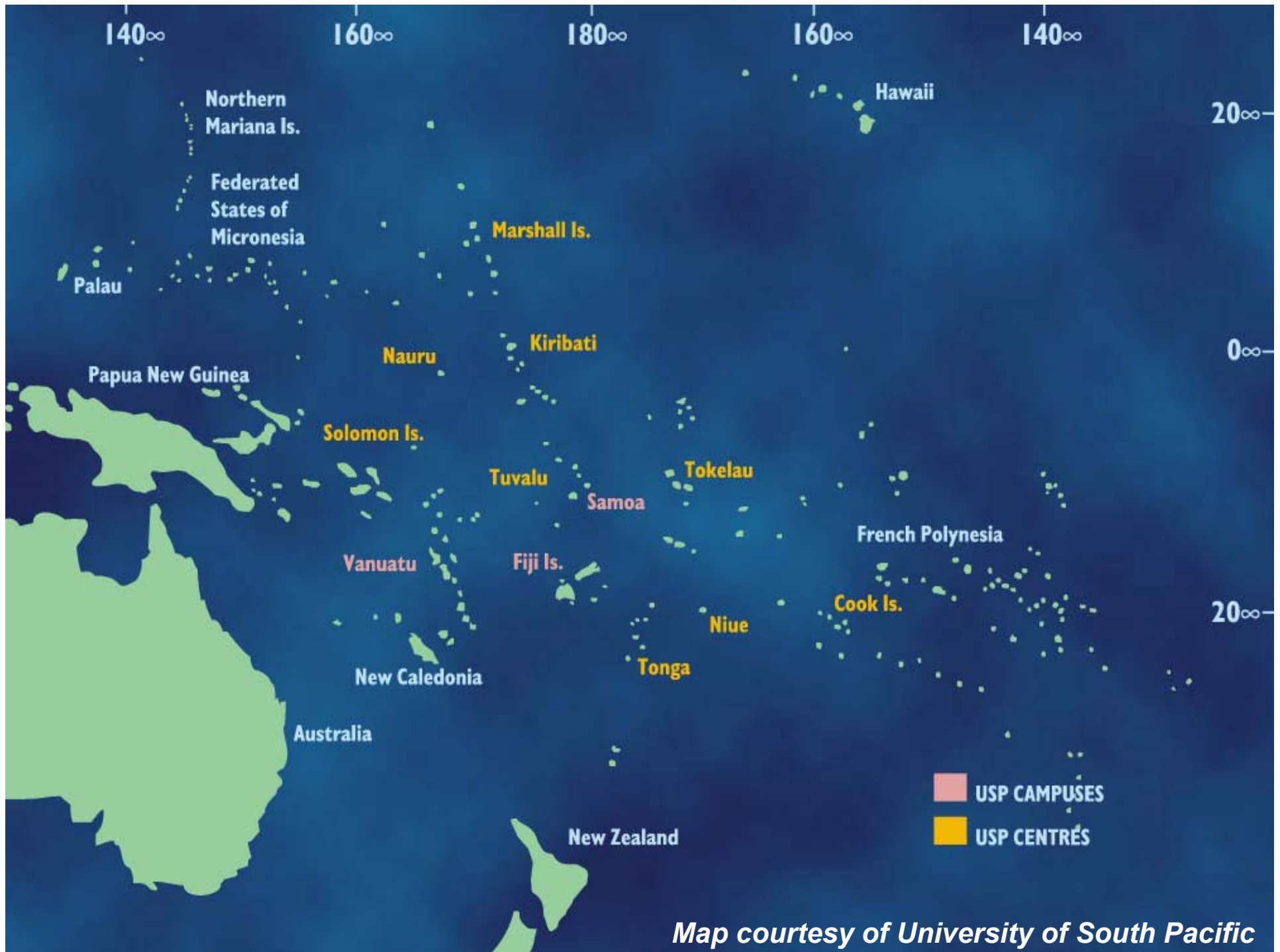


Ipukarea Society Inc.

Caring for our Environment

**PACIFIC
ISLAND
MIGRATION &
LOSS OF
TRADITIONAL
KNOWLEDGE**

A presentation by
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(TE PA
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Map courtesy of University of South Pacific

COOK ISLANDS

LOCATION & STATISTICS



The Cook Islands is a group of 15 islands (3 uninhabited) in the South-West Pacific, west of Tahiti

Area: 240 sq km land

1.8 million sq km ocean

Pop: 17,000 on 12 islands

Density: 75 per sq km

Capital: Rarotonga

Main Town: Avarua

Official Languages:

Cook Is Maori & English

Outline of Presentation

- **Initial arrival by migration**
- **Continuing (sporadic) migrations**
- **20th Century migrations**
- **Effects of accelerated migrations**
- **Possible Strategies**
- **Conclusion**



My ancestors, who called themselves *maori*, migrated across the Pacific, using the stars to navigate ocean-going canoes. [*Maori* or, *maohi* are terms used in Polynesia to mean “indigenous”.] They went from South China, from one island group to another, to the south west Pacific. The legends and chants tell of great hardships, but the voyagers continued in their quest for *Avaiki*, the mythical land.

They made a final landfall at Rarotonga Island, coming ashore at Avana, the only natural harbour on the island. Here, they built *marae* (temples) out of stone and re-established the plants and animals they had brought with them. Sometimes they used place names for landforms that reminded them of their previous home.



But the adventure of the sea was in their blood, and there were further migrations from Avana Harbour which travelled on to Aotearoa (New Zealand) in the south, to Tahiti and Rapanui (Easter Island) in the east, and to Hawai'i in the north.



These journeys took months, sometimes years of preparation. Suitable trees had to be felled to build the canoes, supplies of food had to be readied, and voyagers had to be chosen. Then there was the wait for suitable winds. Legend tells of a fleet of seven canoes that went to New Zealand in about 1000 AD

TRANSFER OF CULTURAL ICONS

Because of the long preparations required, and the limit on numbers, these colonising migrations were sporadic and did not seriously affect the general increase of the population.

Voyages to and from other island groups continued, resulting in inter-marriage with residents of Samoa, Tahiti, Niue. The oral genealogies that have been retained, going back 30 generations, are important because they are the only records of history that we have. To aid the memory of clan chiefs and their advisors in the chant reciting these genealogies, the haft of spears that were handed down as heirlooms were carved with special motifs. It was important to keep these safe, both on the voyage and after arrival.

Voyagers ensured that they took with them a totem from their homeland (often a rock), which was then placed in a memorial on arrival in the new country. Plants and animals were also taken, to assist the new arrivals in settling in.

MIGRATION FOR WORK

In later centuries, pirates such as Billy Hayes would call at the Cook Islands, and forcibly remove young men to work as sailors. This was called “blackbirding”. Sometimes they made it back, and were able to warn others.

Migration on western ships began. One group of Cook Islanders from Tongareva (an atoll in the Northern Group now known as Penrhyn) were persuaded to migrate to Peru to work in the mines. The survivors were returned many years later.

During the late 1800’s, curiosity led my grandfather and his brothers (themselves sons of a wandering Irish sea captain) to work their passage to Tahiti as a sailor. Two brothers settled in Tahiti, and two returned to their homeland. But the population of the Cook Islands continued its slow increase.

ACCELERATED MIGRATION

The 20th century has brought accelerated migration patterns. During the first half of the century, there were regular, frequent shipping links between Rarotonga and the rest of the world meant that emigration remained steady. It was offset in part by immigration as New Zealand administrators from 1901, when New Zealand became a dominion and the Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau became its dependencies.

During the 1940's and 1950's, the demand in New Zealand for labour drew many working-age Cook Islands *maori* men away (matched by movement in New Zealand of their *maori* cousins from rural to urban areas). Auckland, New Zealand became the largest Polynesian city in the world. Typically, the man of the house would emigrate, obtain employment, then secure housing before sending for his family to join him.

ADVENT OF AIR TRAVEL

During World War II, U.S. troops established air strips on Penrhyn atoll in the Northern Cook Islands, and on Aitutaki island in the Southern Cook Islands. Flights using amphibious planes such as Catalinas (named flying-boats by islanders) continued during the late 1940's and the 1950's.



In 1965, the Cook Islands chose internal self-government in free association with New Zealand (New Zealand retains responsibility for defence and foreign affairs). Tourism was one of the options through which to achieve sustainable development.

AERIAL VIEW RAROTONGA AIRPORT & PORT



The new international airport opened in 1972, at the same time as the first resort hotel. Since then, tourism has expanded from a trickle to 70,000 visitors per annum and has become the mainstay of our economy.

PRESENT DAY SOURCES OF REVENUE

- Tourism
- Pearl Farming
- Agriculture
- Fishing
- Light Manufacturing



Aitutaki Island & its islets

SOCIAL EFFECTS OF MIGRATION

- Cook Islands *maori* have emigrated in large numbers since 1972, mostly to New Zealand, where they have free entry by virtue of their political arrangement of internal self-government in free association.
- The number of working-age people has declined severely, especially during the years 1995-1997 when the number of government employees was down-sized in compliance with the policies of aid donor countries, 1800 people (10% of the population) relocated permanently.

There are now jobs being offered in the private sector, but emigrants are skeptical about returning in case it all happens again.

Employees are migrating to Rarotonga from Fiji, Tonga, the Phillipines and even China, who are willing to work for less and in less favourable conditions.

SOCIAL EFFECTS OF MIGRATION cont'd

- Loss of maritime skills: Only a few still know which trees are the best for building the voyaging canoes, and how to construct the canoe hulls. Knowledge about how to navigate using the stars has also been lost.
- Loss of language: Once families have migrated to their adopted country, Cook Islands *maori* is no longer the first language. Despite efforts to establish language nests in the adopted country, English is usually the first language in migrant households. There are conventions inherent in the forms of address in the *maori* language that do not exist in English; allusions and metaphors are not understood; figures of speech and word plays lose their effect because they are not caught by the listener. The loss is greater than just the vocabulary. New words or phrases must enter the language to cope with new (often scientific) ideas.

SOCIAL EFFECTS OF MIGRATION cont'd

- Increased alienation of customary lands: Those who live overseas no longer have the closeness to their ancestral lands that comes from working them. They are more willing to lease them, in order to earn revenue from an asset they can only manage indirectly.
- Loss of cultivated land: The shortage of working-age people means that there are not the people to undertake the hard work of growing traditional crops. *Taro* gardens that have been cultivate for hundreds of years now lie fallow.
- Loss of agricultural skills: The *arapo* (lunar planting calendar) which has been followed throughout Polynesia, is now remembered only by name. The details are no longer familiar and successor generators are not being schooled.

CULTIVATED LANDS ARE LOST



Taro Gardens Life Fallow



Cultivated Taro Gardens

SOCIAL EFFECTS OF MIGRATION cont'd

- Changes in traditional diet: Because it is less effort to buy imported foods than to grow traditional foods, the national diet has changed. This, coupled with a less active lifestyle, has led to increased incidence of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease.
- Loss of traditional arts & crafts: The lack of labour has made it more difficult to collect the materials needed to make crafts. People no longer know the best time to collect these, or how to process them so they can be used in the manufacture of traditional crafts.

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES TO COUNTER THE SOCIAL EFFECTS OF MIGRATION

- Traditional leaders to promote awareness of the value/importance of traditional knowledge systems amongst the communities
- Traditional leaders to seek establishment of learning centres to promote the teaching of traditional skills (similar to, or in collaboration with, universities)
- Treat traditional knowledge systems as you would a rare plant – create a good growing environment, then nurture it carefully



Rarotonga Fitchia (*Pua nei*)

CONCLUSION: The solutions to our social problems lie within our own communities.

MEITAKI MAATA!

