

THE PARADOX OF PERMANENCY IN A RESETTLED NEW HEBRIDEAN COMMUNITY*

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INTRODUCTION

Although a widespread and common phenomenon, resettlement has only recently become the subject of comparative anthropological study. Reviewing some of the theoretical implications of resettlement studies in Oceania, Silverman (1977: 8) concludes:

The ambiguous, the uncertain, the unstable, the testing and revision of old and new forms in new and old contexts, the rising to structural prominence of features that may have been secondary under other conditions – here may be the rule, not the exception.

This statement refers to a response that is common among resettled peoples in their exploitation of altered circumstances: to experiment and innovate, to highlight or play down existing cultural elements, to mold a new identity or else cling to the old by maintaining ethnic and cultural boundaries (cf. Barth, 1969). Whatever coping strategies are adopted, cultural transformations that result are the outcome of a dialectic involving continuities (the culture

carried with the migrants) and change-inducing elements in the new setting. The nature of the on-going synthesis depends on a multitude of factors, but several invariably loom large: the migrants' history of mobility; the role of outside agencies in the relocation and its aftermath; the strength of commitment to traditional values; contact with and changing perceptions of the homeland; the dynamics of interethnic contact in the new environment; and the relative weight of economic and non-economic factors in the migrants' self-assessment.

All these factors are relevant to the case study that follows [1]. It begins with a brief description of the setting, then a summary of the relocation and later migration of the Maat people is provided. Their adaptation to a new environment is described, and reasons are suggested for their "drift into permanence". Fear of sorcery in the homeland is posited as a major factor influencing outmigration and in making the migrants reluctant to return home permanently. Social changes in the last decade are outlined for both Maat and southeast Ambrym, and their implications for the position of the Maat people are discussed.

THE SETTING

The New Hebrides is a chain of tropical high

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islands in the southwestern Pacific; its population (ca. 100,000 in 1978) is more than 90% Melanesian. The country is unique in being a condominium, jointly administered by Great Britain and France since 1906. Difficulties in reconciling two different brands of colonialism led inevitably to government by benign neglect, until comparatively recently. The islands are susceptible to earth tremors and hurricanes, and three of them have active volcanoes. Although damage from earthquakes is minimal, volcanic eruptions can seriously affect surrounding areas with lava flows or ashfalls, but rarely cause deaths. Hurricanes pose the most serious threat, since they periodically wreak havoc and leave a trail of destruction and sometimes death in their paths.

The southeastern area of Ambrym Island is the homeland for the people who are the subject of this paper. The inhabitants of southeast Ambrym (ca. 1400 in 1978) live in fifteen villages; their fifty square miles of land is cut off from the rest of the island by a 2000 foot ash-plain. This separation is reflected in their possession of a distinct language and in cultural differences between themselves and the rest of the Ambrymese. Although it lacks sheltered anchorages, southeast Ambrym's fertile soil and gentle topography favors its inhabitants.

Traditionally, people lived in small patri-lineage-based hamlets scattered throughout the bush, and they practised swidden horticulture at a subsistence level. Communities were inter-linked by complex webs of kinship and friendship, but feuding was common. The arrival of Christianity in the 1890s spurred the formation of villages, each of which had a head chief assisted by lineage headmen. Each community was a law unto itself, with decision-making power largely in the hands of adult males who met informally in their ceremonial men's houses. Contacts with whites and later conversion to Christianity led to a complete collapse of traditional rituals, rapid disappearance of many material and nonmaterial cultural ele-

ments, cessation of fighting, the arrival of a few white traders and the beginning of cash-cropping. The entire area was nominally Christian by about 1930, but contact with the outside world remained sparse.

ASH-FALLS AND FORCED RELOCATION

In eleven months between 1950 and 1951, one of Ambrym's two volcanoes ejected massive quantities of ash. Severe ash-falls had occurred in southeast Ambrym previously, but this was the worst and most prolonged in memory. High altitude countervailing winds dumped large amounts of ash in the southeast, turning day into night and eventually defoliating all the vegetation. Life became uncomfortable, and 300–400 people left southeast Ambrym to wait out the ash-falls elsewhere. Among the majority who remained, there was no panic since they knew that they were in no serious danger. Despite food shortages, they managed to cope adequately and were heartened when the ash-falls began to abate in October 1951.

Unfortunately, this was when the colonial authorities ordered the evacuation of west and southeast Ambrym, without consulting the local people. Even worse, the relocation site they chose was Epi, an island feared by Ambrymese because they believed its sorcery to be even more powerful than their own. Dire threats were necessary to persuade the southeast Ambrymese to move. Officials crammed 701 people onto an 80 ton vessel, which then had to make a risky six-hour crossing to Epi. The Ambrymese were angry at their forced relocation and therefore made little serious effort to establish themselves on Epi; they did not intend to stay there long.

A few weeks later, true disaster struck in the form of a severe tropical hurricane, which devastated houses, gardens and plantations, and killed 114 people. The relocation site was worst hit, and 48 Ambrymese died; the sur-

vivors were left with only the clothes they wore. Some went to join relatives who had gone to Epi to work on plantations after the ash-falls had commenced. Those lucky enough to obtain rides went back to the homeland, and the inhabitants of one of the homeland villages, Maat, migrated south to Efate. In the following two or three years, most southeast Ambrymese drifted back home, to replant their gardens and await the regrowth of their sole cash crop, coconuts.

BACKGROUND TO THE MAAT RESETTLEMENT

Four Maat men, including their chief, assistant chief and teacher-catechist (southeast Ambrym's most forceful and controversial personality) ran afoul of some of the older traditional chiefs and the local white traders in 1949. They were arrested early in 1950 and sent to jail in Vila (the capital, on Efate) on fabricated charges of inciting cargo cult activity. A later court hearing found that their major crime had merely been an excess of Christian zeal, and they were released from prison. They remained in Vila, mistakenly believing that they had been exiled from Ambrym for three years. They obtained work on a nearby plantation and sent for their families. These and other people who came from Ambrym during the ash-falls told of the adverse conditions there, so the leaders decided to summon the remaining Maat villagers to Efate. A French planter had offered them a deal: a village site, some building materials and access to garden land, if they would become his exclusive labor force. Knowing that Ambrym would not recover for at least a couple of years, the leaders agreed and the planter's boat went and collected the remaining villagers from Epi shortly after the hurricane.

COPING WITH A NEW ENVIRONMENT

Although they had moved 100 miles from

Ambrym, the migrants had little difficulty in making a satisfactory adjustment to life on Efate. They named the new village Maat, after their homeland village. The old and new locations share similar physiographic, biotic and climatic characteristics, and no radical change in adaptive strategies was necessary to deal with Efate's physical or social environments. Efate was already familiar to almost all the adult males, who had worked there during World War II, and all spoke Pidgin, the country's *lingua franca*, so they could communicate easily with their new neighbors. The latter were fellow Presbyterians, so the bonds of shared religion helped bridge the cultural gap between the rural newcomers and their more sophisticated peri-urban neighbors. The freedom from outside interference that the Ambrymese had enjoyed in the homeland continued on Efate. Their Hebridean neighbors gave assistance when needed, but otherwise left the migrants to their own devices. Because their move from Epi was a private arrangement, officialdom in Vila largely ignored them, as had been the case in Ambrym, so their strong sense of independence remained intact. Efate was a new experience for most women, whose poor command of Pidgin hindered communication with strangers. However, when not working as a group on plantations, they remained in the village so their contact with outsiders was minimal. This had always been the case, and men had long been the more mobile sex, so the old patterns of mobility and interethnic contact remained structurally analogous after resettlement. A major difference between old and new was the physical isolation of the migrants from their congeners in the homeland, but communication channels remained open and they were able to stay fairly well informed about life in Ambrym.

THE DRIFT INTO PERMANENCE

The people of Maat had signed no contracts

with their employer, so they were theoretically free to return to Ambrym at any time. By 1954 the homeland had recovered and most of the population was back there. Both the Ambrymese and the migrants regarded their absence as temporary. But the Maat people were now well established on Efate and faced a difficult choice: to return and reestablish themselves in Ambrym, or linger and enjoy the fruits of their labor. There was no shortage of reasons for staying on. The new village and gardens represented a large investment in effort; they had a steady cash income from copracutting, which was done on a piecework basis that allowed them ample time for gardening; their children were in schools far superior to those in Ambrym; they had an excellent freshwater supply, which was lacking in the homeland; and so on.

No public meetings were held to discuss their situation and future plans, so the decision to stay on was never formally made. Their stated intention was unchanged: to return permanently to Ambrym "sometime soon". In 1954, their employer sold the community 100 hectares of undeveloped land for garden use, and promised to repurchase it in the event of their return to Ambrym. In 1961, conflict between the villagers and their employer finally led to a major crisis: he threatened them with eviction unless they purchased the land and coconuts they had hitherto exploited without cost. The planter tried unsuccessfully to pressure the government into making a cash loan to the villagers. Officials proposed an alternative: relocation elsewhere on Efate, but this was rejected by the villagers.

Throughout this crisis, the Maat people never seriously considered the alternative of a return to Ambrym, despite their grave doubts about being able to raise what was to them the enormous sum of over U.S.\$ 10,000 in only two years. Teams of men went and cut copra on Maat land in Ambrym, many southeast Ambrymese donated money, Vila area friends

and coreligionists assisted with gifts and loans, and they were finally rescued from failure by a small government loan. Some of the homelander who helped were men who had settled at Maat. Donations from those still in the homeland were motivated partly by bonds of kinship and sentiment, but there was another motive: Maat had by this time become a welcome haven for them when visiting Vila. They were assured of somewhere to sleep and eat, and could remain as long as they wished. The people of Maat continued to assert their intention of returning permanently to the homeland. Most adults did make several return visits, and some built houses and cut copra there, but they eventually returned to Efate [2].

SOCIAL CHANGE: THE FIRST FIFTEEN YEARS

Describing Maat Efate in 1967, it was still more accurate to talk in terms of continuities with Ambrym rather than change. Physically and culturally, Maat more closely resembled southeast Ambrym villages than those of its Efate neighbors. The migrants had replicated major features of the old sociocultural order and still identified strongly with Ambrym. Many of the changes that had occurred were also evident in the homeland; e.g. the relaxation of certain kinship observances, the abandonment of some taboos, an increasing focus on cash-earning activities, and so on.

There were also notable differences between the migrant and homeland communities. Maat had a much higher growth-rate than any of the homeland villages and now numbered about 200 inhabitants. Its birthrate was higher and infant mortality rate much lower than those of southeast Ambrym. Its numbers were swelled by the continuing presence of longterm southeast Ambrymese residents and by short-term visitors (who comprised 10–20% of the total at any given time). Since 1960 many men had become wage laborers in Vila. Per capita income and expenditure were much greater than

in Ambrym, and living standards were higher, but the migrants were not yet investing heavily in housing, furniture, vehicles, etc. It cost them more to live near Vila than in Ambrym, since they incurred expenses (e.g. taxi fares) that were non-existent in the homeland. Yet the fact that they spent almost 40% of their income on foodstuffs indicated changing tastes rather than necessity, since their gardens kept them well supplied with traditional staples.

A major change had occurred in land tenure. In Ambrym land was owned by kin-based groups, but at Maat the land that they had bought was communally owned, and most of their gardens were on land belonging to their employer and neighboring villages. A person established usufructory rights to Maat land simply by clearing and planting a garden. There were no disputes over land, coconuts or boundaries at Maat, whereas in Ambrym these were a major source of tensions and conflict.

One notable difference in social structure was the large number of men who lived uxori-locally at Maat. These comprised some 30% of the total of married men, whereas in Ambrym the number of men living in a village other than their own was negligible. In Ambrym, the major corporate social groups other than church organizations were the family, hearth group, patrilineage or "small name" and the village. (In most villages the "small name" is a named residential area, most of whose male inhabitants claim membership in the same patrilineage.) At Maat there was much greater emphasis on community-wide financial responsibility for education and for marriage feasts than in Ambrym, where they remained the responsibility of kin-based groups. But the situation was reversed with respect to communal work-parties: wage work prevented many Maat men from participation most of the time, so individually organized, small work-groups were becoming more important. At Maat the nuclear family boundary was becoming more distinct, and the "small name" had less significance as a

corporate group than in Ambrym. The village, however, assumed greater importance at Maat as a social boundary, since it separated the migrants from non-Ambrymese neighbors and other outsiders. There was greater interethnic contact than in Ambrym, particularly among urban workers and young men, but the lure of Vila was still not strong and villagers spent very little time there outside of working hours.

SORCERY AND OUTMIGRATION

Maat villagers in 1967 expressed general satisfaction with their lives, but still felt a strong attachment to the homeland. When asked to compare the two locations, most men and women said they preferred Ambrym. When then asked why they chose to stay in Efate, their reply was almost always the same: there was too much sorcery in Ambrym. It seems likely that the notion of Maat as a permanent home crystallized as they became convinced that no sorcery was occurring at Maat. Pointing to the large numbers of children in the village, people contrasted this with the situation in Ambrym where, they claimed, sorcerers were always killing children. The fact that the Maat people made good use of the medical facilities readily available in Vila was never mentioned as a factor in this important change. In the new village the potential for conflict was greatly lessened by the removal of land, coconuts and pigs as potential sources of trouble, and since migration there had been no serious conflicts with their congeners in Ambrym.

Virtually all Ambrymese believed in the reality of sorcery and feared it. No one ever admitted to practising it, though many men were suspected, and it was regarded as the major cause of death. However, people did not live in constant fear of it. There were times and situations of high risk, so they took care not to expose themselves unnecessarily to attack. Pondering this negative aspect of life in Ambrym, the people of Maat had their disquiet

fueled by an almost continuous inflow of bad news — accounts of sorcery attacks, accusations, threats, near misses or alleged hits — relayed from the homeland by visitors or in letters. As a result, their perception of sorcery's significance in Ambrym was gradually distorted.

It now seemed to them that there was much more sorcery than before, and the homeland had thus become a very dangerous place to live.

They knew that they were not the only people who believed this. An additional 450 southeast Ambrymese (30% of the total) were at that time living away from the homeland, and most who stayed away for long periods had no plausible economic, medical or educational reasons for doing so. Many had fled because that their lives were in jeopardy from sorcery attack, and many had taken their families with them. Their absences from Ambrym lasted anywhere from a few months to many years. But like the Maat people, all those interviewed asserted that they would eventually return home.

SOCIAL CHANGE: 1967–1978

Maat's population has grown steadily from 200 to 325, and it is now a much larger village than any in southeast Ambrym. Long-term non-Maat Ambrymese residents still comprise almost one third of the population [3]. Physically, Maat has lost its Ambrymese appearance, with cement and iron dwellings replacing all but a few bamboo and thatch structures. Suburbia has spread close to Maat, with whites and other Hebrideans now living close by; some patronize the village stores, and several whites employ Maat people in and around their houses. A growing shortage of garden land has led to the exploitation of the land purchased in 1954 (but long ignored in favor of plots much closer to the village). Some undeveloped Maat land remains, and as yet no conflicts have arisen over it; but there are indications that as land pressures increase these may arise.

The proportion of the male workforce now employed in and around Vila has risen from 64% to 85%, and of females from 10% to 64%, and the number of men and women who now cut copra regularly has declined considerably. Since wage labor yields much higher returns than copracutting, total income is now proportionately greater. Only rough estimates are possible, but since 1967 per capita income has risen more than three-fold (U.S.\$ 11.30 per month to U.S.\$ 38.25), despite a 62.5% increase in population. Even when inflation is taken into account, real income has risen appreciably, and the solid subsistence base provided by their gardens remains. The dozen or so youths and young men who are unemployed cut copra on occasions, but prefer less demanding garden work if they cannot find jobs in the town. Some of the more affluent villagers, whose employment restricts their gardening time, have begun employing these young men on a daily basis and pay them cash, whereas before people who assisted others in their gardens worked for food only.

Villagers owned two vehicles in 1967, thirteen now, so there is less reliance on Vila taxis than before. A few other high cost items have appeared, such as houses built by outside contractors, kerosine refrigerators, generators, motor mowers, and a great many more sewing machines than in 1967, and many people have invested considerable money in house construction. They spend little on interior furnishings, since the separate kitchen remains the focal point of social life in most households, just as it is in Ambrym. It appears that a much greater proportion of income is now spent on housing and vehicles than in 1967. The proportion spent on foodstuffs has remained high, and the contribution of garden foods to their diet may have declined a little. Everyone still grows subsistence crops, though many wage workers find it difficult to devote as much time to gardening activities as formerly. Rice and bread are even more firmly established as staples, and

much more fresh meat is now eaten.

With many more people now working in town and many neighbors living quite close to Maat, the villagers have a greater amount of contact with outsiders. One consequence of this is a considerable increase in intermarriage with non-Maat people. The larger number of men marrying outsiders is a reflection of two factors: a greater amount of interethnic contact, and a persistent shortage of women within the Maat community, caused principally by a pronounced excess of male births over female [4]. Partly because there are more outsiders married into the village, Pidgin is heard more often than before, but southeast Ambrymese remains the first language and there has been no diminution of a strong sense of identity with Ambrym. Many young people who were born and raised on Efate have visited the homeland, and they consider themselves "man Ambrym" as well as "man Maat Efate".

The villagers are currently attempting to resolve the longstanding problem of a nonfunctioning chief and village council. In preliminary discussions about how best to restructure their system, the Maat people pointedly rejected the models of their Efate neighbors in favor of one drawn from the homeland. The proposed solution is to have village "small names" select representatives to the governing body. It has been noted that these divisions have declined in importance as corporate groups, though they have remained an integral part of the ideational culture of the villagers. The proposed system accords more closely with the realities of social structure and political alignments within the village.

MAAT EFATE AND SOUTHEAST AMBRYM IN 1978

According to the villagers, there is still no sorcery in Maat Efate. But in southeast Ambrym, too, its alleged incidence has declined almost to zero. In 1973, local church leaders mounted an evangelical campaign in a headlong

assault on sorcery in southeast Ambrym. For the first time, its alleged practice had become a subject of public discussion, following the deaths of two prominent chiefs who were reputed to be sorcerers, and a court case in which many people testified to the District Agent against two of the area's chiefs, who were found guilty of profiting from people's fear of sorcery. The well organized and powerfully led campaign struck a responsive chord in the Ambrymese, who pronounced it an enormous success and claimed that the presence and power of the Holy Spirit had crushed the powers of evil for all time. The atmosphere during and after the campaign was one of great relief and euphoria (Tonkinson, n.d.). Parents ceased using the threat of sorcerers to discipline children; in four months on Ambrym (1977–78) I never heard this once common admonition. Two deaths in 1977, and a third early in 1978, resulted in widespread rumors of sorcery. The response of the area's leaders was to hold court hearings, identify the sources of the rumors and castigate the culprits, and invite the alleged sorcerers to publicly defend their good name. The contrast between southeast Ambrym in 1967 and 1978 is striking. Anxiety about sorcery has abated dramatically, and there is consequently a much greater freedom of movement within the area, but no departures occasioned by fear of sorcery.

Convincing evidence of this transformation came early in 1978 when a second evangelical campaign was mounted in southeast Ambrym. Although rumor-mongering was attacked in a few sermons, the topic of sorcery was conspicuously absent. The campaign's aim this time was to revivify people's faith and their commitment to the church. Church leaders and laypersons alike asserted that anyone foolhardy enough to have retained possession of magical paraphernalia would eventually fall seriously ill as the power of the objects turned against them, and they would die if they did not then destroy the objects.

There have been other important changes in the homeland in recent years. There is now a "development society", founded by a well educated southeast Ambrymese who is the area's resident pastor. Funded largely by grants from a foreign charitable organization, it aims to exploit the area's unused natural and human resources, provide practical on-site training for school-leavers, and decrease local reliance on imported goods and on copra as the sole cash-crop. Much has already been accomplished with volunteer labor, and several projects are under way.

The quality of elementary education in southeast Ambrym is now better than that received by the Maat children on Efate; this contrast is recognized by most Maat people. Besides new schools, new clinics have led to a rapid improvement in health levels, although as yet there are no doctors or hospitals in the area. Most villages now have cooperative stores (some of which own vehicles), whose range of merchandise is slowly improving. Copra prices have been high for some time, so there is no shortage of cash among the southeast Ambrymese, but expenditure on material goods other than basic necessities is very much less than in the Maat Efate community. The frequency of shipping to and from southeast Ambrym has increased, but as yet there is no airfield. If one is constructed, as currently promised, and the country's internal airline schedules regular flights, the pace of development should further increase. It would also facilitate mobility: the journey to and from Ambrym by boat is extremely uncomfortable, and the ordeal deters many would-be travelers.

Developments in southeast Ambrym have been closely monitored by the absentees, who in December 1977 numbered 950, which is about 40% of the total number of people belonging to southeast Ambrym. Some 60% of the absentees have been away from the homeland long enough to be considered "permanent" expatriates (even though many of these people

still say that they will return to Ambrym sometime). Some absentees have made trips back to Ambrym to see for themselves, and some among them have resettled on a permanent basis. But to date no significant exodus from the town areas has taken place. Maat Ambrym had a population of eight in April 1967; in April 1978 it was 36, and there is still frequent movement between the old and new villages. The difference between values, behaviors and life style in the homeland and in Maat Efate is not yet great enough to cause significant problems for those villagers who move from one milieu to the other. Most of those living on Efate still regard the homeland as a vacation or working holiday spot rather than as a permanent home. Some of the more affluent Maat Efate men are talking about the possibility of making business investments in Ambrym. Even for those lacking capital, the homeland is an attractive place now that the alleged practice of sorcery seems to have abated. Those who return would have their own land and coconuts, and the freedom and leisure of self-employment in a bountiful land.

The residents of southeast Ambrym say that they do not know for sure what is delaying the return of the absentees, except for those who lack sufficient land and coconuts in the homeland, and for some of those who have bought land and built substantial houses on it. Most residents think that with sorcery no longer an inhibiting factor, many of the absentees should by now be coming back, and that *no one* who came back would be unable to subsist in Ambrym since there are always people willing to let others use some of their land and coconuts for little or no payment. It seems clear that whatever the present circumstances and perceived needs of the absentees, many of them are having to reassess their relationship to the homeland.

CONCLUSIONS: THE PARADOX OF PERMANENCY

Schwimmer (1977) asks if the study of a nonrecurring event, such as a volcanic eruption, should interest anthropologists only if it is paradigmatic of some social law. To the Ambrymese, an ash-fall is a recurring event, so their reactions to this phenomenon are conditioned to a large extent by prior knowledge and experience. However, each such event is inevitably different from all others and sets into motion a unique concatenation of actions and reactions whose specifics are not amenable to prediction. In attempting to study natural disasters, particularly, anthropologists are confronted with social process seemingly run amok. Their attention is invariably drawn towards chance occurrences that influence the course of events in the aftermath, and towards the role of certain individuals as change agents. There are no social laws to be generated at this level of analysis, and it is here that the chances of comparability are slight. If abstractions can be made from raw data concerning the individual and unique, then at some higher level both the enabling forces and the structural consequences of nonrecurring events may prove comparable. As Silverman (1977:7) notes, “. . . we may find them to be recurrent as we enlarge the scale of analysis [of resettlement studies] to a colonial system or a regional mobility system.”

The following discussion is intended to show that attention to both micro- and macro-levels is essential if a balanced assessment of the Ambrym case is to emerge. The southeast Ambrymese people's perceptions of crisis and of Epi as a place to live were shown to be almost totally at variance with those of the colonial authorities. The Ambrymese believed that they were being forced *into* a crisis situation, not *out* of one. By its actions, the government was indirectly responsible for the tragedy that so soon overtook the evacuees. The total experience served only to reinforce the people's already negative stereotype of “government”

and its agents as detrimental rather than beneficent in their effect.

The initial study of Maat was one of ten similar studies of relocation in Oceania. Although success is very difficult to measure, a comparison of these studies strongly suggests that from both emic and etic viewpoints the Maat resettlement is among the most successful of them all. It is coincidentally the one where government agencies played the smallest role – except in the initial relocation, which was a disastrous failure. Prior experience in their isolated homeland had engendered self reliance and taught them to expect nothing positive from either colonial power. The government played no part at all in their migration to Efate, so they were not anticipating assistance from that quarter, and were not disappointed when none was given. They remained strongly self reliant and did not develop feelings of dependence on government agencies, in marked contrast to some other resettled communities whose forced relocations had long and painful aftermaths (cf. Kiste, 1974, 1977).

To explain why the Maat villagers ended up on Efate instead of back in Ambrym, both chance occurrences and the role of particular individuals are of major significance. Had the Maat leaders been less forceful in opposing the status quo in southeast Ambrym, they would not have been removed to Vila and jailed. Had the French District Agent who originally tried them not misinformed the leaders that they were under exile from Ambrym, they may well have gone home instead of sending for their families. Had the evacuation and hurricane not occurred, those remaining in Ambrym may have decided against joining the rest in Vila. It was the teacher-catechist, who had been the homeland's most influential change agent, who convinced the hesitant Maat villagers to buy land so that they would have a haven outside Ambrym in the event of future ash-falls or hurricane damage.

After a few years on Efate, the villagers came to view their situation there as one of

safety from sorcery, which was an excellent reason not to return home. Their continued presence in Efate was perceived very differently by outsiders, who gave what were to them logical economic reasons for this: the Maat people remain because ash-falls spoil their livelihood in Ambrym and it is a dangerous place; the lure of the town and its amenities is too great for them to resist; they are assured of a cash income because there is always work available, and so on. On the rare occasions that they did intervene at Maat; e.g. during the land crisis, government officials threatened a forced repatriation to Ambrym when the Maat people rejected their suggestions. There is little doubt, however, that the officials were mindful of the value of the migrants as a convenient labor force, since southwest Efate has a great many white-owned plantations.

In his concluding comments on ten Pacific resettlement studies, Lieber (1977:387) notes, "In every instance reported in this volume, resettlement has contributed in some important way to the maintenance of the colonial system." He also suggests that because of their labor needs, colonial systems needed to keep part of the indigenous population mobile in order to maintain themselves. It is also true that changes consequent upon contact with colonizers impel the colonized into greater mobility as they develop new needs and wants. In the Maat case, a mutually beneficial business arrangement was involved. Mutual gain of this kind motivated the system of circular migration that evolved in the New Hebrides however heavily the scales of exploitation may ultimately be tipped in favor of the colonizers (cf. Bedford, 1973; Bonnemaïson, 1974, 1976). The fact that a degree of mobility was intrinsic to traditional Melanesian society must also be considered with respect to a people's preparedness to migrate and their ability to adapt to different environments (Chapman, 1969). The history of mobility of the Maat people was definitely a positive factor in their successful adaptation to Efate.

Since they initially regarded their presence in Efate as a temporary sojourn, the Maat people made no concerted attempts to assimilate into their new social milieu. An awareness of their lack of sophistication compared to their neighbors, and of the reputation among Hebrideans everywhere of Ambrym as *the* home of sorcery, may well have inhibited inter-ethnic contacts. But the migrants maintained their identity as southeast Ambrymese and set about replicating major features of the old order in the new locale. In several ways, however, they took the opportunity to experiment and innovate as they established their "new" community. Although they maintained strong ethnic boundaries, they did fulfil their communal obligations to church and educational bodies in the local area. In all, they considered that they had made a good social adjustment in Efate. They showed little interest in borrowing cultural forms from their neighbors, and the significant social changes that they effected were based largely on home-grown models. The important transition from kin-based to communal responsibility for certain purposes is a case in point. Many resettled communities have communal forms of organization in their early years, sometimes in response to crisis, or as the result of a significant widening in the contextual scope of an already existing organizational form. At Maat, when the villages decided to fund educational and marriage feast expenses communally, they were seeking improvement and equity (Silverman, 1977:7). They wanted to ensure that all children had their education funded regardless of parental income levels, and they wanted to prevent marriage feasts and reciprocal gift-giving from becoming an arena for status enhancement. In a related move, village leaders limited bridewealth payments, and discouraged the practice of sister exchange, which was common in Ambrym, because it sometimes involved coercion (Tonkinson, 1976).

The necessity for cooperation and unity in

such communal activity may have constrained divisive tendencies and antisocial activities such as sorcery through self-reinforcing positive feedback (Lieber, 1977:370). More important in this respect would have been the change in land tenure practices in reducing the potential for conflict at Maat. After the land crisis passed, an inactive village government contributed to a decline in communal activities, and the education funding scheme lapsed. But the decline that was occurring in communal work-group activities was also caused by the men's steadily increasing commitment to wage labor, and concomitant strengthening of the nuclear family as a corporate unit.

The paradox that is signaled in the title of this paper arose from the Maat villagers' changing perception of the homeland resulting from their physical separation. They had replicated major physical and cultural features of Ambrymese life on Efate, yet with respect to the presence-absence of sorcery, a vital distinction existed between the two environments — so Maat was and yet was not an Ambrymese village. In consequence of this changed perception of the homeland, a second paradox was generated: there was a weakening in their conviction that their absence from Ambrym was temporary, yet they continued to deny that their resettlement was permanent, and this denial was shared by their congeners in the homeland. Maat thus was and was not a permanent village. As long as Maat continued to serve a useful function for the southeast Ambrymese as an urban refuge, the homelander never provoked a confrontation with the Maat people over their continued absence. For their part the migrants renounced none of their land rights in Ambrym, and enough of them made return visits to justify the homelander's belief that they would eventually come home for good.

It was easy for the migrants to exploit the ambiguities inherent in their paradoxical situation. Their Ambrymese identity remained

strongly intact and they had made no attempts to adopt a more cosmopolitan self-image by abandoning their boundary-maintaining behaviors. Although their continued absence from Ambrym was indeed a conspicuous communication, it was never a negation of identity and did not therefore precipitate schism with Ambrym. By maintaining contact and bonds of obligation and responsibility with homeland kin and friends, they demonstrated their continuing commitment. Having abetted the migrants by helping them purchase land, the homelander at the same time professed not to understand why the Maat people remained away and attributed this to mild craziness on the part of the migrants. The homelander was thus indicating their own ambiguity in their attitudes to the migrants.

In conclusion to a paper drafted initially in 1970, I stated, "Efate will remain their home as long as their conception of Ambrym as a place riddled with sorcery continues unaltered" (Tonkinson, 1977:293). Events in Ambrym, dating from the 1973 evangelical campaign, have indeed altered that conception. The villagers I talked to in 1977–78 were agreed that Ambrym has changed and that sorcery really has abated; if there were sceptics, they were remaining quiet. Since then there has been no revival of sorcery fears in the homeland; the 1977 rumors had reached Maat but no one seemed to be taking them seriously. There is thus every indication that the Maat people have lost what has long been for them *the primary criterion for contrasting* southeast Ambrym and Maat social orders; and this loss removes a major ambiguity that they had exploited in their rationale for their continued absence from Ambrym.

Movement between the new and old villages will continue, and unless copra prices plummet, the population of the old Maat will probably continue to grow. But Maat Efate will no doubt remain the permanent home of most Maat people. If there is no resurgence of alleged

sorcery in Ambrym – an eventuality that is impossible to predict – the migrants will seek alternative rationales, and these will probably be economic ones. Their investment in Maat Efate is now considerable, and in many respects they continue to enjoy the best of both Efate and Ambrym worlds. It is true that they have opted for wage labor and all that this implies in a colonial situation, and this commitment will never be understood by those living the much freer existence in Ambrym, but the compensation is a steady income that enables them to buy the many things that have become necessities to them. Although the acquisition of material wealth is not yet a major preoccupation of the Maat people, they certainly evince a much greater concern with money and what it will buy than the homelander. This contrast has in fact long existed as a notable difference in the life styles of the two societies. If both groups openly admit this to themselves and to each other, the primacy of economic factors in contributing to Maat's continued existence would be affirmed. Maat Efate is now twenty-five year old *fait accompli* whose inhabitants remain culturally Ambrymese. Neither its existence nor their identity seem likely to be extinguished in the foreseeable future.

NOTES

- 1 The Maat resettlement is the subject of a monograph (Tonkinson, 1968), one of a series resulting from a five-year project, directed by Professor Homer G. Barnett, University of Oregon, entitled: "A Comparative Study of Cultural Change and Stability in Displaced Communities in the Pacific." Tonkinson (1977) discusses major implications of the Maat resettlement.
- 2 In fifteen years to 1967, more than three quarters of the Maat adults visited the homeland. Males made about three trips each and stayed for an average of seven months, whereas women averaged only two trips each for an average duration of seven and a half months.
- 3 A noticeable drop has occurred in the proportion of short-term visitors from Ambrym: from 16% to 5% of the total. This is probably because more than 250 southeast Ambrymese now live in the Vila area, so newcomers from the homeland have a much wider choice of relatives and places to stay outside Maat than formerly.
- 4 Between 1952 and 1966, there were 21 marriages with outsiders, eleven of whom were southeast Ambrymese; but in the decade to 1977 there were 31 such marriages, 16 of which were with southeast Ambrymese. Of a total of 52 marriages of Maat people since resettlement, 21 involved Maat women but only twelve of these have gone to live elsewhere. The remaining nine live in Maat with their non-Maat husbands. In 1967 about 63% of Maat people under 16 years of age were boys; in 1978 the proportion was still 59% to 41% girls. So Maat men must continue to find wives beyond the village if all are to marry.

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