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Chapter 6

The Tikopia and "What Raymond Said"

Judith Macdonald

Once upon a time on my way to Tikopia,' the captain of the ship on which I was traveling changed his mind about going to that distant island and unloaded me on the island of Santa Cruz, hundreds of miles from my destination. Knowing that I would have some weeks to fill before another ship could rescue me, I introduced myself to everyone I met and let it be known that I was going to Tikopia as an anthropologist. I was told that one of the nurses at the local hospital was a Tikopia and that he was an expert on traditional childbirth practices. I contacted him, and he agreed to tell me all he knew about childbirth in Tikopia. After giving me an hour of organized information, which I taped, he finished by saying, "at least, that's what Raymond said."

Such tales are increasingly becoming part of the folklore of fieldwork (see, for example, Clifford 1986b, 116): the shaman consulting the definitive ethnography, the chief with a degree in anthropology, and every Samoan with an opinion on Margaret Mead. In relating what happened in the field, they confirm the partial nature of both the occurrence and the resultant narrative. The partiality lies both in predilection and incompleteness: the story that we or they want to tell about ourselves, which necessitates omission and editing.

Once upon a previous time, on my way to an undergraduate degree in English, I was diverted by the story of a small island that was as convincing as the best science fiction. The island was mapped, its people named, their everyday chatter reported, and their important statements recorded. The story had a beginning, a middle, and an end, which was equally the term of the ethnographer's visit, the yearly cycle of the island (the seasons of the different food plants, monsoon, and tradewinds and the ritual cycle), and a continuity of the people through birth, copulation, and death. So I changed course and became an anthropologist in order to see these small and perfectly articulated societies of ethnography.

Renato Rosaldo (1989, 32) refers to the "classic period" of ethnography, which he mock-seriously situates between 1921 and 1971. The ethnographies of this period he characterizes as objectivist, portraying holistic societies where society was a system; culture had a pattern. Raymond Firth's writings about

Tikopia, a small Polynesian outlier in the predominantly Melanesian Solomon Islands, and his fieldwork there in 1928-1929 belong to this classic period, and his elegant delineation of system and pattern informed the nurse of my first anecdote and seduced me from another career. For me, *We, the Tikopia*[2] described a society that was encompassable by the human mind in its tidy organization and its neatly interlocking parts. Functionalist analysis is deeply appealing, both in paradigm and application, because it makes humans, and therefore us, seem reasonable to ourselves.

However, tidiness is not next to omniscience, and the reason of anthropologists, what Trinh Minh-ha has called "the reign of worn codes," has been strongly challenged:

> On one plane, we, I and he, may speak the same language and even act alike; yet on the other, we stand miles apart, irreducibly foreign to each other... . what I resent most, however, is not his inheritance of a power he so often disclaims, disengaging himself from a system he carries with him, but his ear, eye, and pen, which record in his language while pretending to speak through mine, on my behalf. (Trinh Mirth-ha 1989, 47-48)

These are the extreme and oversimplified points of the debate: the classic academic ethnography, holistic and positivist, versus the reclamation of power-to-define by the insider alone. More interesting questions are asked in the continuum. Does any society find itself usefully represented to the outside world through ethnography or by ethnographers? Does ethnography provide a model for (re)definition of self and society and to what end? A worldly wise Samoan friend who lives in New York said that, if he had to choose an image for general consumption, he would rather be Margaret Mead's happy hedonist than Derek Freeman's rabid rapist. However, that reduces culture to a slogan rather than a representation.

The Tikopia liked what Firth wrote about them.[3] While the literacy rate was low on the island, there were men who had read some of Firth's books. There were also people alive who had known Firth and been his informants, and consequently there was discussion of his work. I was told by Tikopia that Firth, called in song *Te Ariki o to Tusi,* "the Chief of Writing," had made them famous throughout the world and that he had rightly recognized their importance. By contrast, they said, no one had bothered to write about their Melanesian neighbors (pace Roger Keesing and other ethnographers of the Solomon Islands). I therefore had to ask, when Tikopia made statements to me that occurred in the same form in the ethnography, whether they liked the Firth version of themselves so much that they had adopted it or was the ethnography the "truth."[4] Was this the persistence of culture or were they quoting? I also had to ask when they told stories about things that had happened previously and those stories differed from Firth's, whether they were redefining themselves for some reason or whether Firth had been incorrect. There was also the issue of how they judged and used the writings of James Spillius and Eric Larson, their subsequent ethnographers.

I, too, had liked Firth's version of this island and knew it well from his writings before I ever saw it. This raised a further question: not only whether Firth had invented the Tikopia, but whether he also invented me as an anthropologist.' The first ethnographer produces in the studied population certain expectations concerning subsequent fieldworkers. Equally, the first ethnography draws later fieldworkers into a relationship where they are caught between the immediacy of their own fieldwork and the written record—each experience triggers a memory of the ethnography. In my case, each fieldnote became a confirmation or rebuttal of Firth as well as a contemporary record. This was an interesting dilemma. The clarity of Firth's descriptions was inescapably superimposed on the Tikopia in which I lived because, although fifty years had passed, the changes in that society and the impact of Western ideas were not particularly strong. Some of the traditional religious ceremonies still existed, the household and personal names were the same, the island looked the same.

There are three interconnected issues I want to pursue. First, what is the relationship of the Tikopia to the ethnographies written about them? Have the Tikopia used ethnography to define or promote a certain identity? Alternatively, do their stories of significant happenings vary from the ethnographic record and, if so, why? There are stories that they tell about themselves and their place in the world that suggest a conscious creation of themselves vis-à-vis the Other (European or Melanesian). The second issue is that of the role actually played by anthropologists in some of the Tikopia's dealings with the larger political and economic world of the Solomon Islands. That is, what was the effect of ethnographies and other representations of the Tikopia to outsiders? When the anthropologists acted as cultural brokers on behalf of the Tikopia, they sometimes depicted them in terms that were designed to communicate with an audience that was neither academic nor indigenous but rather represented a narrow sectorial interest. However, the outcome produced was to the advantage of the Tikopia. While these writings may not be strictly defined as "ethnographic," the material on which they were based came from traditional fieldwork. The third issue grows in part out of the second: new modes of representation have been developed in anthropology to communicate with the academy, for and with the subjects, and for interest groups. But also at issue is the effect of ethnography on later fieldworkers, both in their relationship with earlier anthropologists and in the expectations generated in the subjects. This is ethnography as recursive loop where the original is recycled with commentary that does not pretend to impartiality.

The Tikopia and Ethnography

The title of Firth's first book about the island, *We, the Tikopia,* was not fortuitous; it was, he said, a translation of "a native expression which is constantly on the lips of the people themselves. It stands for a community of interest, that self-consciousness, that strongly marked individuality in physical appearance, dress, language and custom which they prize so highly" (1936, xxi). This suggests that the Tikopia had a sense of themselves in relation to outsiders before the first ethnography of them appeared. As Jocelyn Linnekin and Lin Poyer (1990, 1) point out, previous assumptions that the Pacific Islands were geographic isolates and culturally homogeneous are no longer valid (if, in fact, they ever were). The archaeological record shows that there were extensive trade and other networks in the Pacific long before Europeans arrived. Firth saw Tikopia in 1929 as "almost untouched by the outside world" (1936, 3). However, this appears to have meant *relatively* untouched by the *European* world. Certainly, Europeans rarely found the small island in the early days of Pacific exploration from the Northern Hemisphere, but this is a Eurocentric and passive reading of the Tikopia, which ignores their own extensive voyaging in the Pacific and the effect this had on their definition of themselves. To me in 1980, the appearance of the island and its inhabitants—the leaf houses, the barkcloth clothes, the canoes—also suggested an uncontaminated tropic idyll. However, the impression was not entirely accurate. Tikopia has been influenced by the wider world, but it has mainly been from a greater distance in time and space than more accessible islands, a distance that has given the Tikopia greater latitude to judge, choose, and assimilate change and, in the process, define themselves as individuals and as a society. Some of their definition of themselves takes its authority from ethnography, as other elements of their accepted history differ from the eyewitness accounts of the original happening.

I began this essay with a story about a Tikopia nurse quoting Firth's ethnography to me. He added that Firth had been given his information by elders who had direct knowledge of such matters and therefore the information was true. That Firth's informants included the *ariki* gave weight to what he had written. A chief does not make direct statements or give orders; his *mara* (executive officer) does this for him. To some extent, the anthropologist was seen in a similar role as amanuensis. Virtually no one on the island could read when Firth's books first were published, and even more recently only a few men and virtually no women can read this material easily. Nonetheless, there was a sense of Firth being the definitive authority and the authentic voice of the chiefs. A woman who is the granddaughter of the original Melanesian missionary told me to read Firth's account of her grandfather's coming to the island. She herself could not read, but she knew which book contained the story. A man whose line could be described as chief makers but not chiefs said that his family knew they were the "origin of the island," there before the chiefs. "We do not say anything, we just know and the *ariki* know and Firth knew and wrote it down." It was not simply that Firth wrote about claims to nobility or importance; he also wrote of families that carried the strain of albinism, and a person discussing a specific albino man said that he came from one of the lines Firth had identified. Similarly, an episode of insanity described in *We, the Tikopia* was referred to by a descendant of the brother of the mad woman—"it is known that there is madness in our family and Firth wrote it down." This was verification of history.

There are certain sociocultural aspects or characteristics that any group chooses to prize and promote when it is necessary to define itself vis-à-vis another group. By contrast, when there is a significant inequality in power, as in the impact of Western colonization, certain aspects of a culture are suppressed. A dominant Western invasion of a society was often supported by fiats against speaking the local language or using various customs defined by mission or administration *as* immoral or barbarous. Throughout this century the Tikopia did not, with the exception of Christianity, face a particularly powerful imposition of other rules and customs. Distance from the administrative centers of the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu muted external government. The small land area and population did not draw many labor recruiters or settlers, and missionaries were prevented from settling on the island until the early 1900s. There are still no Europeans permanently resident on the island. That meant that innovations (usually material ones such as the introduction of tobacco and cats) were often introduced by the Tikopia themselves returning from voyaging elsewhere. These innovations needed to be accepted by the chiefs and their executive officers.[6]

For the Polynesian Tikopia, their sense of identity probably first developed during voyages among their Melanesian neighbors. Precontact, the Solomons did not constitute a political entity. In an area where more than sixty different languages are spoken, each island was to a large extent autonomous. This set the basis for a continued assertion of separate identity in postcontact times when some Tikopia permanently settled in other parts of the Solomons but continued to hold to their language, customs, and dress,[7] justifying their practices, not just as custom, but more specifically as Tikopian. This sense of autonomy also influenced their dealings with the introduction of some European institutions, which often came to them mediated through Melanesians. From this strong sense of themselves as Tikopia, all their contacts with other groups of people and other ways of life have been molded uniquely, and syncretically, into something of Tikopia. While some of their accounts of the adoption of new religions and technologies, of their response to overpopulation and migration, and of their relationship with the wider Solomon Islands and its administration may appear as post hoc rationalizations of the inevitable, these accounts illustrate Tikopia ideas about the ways in which they coped successfully with change while maintaining the integrity of their cultural identity. In these cases, my informants were not particularly bound by earlier written versions of significant changes, such as the conversion of the island to Christianity and migration. The latter not only had the potential for wage earners to amass and return money and Western consumer goods to an island virtually unable to generate either internally, but it also exposed traveling Tikopia to other ways of life. Of more minor impact, from the Tikopia point of view, are the bureaucratic structures, first of colonial government and then of the independence of Solomon Islands from British rule and the establishment of indigenous government.

Colonial Impact

The Melanesian Mission (Anglican) first made contact with Tikopia in 1858, but a mission teacher was not allowed to live on the island until 1907.[8] He was a Melanesian man from the Banks Islands who subsequently married a Tikopia woman and lived on Tikopia the rest of his life. Tikopia was never subjected to missionization by Europeans who in the early days of contact had a distaste for local customs and a tendency to extirpate them. As well, Tikopians did not in any way feel inferior to their Melanesian neighbors, and therefore Melanesian missionaries and later administrators, while bringing about change, did not do so with the full impact of a European colonial power. Because of its isolation, Tikopia also appears in the early contact period to have been exposed to only the one form of Christianity, and that mediated not through Europeans but first through Melanesians and later ordained Tikopia themselves. Lacking the pressure of competing doctrines, the Tikopia worked out an accommodation of Christianity that ultimately preserved many of their traditional practices. In some other Pacific Islands, Christian missionaries introduced the idea of competitive giving of money to the church and required members to wear Western-style clothing, practices that required the indigenous people not only to change their spiritual belief systems, but also required them to earn money and enter into nontraditional exchange relationships. The lack of any avenue for earning money in Tikopia meant that the Tikopia were not forced into a Western economic system at the same time they espoused Christianity, so the disruption caused by the introduction of new ways was minimized.

In 1955 the entire island finally converted to Christianity when the remaining pagan chiefs decided that too many commoners had become Christian and that, for the unity of the island, all should share the same faith. The old chiefs thereupon called for baptism and made a final kava for their gods. Firth notes that the Ariki Taumako's action in dismissing his gods "was made in terms of a choice between alternatives; he did not intellectually reject the idea that his gods still existed, he decided not to worship them any longer" (1970, 391). Unlike Ariki Kafika, he did not bury his sacred objects but instead set them out in a small house to the seaward side of his living house. By 1980 this house was described to me (in English) as a "museum," and the fact that the old chief still made food offerings to the objects was tacitly ignored by the resident Melanesian Mission priest (a Tikopia and member of the Taumako clan). The Ariki Taumako, one of Firth's friends and informants, told me that Firth had described how sacred objects from other countries were matters of interest and respect when they were displayed in institutions called museums. To counter the usual missionary charge that pagan ritual objects were "of the darkness," the chief therefore renamed his sacred house a "museum,"

By 1980 the recounting of Tikopia's conversion to Christianity had been slightly recast. While the story of the conversion of the *ariki* was still told in the way Firth records it, in discussions about the general conversion of the island the emphasis had changed from one of the historical accident of initial contact by the Melanesian Mission to a story of choice. The story is now told that the chiefs had looked at the religions available in the Solomons and had rejected Catholicism on the grounds that it was unnatural to have unmarried priests. Seventh Day Adventism (adopted by another Polynesian outlier, Bellona) was rejected because their food prohibitions based on the abominations of Leviticus (which included shellfish and certain species of fish) would deplete their diet. The Melanesian Mission, it was said semijokingly, was chosen because it placed the fewest demands on the people.

This assertion of free choice and perceived lack of doctrinal rigidity is not the same as Firth's experience of the pressures exerted by the missionary. He reports that, in the early days of conversion, reversion to pagan customs such as the young men growing their hair and taking part in the old dances was punished by suspension from the church for a period. Of even greater import was the largely successful missionary ban on informal sexual liaisons among the unmarried. These liaisons were not expected to result in children; reproduction was deemed appropriate only for married couples, and one method of population control was to limit the number of people who might marry. Missionary pressure removed this limit and encouraged marriage among the sexually active, which resulted in a later population explosion and the need for some permanent migration. But by 1980 the Tikopia firmly believed they had completely controlled their conversion. This version of events clearly had allowed them to take control of the language and priesthood of the church, revive several aspects of traditional ritual, and make some accretions to their Anglicanism that were indigenous.

While the colonial (and later, independent) administration in Honiara had formulated laws and regulations for the government of the Solomons, Tikopia's acquiescence to central control was selective on their side and rarely enforced by regional or national authorities. In part this was because of Tikopia's small size and isolation—it was no threat to the internal stability of the Solomon Islands. However, this reinforced Tikopia belief in their self-determination and their sense of separateness from the Solomons. (Their habit of referring to trips away from Tikopia as "going to the Solomons" showed that they essentially believed, or at least acted as though, they were separate and independent.)

All adult males in the Solomons were required to pay a tax to the government. In 1952 it was a few shillings a year (cf. Firth 1959, 125-126). Almost every island group, with the exception of Tikopia, paid this poll tax. The government had decided that, in view of the lack of resources in Tikopia, it was not necessary to pursue the matter for the time being. However, by the 1960s there were considerable numbers of Tikopia living and working in other parts of the Solomons, and they refused to pay taxes. Firth (1969) details the grounds for this stance, which he suggests was caused by a misunderstanding between chiefs and government. Matters came to a head in 1966 when Firth was on his third visit to Tikopia and the district commissioner came to the island to discuss the matter with the chiefs. Firth (1969, 366) reports that the chiefs ordered all Tikopia to come to the meeting dressed in traditional clothing: "[I]t was clear that they wished to have a gesture of solidarity made manifest to the government officer—that the people were pronouncing themselves to be Tikopia, marking themselves off from the white man's world, and so indicating their support for the chiefs, in concrete fashion."

Firth left the island before the matter was resolved, but he later heard that the Tikopia in paid employment elsewhere paid taxes in subsequent years after some further discussion. The government, sensibly in Firth's view, had treated the problem as one of communication and the need for political education (1969, 374) rather than one that required them to challenge the chiefs directly.

By the early 1980s there was a widely known and reworked version of this occurrence. The story was told to me by Tikopia and Melanesian alike, and the style of its telling suggested that it had become mythic and was part of the Tikopian view of their own autonomy. The story of Tikopia's exemption from paying taxes relates that in the time of the old Ariki Kafika the government decided the Tikopia must also pay a tax. The Tikopia refused to pay because, as they rightly pointed out, most families had no source of income. While the Tikopia working in other parts of the Solomons would happily pay taxes in their area, in Tikopia itself it was impossible. The government thereupon sent a boat to Tikopia with officials to tell the Tikopia that the law insisted they pay. The government, it was pointed out, gave the Tikopia a dresser and medicine for the clinic, it paid for the two teachers, and it sent a boat every several months to the island. Their taxes would pay for these services, which might otherwise have to be discontinued.

The Ariki Kafika, to whom these facts were told, said that the government could take away its dresser and medicine, that the Tikopia had managed perfectly well with their traditional medicines in the past and would again. The government could, he said, also take its teachers—there were Tikopia, trained as teachers, who would return to the island and teach for nothing if their *ariki* required it. And as for the government boat—here the Ariki covered his head and body with a cloth, which cut off his beneficent power. Then three freak waves came up out of a still sea and smashed the superstructure of the government boat. The government officials hurried back to their ship and sailed away. And that is why Tikopia does not pay taxes to this day.

The three items supplied by the government and the three waves suggest a story elaborated in the telling. (And the number of tellers who were on that ship and saw the waves with their own eyes suggests a government boat the size of the *Lusitania.)* Nonetheless, the Tikopia on the home island were still not paying poll tax in 1980, and their belief in their chief's superior powers (and the Melanesian confirmation of that power) has added to their sense of their own autonomy and their ability to withstand bureaucratic and political intervention. That Tikopia in other parts of the Solomons should rightly pay taxes is taken for granted in half a sentence, while in Firth's eyewitness version it was the central issue in a dispute that lasted for several years.

John Shotter, in his essay "Rhetoric and the Roots of the Homeless Mind," discusses the way in which the stories we tell about ourselves create and recreate our lives: "a political ethics is in operation in which we are in contest with others for the very nature of our being, for the kind of person we feel we would like to be" (1993, 60). The Tikopia quite clearly define themselves as they would like to be and have, to an extraordinary extent, persuaded others to share that definition.

The Anthropologist as Cultural Broker

Since the mid-1800s labor recruiters have visited the Pacific Islands looking for laborers for enterprises variously in Peru, Australia, and other parts of the Pacific. Tikopia was not a prime target for recruiters who wanted to fill their ships quickly, but the island was affected nonetheless. Some men were taken to Queensland in the late nineteenth century but few survived. Firth reports that, of a group of twenty who were taken to a plantation in Guadalcanal about the turn of the century, only one survived, although the manager of the plantation absolved them from plantation work when they became dispirited with homesickness. A similar proportion survived other labor recruitments, and children taken away to mission schools also pined and died (Firth 1936, 42).

After this the government exempted Tikopia and other Polynesian outliers in the Protectorate from labor recruiting. In 1949 another attempt was made to use Tikopia as laborers in a Unilever plantation in the central Solomons. A large number died of malaria, some of unhappiness, and all disliked working with the Malaitans whose magic they feared. Neither did they settle easily to routine work with set hours and quotas to be met, and the whole enterprise was a failure.

In 1953 Tikopia was in a poor state, recovering from the famine that followed two cyclones. If men could go away to work it would both relieve the pressure of population on the devastated island and also allow the absent workers to send food home to relatives on the island. However, Unilever staff, unimpressed by the Tikopia's past work record, were not enthusiastic about recruiting any more Tikopia. The local manager found them charming, pathetic in their innocence of the outside world, and hopeless as plantation workers, so the company decided, to the dismay of the people, to recruit no more Tikopia (Spillius 1957, 93). While Firth informally advised the Tikopia chiefs of his views on the payment of taxes and their relationship with the government of the Solomon Islands, James Spillius, who was with Firth on his second visit to Tikopia in 1952-1953, intervened in this case, at the request of the chiefs, to explain the Tikopia to a multinational corporation. He described Tikopia work patterns and social and economic relations and asked for another trial. As a result of his intervention the recruiter agreed to take more Tikopia. They were given land to cultivate for their own needs, land for a church, and flexible working hours. They were not required to work with the Malaitans. Under the more liberal and understanding treatment the new workers received, their production outstripped the Malaitans, previously the best workers. The experiment was successful, and it set the pattern for Tikopia migrants to build an environment congenial to themselves rather than having to adapt completely to the conditions of their host area. No other labor group was accorded such privileges.

Firth's anthropological record and direct intervention by Spillius helped explain the Tikopia to outsiders and alter the treatment they received. It was, to the Tikopia, another piece of evidence that convinced them that their traditional way of life was taken seriously, especially by Europeans, and that anthropologists and their information could be used to further Tikopian ends. Spillius did not write an ethnography, as such, about the Tikopia. His description of their customs and beliefs was made verbally to Unilever managers and perhaps exists in briefing papers to the company. His one accessible written record of this intervention was written for the Unilever house magazine, *Progress.* In this article Spillius (1957) uses the word "simple" several times: the Tikopia were taught simple techniques; they failed to grasp a simple idea. He wrote that their dances made a "frightful din," that they presented "novel and difficult problems," and that aspects of their behavior were "characteristic of many primitive societies, especially in the early stages of contact."

Spillius explained his position: "The assistance I was able to offer as a social anthropologist lay in interpreting each side to the other, culturally as well as linguistically. Because of his technical knowledge, an anthropologist can provide on the spot information on aspects of native culture that are directly related to plantation work" (1957, 96). Despite its paternalism, this proved to be effective cultural brokerage, and it grew from a request by the Tikopia themselves. It was also couched in terms that are patronizing and stereotypical but comprehensible to European business managers. Trinh Minh-ha's criticism of the voice that writes the Other (1989, 47-48) can easily be invoked against Spillius. However, that is too easy an exercise against something written forty years ago, and more subtle analysis should be applied. While it is probably not a representation of themselves that the Tikopia would like, Homi Bhabha's concept of "stereotype-as-suture," provides more useful discussion, in this context, on the construction of discriminatory knowledges that depend on the "presence of difference" (1994, 80). Spillius gave Unilever management an understanding that stitched together a useful praxis. It also gave the Tikopia a presence in the labor market that was to their liking.

Ten years after Spillius' intervention, Eric Larson, who worked with Tikopia now well settled on the Unilever plantation at Nukufero, wrote about Tikopia-Unilever labor management relations from an economic perspective:

> The present extension of accommodation to Tikopia labor . . . helps to create an image of liberal, enlightened, and beneficent enterprise. [However], [w]ill Lever's, for its part, continue to take advantage of Tikopia ethnocentrism and maintain a separation of the various ethnic groups now employed on the estate? . . . Lever's managers made it no secret that they trusted Tikopia laborers more than Melanesians, whom they saw (correctly) as more militant and sophisticated in their relationship with the company. . . . The Melanesians, themselves disgruntled by the special treatment received by their Polynesian counterparts, could be expected

> to reject them as collaborators in the struggle against management, and the continuing split in labor's ranks would enable Lever's to carry on indefinitely with a policy of divide and rule (Larson 1970, 208-209).

The Tikopia's treatment by Levers, and in later matters such as their resettlement in Makira, confirmed to them that they were indeed separate from the wider Solomon Islands polity (both during colonization and after independence) and could negotiate to their own benefit in dealings with both multinationals and the government. If ethnography and ethnographers could be used to the same end, well and good.

Ethnographers and Ethnography

Ethnography speaks to the subjects, to interested outsiders, and to other anthropologists, each audience taking something different from the same text. Tikopia has a clear lineage of ethnography beginning with a powerful ancestor: Firth, whose fieldwork was carried out in 1928-1929, and briefly in 1952 and 1966; Spillius, who was in Tikopia in 1952-1953; and Larson, who worked with the Tikopia in the Unilever plantations on Nukufero from 1964 to 1965. Firth, Spillius, and Larson over a period of forty years each represented the Tikopia through ethnography that must be recognized as "historically contingent and culturally configured" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, 9). Therefore, in accordance with the changing tropes of anthropology and their own theoretical perspectives, Firth records, Spillius intervenes, and Larson critiques.

The Tikopia themselves say they are pleased with the way in which they have been portrayed by all these writers, but an increase in literacy and access to the many publications on them may (or may not) change this view. Rosaldo (1989, chap. 2) reports on Chicano dissatisfaction with most ethnography written about them and, in parodying the ethnographic style to write about American customs, points up what he calls the "problem of validity in ethnographic discourse [which] has reached crisis proportions" (49). But perhaps the central issue in ethnographic writing is not a search for validity or any other single accomplishment. Critics such as the Comaroffs have implied that ethnography is inadequate in its "naive empiricism, its philosophical unreflectiveness, its interpretive hubris" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, 8). However, the same authors argue, ethnography personifies, in its methods and models, the inescapable dialectic of fact and value to present accounts that are refractory representations but nonetheless can be grounded in the social, cultural, and historical (9). There is also the creative tension that comes from multiple accounts and many audiences.

All of these writers affected my fieldwork and interpretations. While some of Firth's records from his three periods of fieldwork differ from current versions of the same incidents, these are minor matters and common to all human groups who edit and retell their histories. More notable is the congruence of information between informants separated by fifty years. I collected statements about the position of women who leave their husbands, what constitutes beauty, why the Ariki Kafika is first among equals, the place of betel chewing on social occasions, and a thousand other details of Tikopia life. Time and again my recorded statements were almost identical in form and content with statements Firth had published in his ethnographies.[9] While I ask ironically in my introduction whether they had read the book, one must also take account of a history that was not as disrupted as many in the Pacific. Perhaps the stories of self, developed in a less confrontational environment, last longer because of continuing relevance and therefore remain to be transmitted to anthropologists over several generations. Or perhaps, in a society that respects the *ariki* and elders, if Firth said his information came from respected people it was deemed incontrovertible.

Subsequent anthropologists—Spillius and Larson—dealt with specific problems such as the Unilever crisis and the new settlements of Tikopia. Neither they, nor I, have attempted the grand ethnography, in part because the changes were not so great that a new detailing of kin relations or land tenure (except in the settlements) was required. Instead, we followed administrative, economic, or feminist trails. In my case feminism put a subtle slant into the discourse between Firth's ethnography and me and the Tikopia transmitting Firth and their culture to me. At the time of my fieldwork, anthropology was examining its failure to represent women except through the eyes of male informants of male anthropologists.[10] Second-generation female anthropologists reexamining societies described by male anthropologists often found that the thoughts and activities of the women had been accorded less importance than they deserved. Before going to Tikopia I read Firth's work carefully, and I was also aware of the work on other Polynesian societies, especially descriptions of the role of women. It seemed to me that although Firth had described Tikopia women sympathetically, in comparison with other Polynesian societies they appeared to have less social and ritual importance. This, to my mind, was probably the result of Firth as a male being excluded from women's groups, a deficiency I planned to remedy. Fieldwork and inclusion in women's groups (and exclusion from men's groups) soon showed me that Tikopia women of 1980 had even less social and ritual importance than Firth had suggested for earlier times. Many young men had left the island by 1980 for paid labor elsewhere in the Solomons. Often they married women of other islands, and the supply of potential husbands for young Tikopia females was dwindling; only one in three girls could expect to marry, a state that brought the only status to which a woman could aspire. The loss of young men to migration also increased the workload of the single women. They had to climb coconut trees, squeeze coconut cream, and occasionally paddle canoes—all activities previously forbidden to females. This assumption of male duties did not, however, include an assumption of male importance. Rather, it appeared to be provoking a tighter redefinition of the position of women (which, in Tikopia, is on their knees in the presence of males).

My relationship with the ethnography of Tikopia was also paradoxical. To win my professional spurs I had to produce my own version of the island, tell my own just-so story. Mary Louise Pratt, in her delightful "Fieldwork in Common Places" (1986), suggests ethnographic roles—the Firthian scientist-king, the Evans-Pritchardesque explorer-adventurer—that one plays after enacting the arrival narrative. My ship arrived at dawn, nature imitating art as it so often and elegantly does. Thus I could produce a creditable opening narrative. Thereafter, I rather liked the idea of being an intrepid Victorian woman traveler (the sort that rode through deserts with Bedouin), transcending my sex and conversing equally with men and women. The Tikopia however, having been anthropologized previously, had a much clearer perception of my role, first as a woman and second as a fieldworker, and they were firm in enforcing it. It also involved defining me. In this male-dominated society, a woman had to be under the care of family males, and I was often asked why my husband had let me out alone. It was also assumed that Raymond Firth was in a father relationship to me and that therefore the Tikopia had a responsibility to look after me. Consequently, I was attached to a family and a young married man in the role of my son-in-law technically could tell me what to do. He told me to stop wandering round the island" talking to everyone and said that if I wanted to learn to be a Tikopia woman (the anthropologist's opening gambit backfiring) I should stay in my house unless I was required to work in the family gardens. The directions of the other men were less domestically specific, but they all included doing what men told me and getting information about the island from men because the women were ignorant. An interesting corollary of this was that they also said that everything Raymond had written was allegedly correct if I questioned it in any way. Tikopia women do not question the actions and statements of their men, always in ideology, usually in practice. There were also areas of knowledge that were regarded as being the domain of males only and not of concern to women. These included religion, politics, and public affairs. It was recognized that I knew more than I should about old ritual matters from Firth, but an explicit order went out from a senior man that I should not be shown any of the ritual paraphernalia kept at Uta, the site of many of the most sacred traditional rituals, and that it was inappropriate to discuss such matters with me, although some men did.

A second problem arose in that my informants kept quoting Firth (or the ethnographic validity that Firth had inscribed). Pratt (1986, 28-32) also discusses the controversial work of Florinda Donner (1982), *Shabono,* in which Donner produced an ethnographically correct account of the Yanomamo, but there was some suspicion that it had come from the existing and detailed literature on that group rather than from Donner's own fieldwork. Would I therefore be suspected of writing another *We, the Tikopia* from a hotel in Honiara? Alternatively, would I be seen as a traitor to feminism in that I had not exposed a ferocious androcentrism?

I pose my paradox ironically. In truth, I collected information for another version of a Tikopia fifty years on from Firth's first visit, I spoke to women and gained new insights from a paradigm undreamed in 1929. Then I wrote a thesis in a manner appropriate to my status in the discipline because, according to Paul Rabinow, one cannot be experimental without tenure. After that my representation of the Tikopia engaged with the symbolic and reflexive, seeking a voice to describe my perceptions of Tikopia. But under my voice was an imbrication of voices: Firth's, the Tikopia's, the Tikopia quoting Firth, and a discipline trying hard to get it right.

Notes

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1. I carried out fieldwork in the Solomon Islands in 1979-1980, first with a group of resettled Tikopia in Nukukaisi village, Makira Island, and later in Tikopia itself.

2. In this chapter I refer to the first edition of *We, the Tikopia* (1936).

3. Richard Feinberg writes that his fieldwork in Anuta was made easier by the Anutans' knowledge of Firth's sympathetic writings about Tikopia and the Tikopians' respect and *arofa* for Firth (Feinberg 1979).

4. Niko Besnier addresses the question of a "cover story" in chapter 2.

5. Tom Ryan has referred me to John and Jean Comaroff who report seeing in 1968 the following graffito on a lavatory door at London School of Economics: "Is Raymond Firth real or just a figment of the Tikopian imagination?" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, 9).

6. During my fieldwork in 1980, I saw returning contract laborers bringing chairs to Tikopia. The *tapu* of the head makes it inappropriate for one person to sit higher than another. Therefore, it was made clear to the chair owners that these items could become storage shelves but they were not to be sat upon in Tikopia.

7. Tikopia women often continued to wear a skirt and no top in their settlements in other parts of the Solomon Islands. The skirt may have been of bought cloth rather than barkcloth, but the definition of which parts of the body should be covered continued to be traditionally Tikopia despite Melanesian neighbors referring to female bare-breastedness as *sainting blong bus,* "something belonging to the bush," that is, primitive.

8. See Firth 1936 and 1970 for a discussion of the conversion of Tikopia to Christianity.

9. My thesis supervisor was well versed in the Tikopia corpus. Several times while reading drafts of my thesis she marked passages and said that I should acknowledge the quotation from Firth. With irritation, I replied that they had said it to me, too.

10. This is, of course, both a generalization and an oversimplification of the state of the discipline. Such a gross statement is used as a portmanteau to carry the discussion on rather than rehearsing all the details of the development of the anthropology of women or feminist anthropology.

11. He used the word *takavare,* which means to wander aimlessly like an adolescent.