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‘PLAYING A SUSTAINING ROLE’ :
LIFESTORIES AS TO THE SIGNIFICANCE AND
MEANING OF MODERN CHANGE ON THE
TRADITIONAL LIFESTYLE OF A GROUP OF OLDER
COOK ISLANDERS.

: AN INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Change is. But how we deal with change, the nature of change we experience, and how change affects our lives is a unique experience for each of us.

The purpose of this qualitative (phenomenological) study has been to describe and interpret the lived world of older Cook Islanders through the narratives of eight participants. The narratives arose from the response to the question set for this study *'What does it mean to be an older Cook Islander living a life during marked change?'* The experience of these older Cook Islanders is embedded in the centrality of family, community and religion in their daily life practices, and the textual interpretation of these interviews offers an insight into what they experienced as meaningful and significant in their 'traditional' way of living-a-life during much change. Heideggarian hermeneutical analysis (HHA), the particular phenomenological approach used for this research project, not only uncovered the many changes experienced by the participants, but how they perceived the change and, importantly, how deeply they cherish aspects of their 'place' in their Cook Island communities.

Through analysis of these transcribed, audiotaped, interviews the research team was able to identify the nature of common meanings, concerns and experiences across all the texts and, finally, a constitutive pattern which expresses relationships between themes. Four main themes stood out from what the participants revealed as the main changes they saw, what the effects of these changes were and what areas of their life these changes had impacted upon. From the themes of *'the devil in the can'*, *'the tree that wasn't there'*, *'language : in the house of being'*, and *'an unchanging variant : the church as constancy'* two relational themes emerged, strongly highlighting for the participants the importance of remembering and restoring 'traditional' parts of Cook Island life and challenges and choices they have faced through the changes that have impacted on them. As the seven step hermeneutical analysis proceeded, the two relational themes: *'remembering is restoring : delight in memories and the self'*, and *'prickles and roses : challenges and choices'* linked to the constitutive pattern *'Keepers of the way : playing a sustaining role'* which unfolded as the major finding of the research. The pattern describes transformations in their approaches to the familiar, cherished role of being *'keepers of the way : playing a sustaining role'*. One aspect, they tell us is related to their traditional role as 'sustainer of traditional ways', but from their many life experiences they have also developed a tolerance for being open to possibilities of

new ways-of-being, accepting, redefining, or rejecting these lived experiences through time, as they see appropriate. In all the interviews the participants spoke of how important it was for them to teach and restore what they saw were important parts of Cook Islands culture. What has been disclosed is that change is not rejected arbitrarily but that they believe, or hope, it can be regulated to a certain extent by their actions and that their future is seen to be possible by way of the past and the present. As they thoughtfully and reflectively regarded the experience of living through marked change in their 'traditional' communities they, also, showed an awareness of a need, as appropriate, to be open and affirmative of the possibilities that might exist in present and emerging change in Cook Island society.

'the passing of the past is something else than what it has been.
It is the gathering of what it endures'. Martin Heidegger



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Abstract	ii
	Acknowledgments	iv
	Table of Contents	v
	Figures, tables, and illustrations	vi
Chapter One:	<u>Introduction</u>	1
Chapter Two:	<u>Review of Literature</u>	5
	- The Cook Islands	6
	a brief history of the Cook Islands	
	- The Nature of Change	17
	major categories of social change	
	profiling change : Pacific literature	
	the Cook Islands and change	
	- The Nature of Communities	28
	linking culture and community	
	community in the Cook Islands	
	- The Nature of the Family	33
	the changing role of the family	
	older generations within the family	
	religion	
	- The Nature of Aging and the Elderly	39
	- The Nature of Research	44
	hermeneutics	
	phenomenology	
	- Summary	49
Chapter Three:	<u>Methodology - Heideggarian Hermeneutics</u>	
	- The Hermeneutic Worm that Turned	51
	- Martin Heidegger	56
	his works	
	- Application of HHA	63
	ethical issues arising from the study	
	the researcher	
	the participant	
	the interview	
	the research group	
Chapter Four:	<u>Findings</u>	71
	- Themes :	75
	‘The devil in the can’	
	‘The tree that wasn’t there’	
	‘Language : in the house of being’	
	‘An unchanging variant : the church	
	as a constancy’	

	- Relational themes	90
	'Remembering is restoring : delight in memories'	
	'Prickles and roses : challenges and choices'	
	- Constitutive Pattern	94
	'Keepers of the way : playing a sustaining role'	
Chapter Five:	<u>Discussion and Implications</u>	100
Appendices		106
Bibliography		111

DIAGRAMS, ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS

DIAGRAMS :

'Actors of change'	Ryder	20
'Modernisation/assimilation'	Driedger and Chappell	22
'Paradox of community care'	Ngan and Wong	37
'Factors of change'	Saxton	41
'Methods of research'	Minichiello	45
'Interviewing'	Saxton	66

ILLUSTRATIONS :

poem 'Uncuffed hands'	Tongia	6
poem 'New Zealand is a Polynesia'	Ta'ase	100

MAPS :

Pacific region	Walsh	7
Cook Islands	Idiens	8

PHOTOGRAPHS :

'Manihiki'	iii
'untitled'	4
'preparation'	50
'relaxing'	70
'William's Legacy'	89
'earning a living'	99
'generations'	105