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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

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

#### MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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- 1996 -

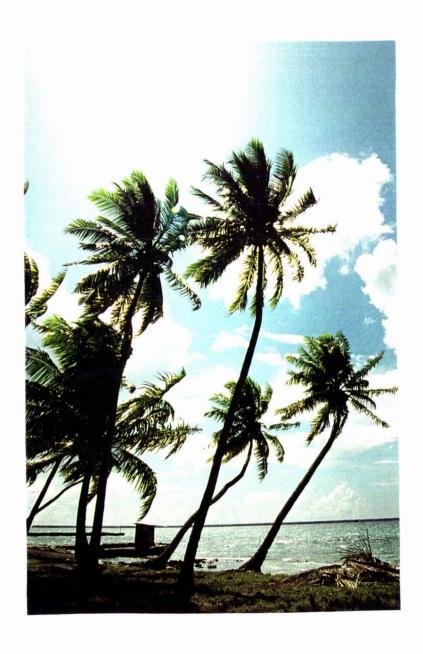
**Change is**. But how we deal with change, the nature of change we experience, and how change affects our lives is a unique experience for each of us.

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 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



#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This study has not only opened my mind to new research possibilities and interests but has introduced me to many great people and many new opportunities that would not have come my way without undertaking this type of study. I would like to acknowledge some of the people who have helped me.

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<b>TABLE</b>	OF	CONTENTS
A1		

Abstract		11
Acknowledgments		iv
Table of Contents		V.
Figures, tables, and il	lustrations	VI
Chapter One:	Introduction	1
Chapter Two:	Review of Literature	5
	- The Cook Islands a brief history of the Cook Islands	6
	- The Nature of Change major categories of social change profiling change: Pacific literature the Cook Islands and change	17
	- The Nature of Communities linking culture and community	28
	community in the Cook Islands  - The Nature of the Family the changing role of the family	3.3
	older generations within the family religion	
	- The Nature of Aging and the Elderly	39
	- The Nature of Research hermeneutics phenomenology	44
	- Summary	49
Chapter Three:	Methodology - Heideggarian Hermeneutics	
	- The Hermeneutic Worm that Turned	51
	- Martin Heidegger his works	56
	- Application of HHA ethical issues arising from the study the researcher the participant the interview the research group	63
Chapter Four:	Findings	7
	- Themes:  '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'	75

	'Keepers of the way : playing role'	g a sustaining
Chapter Five:	Discussion and Implications	100
Appendices		106
Bibliography		111

- Relational themes

memories'

- Constitutive Pattern

'Remembering is restoring: delight in

'Prickles and roses: challenges and choices'

90

## DIAGRAMS, ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS

### **DIAGRAMS:**

'generations'

'Actors of change' 'Modernisation/assimilation' 'Paradox of community care' 'Factors of change' 'Methods of research' 'Interviewing'	Ryder Driedger and Chappell Ngan and Wong Saxton Minichiello Saxton	20 22 37 41 45 66
ILLUSTRATIONS:		
poem 'Uncuffed hands' poem 'New Zealand is a Polynesia'	Tongia Ta'ase	6 100
MAPS:		
Pacific region Cook Islands	Walsh Idiens	7 8
PHOTOGRAPHS:		
'Manihiki'		iii
'untitled'		4
'preparation'		50
'relaxing'		70 89
'William's Legacy' 'earning a living'		99
carming a niving		//

105