

PACIFIC ISLAND STUDENTS IN CALIFORNIA

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A. PROCEDURE OF THE INTERVIEWS

I took part in this field research in California because I was spending my sabbatical year at the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley below), while undertaking my own anthropological research on Samoan migrants in the San Francisco Bay Area. My field assignment for this project turned out to be very tough because of the difficulty in finding appropriate interviewees. Although Pacific Islanders from the area covered by the USP Extension actually live in the San Francisco Bay Area in California, those with tertiary education or with the experience with USP Extension turned out, against our expectations, to be very few. I somehow managed to make interviews but not all of them are quite appropriate in the strict sense of the definition of our research. Nevertheless, the cases have significance in the broader perspective of the project and this is the reason we include the data here.

The Pacific Island countries within the USP Area are mostly former colonies or territories of the United Kingdom and British Commonwealth countries, and the emigrants from the Area have tended to concentrate in New Zealand and Australia. Overseas outmigration into the Area is mostly of Polynesian ethnicity and there are few migrants from Melanesia except Fiji. Migrants from Kilibati are widely distributed within the Area except in Hawai'i.

Most of the Pacific Islanders within the United States came from or via American Samoa, and comprise American Samoans, Western Samoans and Tongans.

The reason why the Samoan Islands are divided into two political systems in spite of the homogeneous culture and language is a product of colonial history and imperial power struggles in the late nineteenth century. The Samoan Islands were the victim of the triangular struggle for colonization by the United States--in need of a navy base in the South Pacific, Germany--having found an interest in the economic development of the South Seas--and Britain, seeking to defend its position as the greatest colonial power in the Pacific region. Naval bases and plantations were seen as vital to the interests of the white man.

Britain soon withdrew from the struggle on the condition of making an exclusive friendship agreement with Tonga, which served its own needs well. Thereupon the United States and Germany decided to divide the islands between themselves for their own different purposes. The United States took Eastern Samoa for its navy base while Germany took Western Samoa to develop plantations.

Thus, "American" (Eastern) Samoa was made an overseas territory of the United States at the turn of the century. Some years after World War II, American Samoan residents became able to emigrate freely to the States as American Nationals, being supplied with American passports though without any political rights to send their own representatives to Congress. The navy base on Tutuila island remained operational until 1951, when the most of its functions were moved to Pearl

Harbor and many Samoan servicemen and civilian workers were transferred with their families to Hawai'i. This military decision caused a large wave of emigration from American Samoa to Hawai'i and the United States mainland, and today, more Samoans are living in the United States proper than in American Samoa itself.

After the East--West separation, Samoans on both sides kept up their customary bilateral travels and migrations between the two island groups through their kinship networks and affinal links. But after fish canneries were established in American Samoa in the late 1950s, migration trends tended to be from Western Samoa to American Samoa. There has been an emigration movement from American Samoa, mainly among younger people, which has resulted in a manpower shortage at the canneries, and this again has been supplied by immigrants from Western Samoa and Tonga. Today, only around three-fifths of the people of American Samoa were born there. About three-tenths were born in Western Samoa and the third major group was Tongan-born. Many of those born in Western Samoa have been incorporated into American Samoan society through kinship or marriage and their sons and daughters born there assume American Samoan legal status irrespective of their parental social identity.

The problem of the Western Samoan- and Tongan-born is that they are not free to migrate to the United States. They may ask for sponsorship from their near relations who have already obtained citizenship or permanent resident status, but the situation is getting tight with the exception of spouses, aged parents and minor children of legally-recognized citizens. Some migrants are or were overstayers who first came to the US on travel or student visas. The ratio of overstayers is said to be higher among Tongans who tend to have smaller networks in the States.

Therefore, the Pacific Islander population of the San Francisco Bay Area is mainly composed of the Samoan community of American and Western Samoans, whose boundary is not quite clear, and the Tongan community. (In fact, there is a larger Hawai'ian migrant population in California, but they are American citizens from the beginning and they do not form a "community" in the same sense as the most of the other Pacific Islanders.)

On the other hand, it is to Fiji, Australia and New Zealand that the Island countries in the USP Area send most of their scholarship students. Except for Hawai'i which has the East-West Center (offering University of Hawai'i study awards) and Brigham Young University, Laie, there are only a few scholarship students from the Pacific in graduate schools in the United States. Because American Samoan scholarship students mainly go to universities in the Midwest where tuition is relatively cheap, I have not seen many of them either.

Thus, I could not find a single case of an ex-scholarship student from the USP Area who decided to remain after graduation. This is natural since only a few scholarship students come to the Bay Area in the first place. No.155 might be exceptional among my interviewees though the scholarship is only for a short term professional training course. She went back to her last job, terminating her course work as she had first planned.

My interviewees are from various sectors. Five are from Western Samoa, three from Tonga, two from Fiji. Some of them have already gained American citizenship while some others are in the

process of obtaining it.

Because I had been undertaking research on the Samoan community in the Bay Area, I already had a contact with the Samoan Affairs Office in San Francisco, which specializes in providing various kinds of social service programmes for Samoans. But I found that not even the help of the office could secure me enough appropriate interviews. Indeed, the social workers at the office seriously questioned why I was making such a fuss about trying to differentiate the two groups of Samoans, because they were trying to provide their social services equally to both groups. One of the staff from American Samoa, in fact, had spent a few years studying in a college in Western Samoa. The strict distinction was thus difficult to draw in some cases.

No.155 told me in the interview that there was a Fijian participant in her course. I approached him, but unfortunately he was not willing to be interviewed. I later found that there is no student club for Fijians at UC Berkeley, so I made an international telephone call to one of the faculty at USP Suva, who gave me the names of no.144 and no.145. They are Indian Fijians. They said that they did not know any university graduates of Fijian origin whether Fijian Fijian or Indian Fijian in the Bay Area.

The Samoan Affairs Office did not have contacts with any Tongan organization as I had hoped they would. Later, I found the Tongan Consulate in the telephone directory while looking for organizations for Tongans. I discovered that the Government of Tonga has only one consulate in the United States : in San Francisco. Its purpose is to issue passports for Tongan migrants and to promote tourism and trade. Through this connection, I was successful in arranging interviews with three Tongan ladies. It is too bad that it was almost at the end of the research schedule that I came to learn of this office, though there were fortunately more possibilities elsewhere.

There was a scholar at UC San Francisco who was making research on Niueans. But she said that she did not know of any Niuean students or graduates in the Bay Area. That was the end of my search for interviewees.

B. OVERVIEW OF THE INTERVIEWS

We will examine here the life courses of interviewees with various backgrounds, dividing our subjects into three or four groups.

The first group is Type A whose interviewees are temporarily staying in the Bay Area in order to gain higher education and who definitely intend to go home on the completion of the education. We have only one such case in a strict sense (no. 147). If we overlook the political boundary between two Samoas, since both belong to the same culture at least, no.155 can be categorized in this group, too. But again in the strict sense, she should be defined as a migrant from Western Samoa to American Samoa. We may categorize her as Type A.

Type B are those migrants who came to the States with their parents when they were young and started their early education in the States. Nos.150 and 151 are in this category.

Type C are those who migrated from their homeland to the States without a definite plan to go back. They have a dream of realizing higher education or upward mobility by themselves, but not

necessarily at home. The rest, nos.144, 145, 146, 149, 156 are in this category.

We start from Type C. It is only no.144 who had finished a university education before the migration. Having emigrated from Fiji with the whole family before finishing USP, no.145 graduated from a university in the States, supporting himself with his own earnings without any financial support. It must have been very hard, but he made it.

The time when no.145 left Fiji was at Independence in 1970. The whole family migrated because of the prospect of a harder life for Indian Fijians. They were not allowed to take their property out of Fiji and the new life in the United States was severe. The decision of migration was made by his parents and no.145 missed his education at USP and his friends there. He also retained some nostalgia for the South Pacific environment that he was used to in his youth. In order to obtain an immigrant visa for his wife, he had to give up his Fijian passport while turning his permanent resident status into United States citizenship. This happened only recently and perhaps reluctantly. Still, he has not given up the possibility of going back to Fiji and living there.

On the other hand, the reason why no.144 left the country after having graduated from USP and obtained an appropriate job was because of the coup-d'etat in 1987 which ousted many Indian Fijians from the country. The rest of her family members migrated to Australia. She said that "they" (Fijian Fijians) do not admit the contribution of her people though Fijians of Indian origin have made great endeavours in various sectors towards the development of the country. She seemed determined that she would not consider the country as her "homeland" any more.

Both members of the couple (nos.144 and 145) have been working and they live in a neat apartment in San Mateo with two small children. Their own ethnic group do not seem to form a close ethnic community as tends to be the case with other Pacific Islander groups. They have never lost contact with the family of no.145 who seem to live somewhere on the West Coast and they must have other Indian friends as well, though they said it is almost only among themselves that they speak Fijian Hindi. It seems that they do not activate Indian networks when they need to find jobs. In their childhood, both of them were told many times by their parents that education is the only way to survive since they had no access to traditional land in Fiji. Seeking education was their family law, says no.145. I could feel the strict emphasis on educational training among intellectual Indian families in Fiji, which is distinct from the attitude of Samoans and Tongans though they are also said to place emphasis on education.

No.145 says that there must be racial discrimination in the States as well but he does not feel much of it, leading a middle class life in an urban area on the West Coast. Though he had been a typical anti-American young man of a third world country before he came to the States, he now appreciates the political system and the equal opportunities of this country.

Asked if she is interested in migrating to Australia where her family members are living, no.144 is definitely opposed, saying she has no such intention since she now lives in the greatest country in the world.

Nos.146, 149, and 156 came from Western Samoa sharing the same experience of having failed in New Zealand or Fiji as government scholarship students for one reason or another.

Because most of his family members including his parents are now living in the Bay Area, it was natural that no.146 came to San Francisco after he had to leave Fiji. He is now a student of the City College of San Francisco where the tuition is cheap and the enrolment is not difficult; he is seeking to be transferred to a university. [At the time of the interview, the result was not sure, but later we found out that he was accepted in San Francisco State University. Congratulations!] Missing the independent life at USP in Fiji, he has made up his mind to overcome any difficulty to lead his education successfully in order to clear out the memory of his previous failure. While he is tempted by the various opportunities in the US, he also greatly misses Samoa as his homeland and hopes to go home and to work there on finishing his education. But he is also interested in pursuing further degrees.

No.156 had worked in Western Samoa for a while after his failure in New Zealand before he came to the States under his rights as an American Samoan. Soon he joined the Navy and was trained as a medical corpsman. For American Samoan youth, military service is an alternative way to seek education immediately because there are various courses and training programmes available free. Servicemen have access even to university degrees. For those with more ability than money, military service can even resemble a scholarship programme. He collected good credits in the courses while with the Navy and, after he left the job, he was transferred to a prominent university on the West Coast where he received a B.A. degree. He also got an M.A. in Public Administration from one of the best universities on the East Coast. He is now a student at UC Berkeley Law School.

His degrees give the impression that he is one of the elite Samoans who are only seeking their own careers. But, in fact, he has worked in non-profit organizations for Samoan community service programmes and homeless people in the Bay Area. He is also greatly concerned with the environmental problems of Western Samoa, and every time he goes home, he makes inspections of water pollution in the bay where his home village is located. Influenced by the new liberal ideas of developed countries, he has fresh ideas on problems of his homeland. He is also interested in the political rights of Polynesian foreign residents (Niueans, Tokelauans, Tuvaluans) in Western Samoa. It is first time I have heard a Samoan talk about these issues. Naturally, he thinks that he might go home in the future to work for his people. He is not necessarily interested in a governmental post. He might even work in a taro plantation, he says, while giving his labour for public welfare. But he is not sure when he can go home since he might be interested in studying for a PhD in Environment Studies after his law degree.

No.148 also failed in his scholarship in New Zealand. He had to work to support his own family because he ran away from Western Samoa to the States with no.149. Otherwise, he might have succeeded in university education as did nos.146 and 156. He had the experience of being rejected by the Air Force (although he passed the examination) allegedly because his nationality was Western Samoan. He was well potentially qualified if he had completed the documentation, since his father was an American Samoan.

After hopping here and there on different jobs, he became a salesman of used vehicles taking

advantage of having studied mechanical engineering in New Zealand. Later he became an independent businessman in the same field. Though he made a good salesman, he was not so successful at getting along with his bosses. So he is quite satisfied with being independent though he earns less money now. However, because of the slow economy, the competitiveness in his business is very trying. He has started a new additional business of special oil franchising, but because of the investment he has had to make his income has declined further. [I later found that his wife, no.149, works every day at a bakery until midnight to support the family.]

At the moment, his customers are not necessarily Samoans, but he hopes to start a shipping service of used vehicles to attract specifically Samoan and Tongan customers. He hopes to set up a branch office in Samoa if the business goes well so that he may contribute to the both communities. In fact, he is quite active in the Samoan community: in leading his Samoan church, in organizing Samoan gatherings, in setting up a relief organization after Samoa was damaged by a cyclone, and in helping Samoan language broadcasting in the Bay Area. His social activities might be useful in developing his business as he will gain more acquaintances through personal contacts in his various activities. But at the moment, it does not seem that he has many good customers in the local Samoan community. He is interested in what is going on in his home country and often visits there.

No.149, the wife of no.148, had the experience of being sent to a secondary boarding school in New Zealand from where she continued on to university education. After leaving the university (without finishing) and coming home, she fell in love with no.148 and came to the States with him. She has been very busy recently, helping her husband's business and community activities and maintaining a part-time job to support her family (including five children).

But she does not complain about her busy life at all. Instead, she seems to be enjoying the various experiences initiated by her husband. Even in the midst of her activities, she has a dream of taking writing courses and business classes at the community college nearby when she can spare time someday. Indeed, she once tried to enrol herself in a community college soon after her arrival in this country. She was not successful because she had some visa problems shortly after beginning a new life here. She was too young to know what she wanted to do and had problems when she first went to New Zealand. She was under the control of her parents in those days. But she knows much better now what she wants to study.

Compared with the hard experiences the Type C interviewees had when they started as scholarship students in overseas universities, interviewees of Type B, nos.150 and 151 report smoother experiences as they had enough time to become used to the life and education systems of developed countries. Of course, those bilingual children who speak languages other than English at home might have some difficulty in catching up in regular classes but it is probably still easier for them to be enrolled in universities.

The parents of no.150 are from noble families in Tonga with a good educational background. They seem to have appropriate jobs, having realized a middle class life in the States. She is the eldest daughter of four children. Her parents are successful in reminding their children of their Tongan identity and in making a certain compromise with the American way of education. She is

now twenty-five years old. She has a BA in Business Administration and History and an MA in International Relations from two different universities in California. She is now a computer designer and making quite good money--much of which she saves in order to attend law school in the future. She has a Caucasian American fiance and is getting married soon. She is active in the environmental movement and supports GreenPeace. She attended an environmental conference in Germany and was impressed by the level of development of European countries.

She identifies herself as an American, and does not think she can now lead a genuinely Tongan way of life . [Perhaps that is one of the reasons why she is engaged to a Caucasian.] Nevertheless, she is quite active in the social work in the Tongan community through her church activities. Recently, many Tongan youths are found in gang groups. She thinks this is because Tongan parents are too busy earning money and consequently their children are neglected. In order to prevent them from joining gangs , she is organizing the community to set up a work centre. She thinks that it might also be useful to encourage Tongans to interact with other ethnic groups; at present this is rare. She stayed in Tonga for several months for her MA research. She hopes to visit Tonga every two years. If given an opportunity, she would go there to work for a while.

No.150 was also brought here by her parents when she was in primary school. She says that her parents worked first in American Samoa for three years in order to save the air fare for the whole family. Her parents did not have much education but worked hard to invest the family's future in their children. She is the eldest of five daughters. Her family has given educational priority to her. Her parents are now old and retired from their jobs. She shares the family expenses and saves money for her further education at the same time. Although she was succesful in moving straight to BA and MA, she thought several times of giving up because of her financial situation. She is now accepted in a PhD programme in education at Stanford University. She has been working hard since she started in a community college. She is afraid that the present Tongan political system is not democratic and prejudiced against women , but she hopes to go home when she finishes her PhD. This is from Stanford--a thing that she almost discounted as a commonplace in the United States; however, it makes a lot of difference in Tonga.

Last come the interviewees of Type A. No.147 is from a family of good educational background. She had finished her secondary education in New Zealand with private funding before she was given a government scholarship to study at the University of Auckland, from where she proceeded to a prestigious job in the Tongan Development Bank. Later, she was again given a scholarship to study for an MBA degree in Auckland. However, she had to give up her study a few months after starting because she was appointed to a high position in the Tongan consulate in the United States. She came here with her husband and children.

The respondent has been perhaps aware of missing out on her progress towards academic qualifications since she has recently started her study again in the night classes run by the School of Business Administration, UC Berkeley. Her appointment is being terminated soon, and she hopes to continue her study and to finish her degree. Since it was the government that caused her study to be discontinued, it is probable that she will resume the former scholarship here and will start a

full-time enrolment. She had no other interest than the degree itself before. But since she started, she has found the lectures useful for her profession. It also makes sense for Tonga to have a graduate from the school as the name of Berkeley is acknowledged through all over the world. She emphasizes that her life is based in Tonga whether she continues to work in the Bank or starts her own business; even if she is able to continue her study here she regards Tonga as her home.

No.155 is a journalist who started her career after joining the training programme for broadcasting journalists run by UNESCO in Western Samoa. Her family is "half-caste" (locally so-called) and their way of life has not been very Samoan. She and her husband migrated to American Samoa with their five children several years ago. She came to UC Berkeley on an international journalist training programme for six months. She intends to go back after the programme. She is interested in the Samoan community in San Francisco, and is going to write reports about it. She appreciates the programme which consists not only of lectures but of internships in San Francisco and Washington DC.

She is interested in the BA degree and other training programmes, but it is not so easy because of her family. She likes American Samoa, where salaries are much better and goods are cheaper than in Western Samoa. She can see many of her relations. The weather is the same. She thinks she will stay there for good. American Samoa is a place where you can enjoy both sides of the world [she believes].

C. CONCLUSION

The above is a summary of several interviews I made. I am glad that I was given the opportunity to meet people from different areas of the Pacific. It is almost impossible to integrate the above interviews and arrive at a solid conclusion, since I am not quite sure whether my interviewees represent a valid sample of the whole group of university students and graduates from the Pacific Islands covered by USP who currently live in the San Francisco Bay Area. The conclusion I am going to give here is nothing more than an impressionistic one. Nevertheless, some trends and patterns may be established.

First, all the interviewees are interested in education and seeking further qualifications if they have the chance. Nos.146, 147, 155, and 156 are now students or trainees. No.151 will become a student soon. Nos.144 and 145 go to night classes. No.150 wants to go to a law school. It seems hard for nos.148 and 149 because of the present situation, but they retain their interest in education. Probably it is not just a matter of coincidence that we can find a high ratio among our interviewees of those who had the experience of failure as government overseas scholarship students. In the same way as Japanese students who failed in entrance examinations for Japanese universities go to America, Pacific Islanders may try their second chances in the States as well. The United States is truly the "land of opportunity".

Some interviewees who experienced university education in other countries say that American tertiary education has a less than satisfactory standard. This kind of opinion has been often heard in other interviews elsewhere. But it must be pointed out that those students from the Pacific who

voiced the criticism tended to concentrate in second-rate universities because of their low admission requirements and tuition costs. The famous schools are still out of reach. Those who had been to first-rate American universities made no such criticisms.

On the other hand, my interviewees tended to give positive evaluation to USP although some of them pointed out several weak points such as the shortage of funds and the too high ratio of faculty from Australia and New Zealand. One of the important advantages of USP seems to be its curriculum targeted to the actual situation in the USP Area. The story of no.156 was very impressive. No.156 was faced with an alternative choice given by the government whether he should come home or be transferred to USP when he failed in New Zealand. His pride as a very able student did not allow him to go on with the second choice at that time. But he said that he should have chosen to go to USP and he would do so now if he were given the same choice again.

It is clear that not only interviewees of Type A, but many of those of Types B and C, have been keeping much closer ties with their homeland than I expected. Except no.144, who felt as if she was actually chased out of her native country, all the interviewees have remained keenly interested in their home. Nos.150 and 151, who migrated here in their youth, recently visited their homeland and noticed all the changes that have taken place there. No.151 hopes to find an appropriate post at home when she finishes her degree. No.150 is planning to visit every two years. Nos.145,149 and 156, who have been living in the States for a long time, visit home regularly and keep up ties with their kinsmen and friends. Only no.146, who does not like flying, has not been to her home since she left, but she sends money for her mother now and then to come and visit her.

As with most ethnic communities in the Bay Area, these people tend to keep close relations. Nos.149 and 156 are actively involved in the social service activities of their community. Nos.150 and 151 of Type B are the same. Having better education and better knowledge of the American system, they have better insights into the weakness and defects of their own people. They want to help to raise the social level of the whole community.

It is also interesting that many of them do not deny the possibility of coming home if asked whether they intend to stay in the States for good, even if they have been leading quite established lives in the States, though no.144 has a different attitude towards her "homeland" from the rest. The higher the education they achieve, the more possibilities they have at home than in the States, as no.151 said. The recognition and respect given to education and qualifications at home are incomparably higher than in the States. One is "nobody" in the States but "somebody" at home. This is probably a simultaneous combination of luck and fate for those from the microstates which currently lack educated elite personnel.