FROM CULTS TO CHRISTIANITY:
CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN TAKURU

by

Jeffrey L. Clark

Department of Anthropology,
The University of Adelaide.

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ABSTRACT

Against the background of an intensive period of colonial development and mission proselytization, the thesis examines the social processes which shaped post-pacification Wiru society. The Wiru people rapidly abandoned, in the face of labour intensive development schemes and a strong evangelical effort, warfare, cults, and many other exchange and social practices of the pre-colonial era. It is argued that this society was organized around life cycle exchanges and cult performance directed at exchange between men and spirits; cults frequently celebrated these exchanges. Individuals and groups were reproduced through these activities and continue to be today, although Christianity has been synthesized into the same cosmological concerns of cults. Christianity, labour migration, money and the like radically altered, however, the context in which this reproduction takes place. The cessation of warfare, Christian ideology, and the introduction of new avenues to status achievement have changed the concept of the individual and the group to which s/he belongs. Descent and agnation continue to play an important role in the constitution of groups but church attendance and ritual have taken over the group definitional aspects of cults which, along with cosmological changes, have produced a perception by Takuruns of a 'new' society. Christianity, like descent, provides a moral symbol for the group and circumscribes the behaviour of its members, such that the clan is not only a descent group but a denomination, and the church has become the focus of a cult of Christianity.