1977, 1994). Kapinga people in Pohnpei explicitly recognized that they lived in a different—and to some extent differently constituted—community from their home island, while sharing a common fate even in the face of occasionally conflicting interests (Lieber 1977, 1984). From the standpoint of community, the Kapinga on Pohnpei most closely resemble Banabans, Carolineans, and Marshallese described in this issue (see Kempf 2012 [this issue]; Kuehling 2012 [this issue]; Carucci 2012 [this issue]).

Later Kapinga resettlement in the continental United States has followed a different trajectory. Kapinga people who resettled in the United States most closely resemble Rotumans in Fiji in 1961, as described by Alan Howard and Irwin Howard (1977). At that time there were four Rotuman enclaves in Fiji, two small populations and two larger ones. The small populations were residentially scattered, so that getting together with other Rotumans took planning and was infrequent. The two larger populations included the community at the gold mines in Vatukoula and in Suva, the

capital city. Although the Rotuman community in Vatukoula had little resemblance to communities on Rotuma, the Rotumans there had a self-conscious, well-developed sense of themselves as an ethnic category and as a community and an ethnic solidarity that was largely the result of mining management policy, which pitted Rotumans against Fijians in a continual competition to keep workers from instituting collective bargaining.

The residence patterns, distribution of households over space, and spatial mobility that characterized Rotuma Island's social organization were most clearly replicated in Suva, where three spatially separate enclaves were organized around a combination of kinship and district of origin back home. The districts also served as an organizational focus for clubs, especially for sports teams in Suva. Mobility between households was also replicated, so that if relationships got tense within a household, people could leave to stay with kinsmen elsewhere. These factors, along with church services, kept Rotumans in contact with one another and formed a network that served to socialize new migrants into life in Fiji.

In a 2001 article, Alan Howard and Jan Rensel used the concept of "critical mass" to explain organizational contrasts between smaller enclaves and larger ones. That is, there appears to be a population size below which Rotumans are unable to coalesce into a functioning organization larger than a household. Above that mean, one sees the emergence of organizational clustering, e.g., clubs, church groups, and special interest groups.

We now present an account of Kapingamarangi people in the continental United States. We aim to show how the Kapinga people have replicated aspects of their home community in the United States, and we conclude with a reformulation of the concept of community based on our data in comparison with those in other contributions to this collection.

Kapingamarangi in the United States

Kapingamarangi people were originally recruited to come to Pohnpei by agents of nonindigenous institutions—the Japanese colonial administration and Japanese commercial companies. Likewise, U.S. institutions recruited students to travel to the United States. These institutions were responsible for housing, orienting, and protecting them. From 1919 until 1982, all of the Kapinga on Pohnpei continued to be sponsored by the colonial administration in place. The Kapinga community on Pohnpei developed in this institutional context of sponsorship from the top of a nonindigenous institutional hierarchy. In contrast, the development of an ethnic Kapinga community in Salem, Oregon, has not been conditional on institutional sponsorship. Once a student stopped attending a college, staying on in Oregon depended on personal effort.

Table 1 summarizes the distribution of the Kapingamarangi population in the United States and its territories. Although we do not have precise data on ages of this population, we can still say that it is relatively young. Fewer than a dozen people (less than 5 percent of the total) are more than fifty-five years old, and most of these are in Oregon. The largest single age cohort in any of these enclaves is between zero and ten years of age. Teenagers are an even smaller cohort than the elders, with the rest of the population in their twenties, thirties, and forties.

All of the enclaves show mobility into and out of local groups. The enclave in the Salem area (including Monmouth, Independence, Keizer, and McMinnville), because it is the oldest and most stable population, shows more in-migration than out-migration. The Florida enclave, established in the 1990s when Kapinga people were recruited to work at Sea World, has helped to augment two more populations through out-migration. Kapinga living in Ashville and Durham, North Carolina, appear to move frequently between these two enclaves and Florida, while

TABLE 1. Distribution of Kapingamarangi People in the United States.

State	Male	Female	Adults	Children	Total
Alabama	0	1	1	0	1
Alaska	1	0	1	0	1
Arizona	6	1	6	1	7
California	7	14	18	3	21
Colorado	0	1	1	0	1
Florida	15	10	20	5	25
Georgia	0	3	1	2	3
Hawai'i	30	29	48	11	59
Indiana	1	1	1	1	2
Iowa	12	13	15	10	25
Kansas	1	1	2	0	2
Michigan	3	8	11	0	11
Mississippi	2	2	4	0	4
Missouri	3	9	6	6	12
New Jersey	3	0	2	1	3
North Carolina	34	35	38	31	69
Ohio	1	4	5	0	5
Oregon	34	36	41	29	70
Texas	4	2	3	3	6
Wisconsin	2	0	1	1	2
Guam	38	59	61	36	97
Military	10	0	10	0	10
Total	207	229	296	140	436

Kapinga in Florida move between their enclave and the two in North Carolina. From the point of view of kinship connections, visiting, mutual aid, and telephone contact, these three populations could be profitably seen as a single population. People move to be with siblings and other close kin, to find better jobs, to find affordable housing, to get driving privileges and cars (which the Florida enclave seems to have had difficulty acquiring), and to leave untenable family situations.

Housing arrangements in all Kapinga enclaves vary with income, affordability, distance to the work place, and whether there are compatriots in the vicinity. Income and affordability trump the other considerations, and part of affordability is the possibility of sharing housing costs—a major incentive for moving to live with close kin. In some cases, people live in extended-family households that differ from those on Pohnpei and Kapingamarangi mainly in the absence of elderly parents (or aunts and uncles). This is, of course, common in migrant populations. One result of mobility and the availability of affordable housing has been a population more or less scattered through the host community, as opposed to living near one another like the Pohnpei community. For example, it is unusual that four families have housing units in the same apartment complex in Salem, Oregon. In Salem and elsewhere, households are located anywhere from 1 to 10 or more miles (1.6 to 16 km) from one another.

It seems clear that there are three categories of people who make up the ethnic Kapinga population on the continental United States: (1) the student population that migrated to the United States in the 1970s and 1980s and remained, (2) the population that was recruited for Sea World and for jobs in senior care and disabled children's facilities, and (3) the children of the first two groups, born and raised in the United States. The earliest migrants are the well-established families with stable jobs and housing. A few of these are married to Americans, and all live middle-class lifestyles. This population lives in Oregon, Washington, and California, with a few of these people having migrated to Hawai'i. The second category, mainly in their twenties with a few in their thirties and two older than forty, live on the East Coast, principally in North Carolina (Raleigh and Asheville) and Florida (Orlando). This younger population was recruited as crafts people for Sea World and to care for seniors. A few of these workers have branched out into the food services and actively recruit friends and relatives from other enclaves. Gossip has it that this population has replicated the Pohnpei lifestyle for that age group—working hard during the week and getting drunk on the weekends. While the domestic violence that often accompanies weekend boozing has also been replicated, its ramifications in the U.S. setting are different from those on Pohnpei, where people shrug

off the violence as drunken comportment. In the United States, police and courts become involved, complete with court orders of protection.

Phone calls and private e-mails circulate news of these events in all of the enclaves, such that the gossip networks function with the efficiency of a modern technological infrastructure. This in itself is unremarkable, but the implications are anything but trivial. Kapinga people in the continental United States have managed to replicate the intergenerational differences (and tensions) that characterize the Kapinga communities on Kapingamarangi Atoll and in Porakied: an elder generation that is seen as sober, responsible, and “hopelessly square” versus a younger generation that the elders consider to be lazy, irresponsible drunks destined to embarrass them. In this case, however, the elders are located on one coast of the country while the younger generation is on the other. But even on the atoll and in Porakied, the generations tend to maintain spatial separation.² We take this as an indicator that Kapinga people are in the process of recreating their social organization above the household level—an organization that includes the entire Kapinga population.

Face-to-face contacts occur most often (but not exclusively) within local enclaves—sharing childcare, weekend get-togethers (e.g., poker games and bingo), and first birthday celebrations involve interactions among local households on both coasts. More elaborate gatherings involving months of planning are seen mainly in the Salem, Oregon, enclave. Celebrating Christmas and March 15 (a kind of thanksgiving celebration originating on the atoll in the 1950s) draws together residents of the Salem–Eugene area and, occasionally, Kapinga from the Seattle area and from Hawai‘i. Families take turns organizing these celebrations, and participating families contribute cash and food toward the events. A more recent innovation is a summer camping trip to the Oregon coast that lasts a week or more. These multi-family outings draw people from the Salem, Seattle, and Hawai‘i enclaves. Men commonly spend mornings on the golf course (a must in site selection). Although a recent innovation for U.S. Kapinga, this pattern is an elaboration of a much older tradition of picnicking that dates from pre-Christian days on the atoll involving families trekking to a remote spot far from the village for one or two days of feasting and play. The U.S. version combines the old version of picnic with the modern concept of a vacation. Another recent innovation is a Nukuoro–Kapinga club called *di malae*, which translates as “the meeting place” in this usage. Joint Kapingai–Nukuoro organizations are not new, but this appears to be a recognition of the de facto inclusion of Nukuoro in the Kapinga community.

Kapinga enclaves in North Carolina and Florida comprise loosely knit networks of people in scattered households in Raleigh, Ashville, and

Orlando. They communicate with one another, especially those who work in the same facilities, and they visit between enclaves. The Seattle area enclave is similarly a loosely knit set of scattered households that stay in contact through phone calls and occasional visits. The Salem area enclave seems to be the only one that has achieved a critical mass sufficient to organize ceremonial events that involve all of the households in the area (and beyond).

Since 1996, Internet technology has been an important method for maintaining frequent and varied contacts among Kapinga in the continental United States, Hawai'i, and Guam, playing a role very similar to that of the Rotuma Website for Rotumans (Howard and Rensel 2012 [this issue]). Finding no Micronesia websites on the Internet, one of us (Willys Peters) established Kapinga.com after reading the literature on starting websites and learning HTML programming. Kapinga.com, in its various forms, has moved several times as Peters found better interfaces for less money. Kapinga.com became MicroIslands.com in 1998 with the inclusion of discussion boards for Pohnpei, Chuuk, Yap, Palau, Saipan, and the Marshall Islands. In 1998 the site was getting about 1,000 hits per day. This was an open site, taking what people posted and eventually dividing posts into categories. In the site's busiest years (1997–2000), politics and culture were the most popular discussion categories—and the hardest to separate.

Some of the major general discussion threads focused on

- Genealogy (personal concerns about who was related to whom and how)
- Advantages and disadvantages of assimilation
- Why people like living in the United States (e.g., freedom, important especially to younger people)
- “We’ve been away too long”
- Welcoming new people
- Maintaining connections with other migrants and with people back home
- Losing control over local affairs
- The advantage of dual citizenship
- Finding work, keeping one’s job, and who is responsible for what

Homelessness of Micronesians in Hawai'i has also generated a lot of discussion, such as what can and should Kapinga do as a community to help? What can anyone do with or for people who can't make it?

The Rotuma Website has some interesting overlaps with Microislands.com and its successors, Taropower.com, Tarobuzz.com, and MyFSMid.com.

The themes of keeping in touch with people back home and being involved in supporting home affairs is prominent in Rotuman discussions (see Howard and Rensel 2012 [this issue]). MicroIslands.com had very similar discussions in the late 1990s. But in 2000 and later, discussions moved away from these topics, partly because the discussions were dominated by a very few people. Interest in island affairs dwindled on MicroIslands.net and Taropower.net, while Rotumans seem to maintain a consistent level of interest in Rotuman affairs and connections as well as a tolerance for varying points of view.

While the Rotuma Website separates announcements, news, humor, and forums (for specific topics), Tarobuzz.com combines all of these into a single forum, with notices, songs, history, and the like listed as separate topics. The most active of these forum topics was that of Kapingamarangi History, started by Mike Borong, who expanded the discussion by 2008 in a separate website, NgeiaoHale.com.³ This excited more interest and response than any other topic on Tarobuzz.com. Of all specific topics on this forum, genealogy has excited the most participation, starting in and continuing into 2010. Typical of the posts has been a recounting of a particular sibling set (from around the turn of the twentieth century), their marriages, and their current descendants. Readers sometimes offer additions and, less often, minor corrections. A common response to this information is surprise from readers who had no idea that some or all current descendants were their own kin. On Kapingamarangi and in Porakied, genealogical information past three generations is not commonly known among people in their twenties, thirties, and forties because it is regarded as proprietary information. Very few people have the right to this sort of knowledge, and they deploy it strategically in only two contexts: (1) making a will and (2) engaging in land disputes that often follow. In these situations, the person recounting the genealogical justification for whatever claim is being made is a landowner or the steward of a land-owning group (Lieber 1974). Anyone of lesser position contributing to the recounting (unless invited to do so) would be considered rude, eliciting a response like “Why are you talking about *my* ancestors?”

The most striking aspect of the genealogical threads on Tarobuzz.com is the lack of any hint of proprietary control over the information and the longevity of the thread. No one seems to find the discussion itself remarkable or worthy of comment. Conversations are casual, not strategic, and nowhere is property even mentioned. It appears that, at least in these discussions, the relationship between property and genealogy has been severed, as has the relationship between knowledge and the authority to

recount it. This is a connection that is rooted in Kapinga conceptions of knowing, wherein one knows something through repeated experience, such that the right to know depends on the right to use the information in question (Lieber 1994). The outcome of this dissolution of relational constraints on communicating about genealogy is a recontextualization of genealogical knowledge as part of the public domain. Does this recontextualizing of genealogical knowledge indicate a fundamental change in what knowing means to Kapinga people in the diaspora? Or are we dealing with what Barnett called a “recombination” of cultural symbols (1953, 1983), such that genealogy means one thing in the atoll context and another in the United States? Part of the answer to these questions has to do with what participants think is going on. What is it about genealogy that makes this such an attractive discussion thread? Two years is a long time to maintain an Internet discussion thread, whose half-life is normally a matter of days.

One possible incentive for maintaining the genealogy thread may be that it makes it easier for ne'er-do-wells to take advantage of their compatriots by providing grounds for asserting kinship. Another possible incentive is that spelling out genealogical connections helps to forfend inadvertent incestuous relationships. But neither of these explanations is compelling enough to account for the persistence of the thread.

A more compelling explanation speaks to the central issue of this collection and the symposium from which it grew—that the longevity of this thread stems from its ability to convey messages about Kapinga identity that other forms of discourse cannot. Indeed, it is precisely the essentializing implications of genealogy that make it a powerful metaphor for talking about shared substance, regardless of where people are living, what language(s) they speak, and what lifestyles they practice. Disengaging property rights from the conversation removes the competitive incentives for excluding people who might otherwise be considered kin.⁴ This would support and amplify the arguments that Helen Lee and Steve Tupai Francis (2009) and Ilana Gershon (2007) have made about the role of kinship in facilitating the organization of people in the process of resettling. While kinship relations within and between households tend to be particularizing in practice, sharing genealogical information serves to display the densely connected networks that bind people in all the complexity of descent, marriage, and adoption across generations. It is the complexity of connections that constitutes a community. Genealogies can do that kind of complexity; individual households cannot.

There are some indications in other discussions about Kapinga history that identification with other Kapinga people drives discussion and that

issues that could be divisive on Kapingamarangi or in Porakied are not in the diaspora. In an early thread on the history of Porakied, the grandchild of one of the principals in a bitter dispute over ownership of Porakied land and compensation for developing the land (in 1929) posted as fact the claims that this man had made about what was owed to him for years of labor on this formerly uninhabitable space. This could have been a very provocative posting, but no one took the bait. Only the moderator, Mike Borong, replied, thanking the person for sharing the information. In another discussion on the religious history of the atoll, a participant posted information he had from his grandparents about *talia* (a place of spirits). This began a series of exchanges on whether or not there was a pre-Christian concept of an afterlife on Kapingamarangi. Like the genealogy thread, this one elicited a pooling of pieces of information in an effort to put together a larger picture. Like the genealogy thread, it is a discussion that would not occur on Kapingamarangi or in Porakied, constrained as they are by church dogma in both places. In the islands, pre-Christian religion was and is considered to be a manifestation of Satan, precluding the possibility of discussion or debate. Like genealogy, the discussion of traditional religious practice is diaspora talk.

Finally, the conversations described here are explicitly described by participants as *hagaboo* (conversation or discussion). This is significant in that *hagaboo* is thought of and talked about as adult conversation, which is possible among pairs of people but most common among larger gatherings of adults. *Hagaboo* always begins with a specific topic for discussion in the expectation that everyone present will contribute. Topics tend to be intellectually challenging but can range from clarifying some enigma to sharing fanciful renditions of how something came to be (generating “just-so” stories). An example is a men’s house conversation about why the word that denotes one’s sensation when touched by a person or object (what Americans call “feel”) is the same word as “to hear.” This is a famous conversation because it ends with one man coming up behind another and scratching his back. When asked, “*Goe gu longono?*” ([Did] you feel [hear] that?) the second man said yes. The first man then retorted, “So are your ears on your back?” to the appreciative roar of the participants.

Hagaboo is an institution whose participants can be same-sex or mixed groups. It is contrasted with other kinds of talk, such as storytelling, reporting, testimony, banter, “coarse” talk (of a sexual nature), and play. *Helekai dadaagala* (banter and play) are more typical of conversations among younger people. Until about 2007–8, Tarobuzz.com (and its predecessors) included all of these kinds of talk. Since 2008, however, most

of the reportage, stories, and banter have shifted to Facebook. By default, Tarobuzz.com is a site for hagaboo, effectively replicating the generational bifurcation already seen in the enclaves.

Kapingamarangi Identity in the Diaspora

As Larson reported (1977: 257–60), Tikopian identity can be a cause for Tikopians doing something, not doing something, or doing something in a particular way. While for Kapinga people, ethnic identity is not a cause of doing anything except, possibly, conducting the March 15th celebration. For Tikopians, ethnic identity is a political issue that shapes decision making and interethnic interaction. For Kapinga people, ethnic identity has rarely been a factor shaping decisions and their implementations—although it can be argued that participating in Tarobuzz.com and on Facebook, all in Kapinga language, is affirming one's identity as a Kapinga person.

Possibly as a result of centuries of isolation on their home atoll, interrupted on average less than one canoe of castaways per century, Kapinga people came to think of themselves as just plain folks, and all *baalangi* (outsiders) as exotic people (see Lieber 1994).⁵ When it became necessary to interact with such people, what one really needed to know about them was what one could consistently expect from them in specific social contexts. What passes for ethnic stereotypes in Kapinga lore are sociological sketches of how people in different communities do things (Lieber 1990; Watson 1990). Thus, Kapinga contrast the sociological patterns of others with their own patterns; for example, when they greet people saying “come and eat,” they actually expect them to come and eat, in contrast with Nukuoro people, who do not. These comparative tidbits do not come together into a single coherent picture, however. No such portrait appeared in Porakied, the nucleated Kapinga community on Pohnpei, so there is no reason to expect that it should appear in nonnucleated enclaves in the United States.

Kapinga identity in the United States is contextualized very differently from that on Pohnpei. While it is true that Kapinga people look, talk, and do things differently from both Micronesians and white Americans, most Micronesians know who the Kapinga are and where they come from, and use the ethnic labels Kirinidi or Kirnis (from “Greenwich,” the British name for the atoll). To the extent that Kapinga people participate in the Pohnpei state legislature and other island affairs, the ethnic label matters to non-Kapinga people. This is not true for white Americans, who often mistake Kapinga people for Mexicans or Pakistanis. When asked where

they are from, Kapinga find it is difficult to answer in a way that Americans can comprehend. “Kirinidi” is out of the question. “Micronesia” evokes a response of “huh?” even in Oregon, where Micronesians have lived for more than thirty years.⁶ “Pacific Islands” seems to satisfy most people.

If Kapinga people need an incentive to maintain an ethnic boundary, then the presence of other Micronesians in Oregon, Washington, California, and Hawai'i is a help. The point we wish to make is that the representation of Kapinga identity is the outcome of decisions Kapinga make about how to organize their relationships with other people, which is akin to what happens in other migrant ethnic enclaves.⁷ This is not to say that all ethnic communities are identical in how they maintain or change their identities—only that the same kinds of decision processes are in play. Specific decisions vary.

In the Kapinga case, ethnic identity is rarely a conscious issue, partly because it is difficult to separate ethnic identity from other sorts of connected social identities (Lieber 1990).⁸ Kapinga understand the person to be one part of a relationship. Different kinds of relationships, therefore, define different kinds of people. To the extent that one relationship is nested in others, the person is part of a relational hierarchy, for instance, a *hagahidinana* (household), a *madahanau* (land-owning descent group), a *madawaawa* (cognatic stock based on a named house compound on which ancestor lived),⁹ and a *di golohenua* (community). Ethnic identity differs from personal identity largely in its level of inclusiveness. So, for example, a person with Kapinga ancestry is eligible to be considered an ethnic Kapinga because he or she is part of a *madahanau* or a *madawaawa*. That person has a Kapinga “half,” but to be considered and treated as a Kapinga person requires maintaining personal relationships with other Kapinga people. These are all assumptions that are rarely made explicit. This—and the fact that it is rarely clear which level of relationship is operative in any given case—is crucial to understanding changes to Kapinga ethnicity. Examples will help to clarify how messy this really is.

Two younger Kapinga have died in the United States. In both cases, the people they were staying with used the telephone to notify others in the area along with relatives and friends elsewhere, who then phoned others. By this mode of communication, enough money was raised to send the bodies back to Pohnpei for burial. So, did people contribute money and urge others to do so because they are all Kapinga? Because they were relatives? Because they were friends? Because they were children of friends? That would depend on the relationship between the contributor and the deceased or between the contributor and the person asking for the contribution. Did either death galvanize ethnic sentiment or commitment? There is no evidence that this was the case.

In another case, a young Kapinga man was tried on criminal charges, requiring \$25,000 for his defense. Contributions were widely sought, but the financial burden fell most heavily on the few families who had the means to pay. One of the families was closely related to the defendant. Another had a close personal relationship with him. A third had no particular connection to the man, and while they resented the expectation that they contribute, they were also worried about their reputation among other Kapinga in the United States and on Pohnpei and Kapingamarangi should they fail to contribute enough. Is this an act of ethnic identity maintenance in any useful sense? We suggest that this is less about who is an ethnic Kapinga person and more about who is a member of the Kapinga community.

The most fundamental challenge to Kapinga identity—as it has been for other ethnic groups—is the most insidious in its effects, that is, perpetuation of language. Common practice in the Salem enclave is to speak only English to the children of the household, reserving the Kapinga language for conversations to which only adults are privy. This has been an adaptation strategy to make it easier for children to fit into peer groups and school. While it is rarely explicitly articulated, it is a strategy for parents who do not intend to move back to the islands. Their home is in the United States, and they expect their children's homes to be there. The separate webs of expectations—Kapinga and baalangi—do not neatly intersect.

Kapinga children are socialized partly by their elders, mainly through example, and partly by their peers (both in the United States and in the islands). What Kapinga children learn from their peers is American social expectations, in the same way that they would learn Kapinga expectations from Kapinga peers if they lived on Pohnpei or Kapingamarangi. The outcomes of these learning experiences are almost always a shock when they occur across ethnic contexts, as seen in the examples that follow.

Kapinga children learn what is permissible and impermissible, mentionable and unmentionable in American social contexts from their American peers. They internalize the boundaries that these dos and don'ts delineate. When these children spend time with older Kapinga at ceremonial events and other get-togethers, they are subject to the teasing that is common social banter. They are often teased if they are fat, although for Kapinga, this is a gentle sort of teasing, given that being chubby is a sign of good health. But Kapinga children are offended, hurt, and angered by this teasing in a way that any baalangi kid would be. It does not help to tell them that being called fat is not a Kapinga insult. Kapinga adults are offended when they criticize a younger person and the latter responds by defending or explaining himself or herself. Young people are expected to

remain silent and look ashamed when being criticized by an adult. It does not help to tell the adult that the kid learned to do that from hanging out with baalangi kids. Kapinga adults get angry and frustrated when their children do not act as their elders expect them to act. Yet these same adults have not taken the time to teach their children what they expect from them, which would require them to make these expectations explicit, to translate them into English (or stop using Kapinga to talk to other adults), to teach the children the Kapinga language, and to socialize them at home regarding Kapinga ways.

Perhaps the most difficult American rite-of-passage for parents with teenagers who grew up in Salem is when children leave the nest. American parents expect it. Kapinga parents do not. It is shocking and hurtful when it happens, although parents understand that this is the baalangi way. It is not that Kapinga elders do not appreciate the autonomy that American life makes possible. Owning one's own canoe on the home atoll gives a fisherman the autonomy he needs to escape the limitations of group fishing, including expanding the range of fish habitats that can be exploited and the timing of expeditions (Lieber 1994). Owning one's own house and car afford a similar kind of autonomy in the United States. But young people leaving home to rent their own place and go where and when they will is not seen as comprising the same kind of autonomy. In baalangi perceptions, leaving the natal home and living on one's own is what makes an individual an adult. Kapinga, in contrast, are rarely thought of as adult until their early thirties. It is here that the issue is joined.

Is it possible to be an individual and still be a Kapinga person? Has this group of teenagers and twenty-somethings been enculturated to assume that they are individuals rather than nodes in a network of relationships? How can we know that; what kinds of data are sufficient to answer these questions? If, as is likely, it takes three generations to answer these questions, are there benchmarks that would indicate a direction of development of the concepts of personhood and ethnic identity? The benchmarks, we believe, will be seen in the shape and content of the social networks of Kapinga people who are now children, in particular where and with whom they reside and interact on a regular basis.

Conclusion: The Replication of Community

If diaspora poses challenges to people struggling to maintain themselves and some semblance of what they understand to be a community, it also affords opportunities for people to use their cultural resources in creative ways. Online discussions using self-assigned nicknames (many of which are

ancestral names) afford the opportunity of visiting people who live hundreds or thousands of miles away without the constraints of face-to-face expectations. With conversations removed from the anchors of space and conflicting obligations, opportunities arise to deploy old forms in very new ways. One example of this cited above is the genealogical discussion, a sort of conversation that would be unthinkable in Porakied or on Kapingamarangi, where genealogy is proprietary information used strategically in negotiations or conflicts over property rights. In online discussions, genealogy has been divorced from property rights and the authority to talk about genealogical connections. It has, in the American diaspora, entered the public domain. With no incentive to exclude someone from rights over property (and, thus, consideration as a kinsman), genealogical information has become a tool for displaying the complexity of descent, marriage, and adoption that includes a wider net of people, the farther back one goes.

If genealogy has been disconnected from its role in manipulating property rights, it has been clearly reconnected to other relational concerns of Kapinga in the American diaspora. To say that genealogy conjoins people as a somehow unified *kind* of people is to unduly simplify the matter. Genealogy is not about ethnic categories, but rather about how people are connected to other people over time. Genealogical discussion on the Internet has allowed information to be shared in the interest of generating and maintaining ties with compatriots over long distances. Barnett saw this process of recombination of symbols and constructs as the basis of all cultural change, by which he meant the meaningful content of and associations of symbols (1953, 1983).

Our discussion calls into question the meaning of community. The answer formulated at the time of publication of *Exiles and Migrants in Oceania* (Lieber 1977) was that community denoted any social organization that served to shape the careers of its members, regardless of where they are located. From this conceptual standpoint, the Nukuoro can be considered a community if it can be shown that Nukuoro on the atoll, on Pohnpei, on Guam, and in the United States have and share information (such as gossip) about one another among one another. The Rotumans in diaspora can be thought of as forming a single community if it can be shown that their utterances and actions and interactions serve to form personal identities that are known to and by other Rotumans, wherever they might be located. Howard and Rensel show that this is precisely the case in their contribution to this special issue (2012).

We propose that “social organization” is too broad a category to be useful for a definition. It is clear from the data presented above that it is the active participation of people in social networks that not only lends

them membership but also shapes the experiences other people have with them, what other people expect from them, and how other people characterize them. These, taken together, shape life experiences not only in that specific network (say network A), but in overlapping networks that contain members of A. We thus offer to our colleagues the following definition of community:

A community is any set of connected social networks that serves to shape the life trajectories (careers) of its members.

By this definition, not only do the Kapinga in the continental United States constitute a single community, but so do Rotumans in Fiji and elsewhere, as do the Nukuoro, who may not be crazy about one another but still keep tabs on one another. It also follows that a person may be a member of multiple communities and that communities may be nested in other communities.¹⁰ Such a definition embraces virtual communities that have their genesis on the Internet as well as dispersed, ethnically based communities, which have their origins in congregated spaces such as islands. It is therefore more appropriate than traditional definitions for diasporic populations who develop and/or maintain ties via modern technology.

NOTES

1. This research was the topic of the first Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania symposium in 1970 and resulted in the first published comparative volume on "diaspora" communities, *Exiles and Migrants in Oceania* (Lieber 1977).

2. Younger people learn a number of strategies to minimize contact with and avoid the attention of their elders. As they grow older, they get better at it (at least in the short term, before gossip fills in what people did not see).

3. Ngeia o Hale is the name of a residence site on one end of Hale islet on the atoll. It belongs to Borong's family.

4. It has long been clear that controlling the size of landowning corporations requires a truncation of group boundaries (Lieber 1974).

5. *Di gau henua* is the Kapinga term for other islanders, whereas white people are called *di gau baalangi*.

6. The exception here is within the justice system, as discussed by Manuel Rauchholz in this issue (2012).

7. Decisions of individuals vis-à-vis their compatriots is the single most popular theme in ethnic theater of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This is the theme of the first talking motion picture, *The Jazz Singer*.

8. See Howard and Rensel 2004 for a discussion of strong and weak cultural identities. Howard and Rensel describe Rotuman identity, which parallels Kapinga identity in many ways, as relatively weak in diasporic settings.

9. These were formerly matrilineages.

10. Eve Pinsker, who worked in Micronesia, has used this formulation of nested communities in evaluating community development programs in Chicago and elsewhere (Lieber and Pinsker 2005).

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