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Mana and Māori culture: Raymond Firth's pre-Tikopia years

Patrick Lavolette 

ABSTRACT

As a preliminary biographical exploration, this article provides an introductory study into Raymond Firth's early research, as it initially related to Māoridom. Using archival and creative collaborative techniques to look at anthropology's contemporary past, it contends that Firth is amongst the earliest founders of the ethnographic approach known as 'the anthropology of/at home'. A significant interest in the biographic description of anthropologists is currently taking place. As a newly developing self-conscious genre, the intellectual biography is becoming central to the way in which the discipline writes its own history. This paper not only provides an introduction into Firth's Māori work (as found in his MA and PhD research), but also demonstrates the use of experimental methods in creating an 'archaeology of us'. In seeing the lesser known and largely disregarded elements of Firth's personal history as a poorly investigated type of biographical data, I suggest that such interdisciplinary approaches are essential in conducting biographical research. Despite two *Festschriften* honouring Firth's contributions to the discipline, there is as yet no lengthy biography of this acclaimed economic anthropologist. He was 'born and bred' in Aotearoa/NZ, but migrated to the UK in 1924 to pursue his doctorate. By tracing the early career path and initial written output of one of the longest lived and most influential ethnographers/ethnologists in the discipline's legacy, this paper contributes to expanding the biographical genre – both regarding antipodean academic history, as well as in dealing with international migration, the movement of ideas and social anthropology's diasporic intellectual landscapes.

KEYWORDS

Raymond Firth;
anthropological biography;
Māori culture; Aotearoa/New
Zealand

Preamblings

My mother's father was from a north-of-Ireland peasant family, and her mother was the daughter of a London doctor, with her mother in turn from Cornwall. (Firth in Parkin 1988, 327)

25 March 2008

Dear Sir Raymond,

Happy birthday. I hope you'll forgive these intrusions of familiarity from someone who's never actually met you. As far as I can work out, the closest I came to having this honour was in attending Nicholas Thomas' inaugural Firth lecture at SOAS on 6 March

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2002. Now, however, after noticing a 'Cornwall connection' in your *Current Anthropology* interview with David Parkin, I thought I'd belatedly introduce myself. Indeed, your work on English kinship has proved invaluable in helping to justify some of the rationale behind my own research on Cornish perceptions of place and landscape. Last year, I moved away from London to take up a position within the School of Visual & Material Culture in Wellington, NZ. Before doing so, I had even met with Peter Gathercole on a few occasions so that he could coach me through how to adapt to the antipodean anthropology scene. He even gave me some of his lecture notes dating back to when he moved to Otago to help create a more four fields department.¹

So far so good. But oh blimey, what have I got myself into now? In all my wisdom, despite already working on countless projects, only a handful of which ever get to see the light of day in terms of completion, I've decided to attempt some biographical account of your Māori research. Somehow I even managed to convince the University's research fund to allocate some money to this effect. I've now got nine months to spend over nine grand on a topic I know next to nothing about. Fortunately, I've budgeted for a research assistant to help with some of the legwork.

Even more fortunately still, I recently met an historical anthropologist finishing her dissertation on one of your former anthropological contemporaries, Reo Fortune (Thomas 2009; 2011). She's supposed to submit this month. I hope to hell that she takes me up on the invitation to free me of some of this research money in exchange for a couple of months of skilled labour in finding some usable material about your past work in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Anyway, I thought I'd get in touch to see if you might be able to help me carve out an interesting angle.

Thanks and best wishes,

Dr Patrick LAVIOLETTE
Director of Postgraduate Studies, SVMC

20 June 2008

Dear Professor Firth,

Hiya again. After several months of waiting for my potential research assistant, she finally seems to have taken up my offer to start digging into your past interest on Māori culture. She's still not quite finished her PhD thesis, but says she close enough so that she can start with some background work whilst writing her conclusion.

All best, Patrick

14 Aug. 2008

Kia ora Sir Raymond,

Progress has been slow over the past months, but we finally approached your son to formally request access to archives at Auckland Grammar School and Auckland University,

which he kindly granted. I embarrassingly sent him an email thinking I was only replying to my RA Caroline which read: 'well done for getting him to email you the consent letter, saving us time ... I hear that he hardly ever uses email, which is why Raymond's niece Greta had given me her cousin's phone number in the first place'. Oops!! The worse thing in sending such a message is that Caroline hadn't told him how she had obtained his phone number. Oh well, maybe he'll never read the email.

Anyhow, when Caroline went to Auckland Univ with the consent letter, she met an archivist who eventually explained that everything that was part of the University of NZ in the 1920s would have been sent to the National Archives here in Wellington.

All best wishes, PL

15 Nov. 2008

Dear Raymond,

Things really seem to be advancing now that I've suggested to Caroline that she visit Wellington for a little field trip excavation in the National Archives. I've been too busy to initiate such digging and she's better trained at sieving through such documents.

So together we piled through several dusty boxes labelled 'R.W Firth'. We found copies of your original birth certificate as well as transcripts of your university grades. Times have certainly changed when it comes to the types of marks that would encourage a student to pursue their career into postgraduate studies. Caroline equally managed to retrieve two unpublished papers submitted to the *JPS* in 1925. These seem to have been both turned down. She also located a copy of your MA examination report, produced by the British political economist J.S. Nicholson.

So anyway, I hope I'm not betraying too much confidential information in writing down these details – informed consent is obviously a grey area in the world of biography. I guess the best yardstick here will be to constantly seek publishing approval from your son and other parties involved.

All best, PL

12 Jan. 2009

Dear Patrick,

Yes, it was a very pleasant and productive afternoon, and thank you for your article in **Reviews in Anthropology**.² It looks most interesting. Here is the first paper I wrote on Jim Davidson. More will follow.

John Barnes' autobiography was published by Lulu.

All the best,

Doug Munro

Adjunct Professor of History, VUW³

Kiwi family background

Raymond William Firth was born in Auckland on 25 March 1901. He died in London one hundred years and eleven months later, on 22 February 2002, a month and three days shy of his 101 birthday. His was a rather typical upbringing of the working class, colonial settler sort – raised in a fairly strict Methodist household in which Sunday school was compulsory, swearing prohibited and alcohol shunned.

Firth's grandfather William migrated to New Zealand in 1886 with his second wife Mary Ann (née Taylor), their son Wilfred Taylor Firth and two sons from his previous marriage to Alice (née Foster). These were Wesley who was 13 years old and a two year older brother, Joshua (15), who died aged 25 on 7 November 1896, 10 years after arriving. William's first son, Thomas Henry, remained in England.

Raymond's father, Wesley Hugh Bourne Firth, was born in Lancashire on January 23rd 1873. On their arrival in New Zealand the family settled in Claremont Street, where they remained until the deaths of William (20/5/1892) and Mary Ann (7/11/1892). Wesley took up residence with Jane Marie Cartmill, Raymond's mother (born 29 August 1876, Auckland NZ). They were married on 21 December 1898 in Auckland. She died on 1 December 1962, Otara, Auckland, aged 86 and was buried on 4 December in Auckland's Purewa Cemetery.

Known by her second name, Marie, she was the eldest child of James Cartmill (moved from Belfast 1874) and Jane Weedon (moved from London also 1874). James was caretaker/gardener of the Auckland Domain. He then became a pioneer farmer in Onewhero, Lower Waikato, West of Tuakau. He also worked on Great South Road, Bombay Hills. Born in Auckland, Marie was from Onewhero and educated there. She met Wesley at Grafton Methodist Church. Initially, in New Zealand, he was apprenticed to Henry (with John's Thomas). After the death of his parents in 1892, Wesley resided with Joshua and Willie Winn at both 12 and 14 Claremont Street. Along with Willie Winn, Ben Cranwell and Jack Parkinson they collectively acquired a yacht called the *Maybelle*. Wesley established his own successful building business, later 'Firth & Gray', operating from Nugent Street, Grafton.

After their marriage, he and Marie resided in six different places in the Auckland area: Millais Street (1898); and Murdoch Street Grey Lynn; 49 St John's Avenue, Remuera (1904); 'The Grange' farm Mauku/Karaka, West of Pukekohe (1910); Manurewa; then Otara, South Auckland (1915). In his last months of widowhood, Wesley Firth lived in Papatoetoe, South Auckland. He also became a highly respected doyen of Papatoetoe Bowling Club. He died in 1977, aged 104.

Wesley and Marie had three children, Raymond, Gretta [1905–7] and Cedric [1908–94], but their daughter died of measles in her second year. Cedric Harold Firth was greatly influenced by his father, more so than Raymond. After attending Auckland Grammar School Cedric was a builder apprentice. He trained as an architect at Auckland University College. Afterwards from 1931 he travelled to Europe and visited new housing schemes built during the depression. On his return to New Zealand in 1937, Cedric settled in Wellington and became an acclaimed social housing architect. The brothers described each other as life-long friends, but they were never especially close. Cedric had two daughters, one of whom is named after the sister he never knew.

Fairly short, slight of build and not particularly into sport, the first-born son Raymond was a rather pensive, erudite boy who enjoyed books. Indeed, his father had initially wanted Raymond to become a farmer, but soon saw 'that letters attracted me' (Firth in Thompson 2000). His best friend at school was Edgar Burton who became a journalist for the *New Zealand Herald*. Another friend, Robert A. Falla [1901–79], later became a respected ornithologist and director for Canterbury Museum (1937–47) and Wellington's Dominion Museum (1947–66). Falla is credited with the frontispiece photograph of Waewa Te Kotahitanga in Firth's *Economics of the NZ Māori*. Burton, Falla and Firth formed a group comprising four or five school kids who used to go to the coast looking for sea birds. They would also explore and 'study' abandoned Māori hill forts (the subject of one of an early publication, see below).

In 1914, as a young teenager, Firth became the first student from his school to ever win a Junior National Scholarship. So the following year he moved to Auckland Grammar School. The second headmaster there, Harold James Del Monte Mahon, was an English teacher and became Firth's earliest intellectual mentor, asking him back later to teach once his MA was done. In his interview with Thompson in 2000, he recalls liking to read a lot in the public and school libraries, including Robert Burton. He equally admits to being aware for having an eccentric taste for the exotic and ethnographic, especially through scanning articles in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society*. He read J.H.R. Rivers (1914) *History of Melanesian Society* and later some of Captain Cook's voyages. Ballantyne, Belloc, Dickens, Kingsley, Kipling and Scott are listed amongst the fiction he was fond of reading.

Judith Macdonald (2002, 53–55) an anthropologist at Waikato University, wrote in her *Oceania* obituary:

He attended Auckland Grammar School where, at the age of 14, he found a copy of F.E. Maning's *Old New Zealand* which, he said, laid the foundation for his interest in the New Zealand Māori. As a school boy, he also discovered the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* in Auckland Public Library, became a reader and, later, a contributor. In 1925 he published an article in the *JPS* on a Māori pa, and 76 years later at the age of 100, one of his last pieces of work, on Tikopia dreams, was published in the same journal. Growing up in New Zealand, Firth had Māori friends and learned their language which helped him acquire fluency in the cognate language of Tikopia in his later fieldwork. He was also aware of the effect of colonisation on the Māori and the immorality of the expropriation of their land, which he later discussed in his doctoral thesis.

[...] in 1924a wrote a Master's thesis, *The Kauri Gum Industry*. During his research he travelled to the north of the country and interviewed gum miners about their lives, working conditions and wages, an unusual approach for an economist and one which prepared him for his introduction to anthropology.

Firth's university education was supported by the Senior National Scholarship scheme. He completed a BA in the subject of Economics, whilst also reading courses in English and Chemistry. His MA was in Economics and History, equally at University College Auckland, which was then still part of the University of New Zealand. Upon his father's insistence, he was a full-time student, which would have been unusual at the time. By his own admission, he did not excel as an undergraduate (Davis 2004). His main accomplishment seems to have been to receive a bare pass of 35% by John Maynard Keynes [1883–1946] in 1919, an external examiner who notoriously failed most of the class, but who is also known to have employed postgraduate students for marking.

Firth's Masters Dissertation was examined by another famous British economist, John Shield Nicholson [1850–1927] from the University of Edinburgh. It is at this stage in his university career that things began to really change. Nicholson awarded him the highest First Class recommendation possible (95%) for his research into the Northland's Kauri gum digging industry. The thesis formed 'the basis of his first article, published in the *New Zealand Journal of Science and Technology*' (Davis 2004, 73).⁴ The Kauri⁵ tree (*Agathis australis*) can live up to 1800–2000 years. It is the second largest growing pine species in the world, rising up to 50 meters, with a trunk diameter of up to 20 meters, although five to eight is the norm for mature specimens.⁶ As with many conifers, Kauri secrete an orange viscous resin that slowly fossilizes into solid crystals in the soil. This gum as it is so-called has a variety of purposes, especially as a varnish and linoleum. A museum in the West coast town of Matakoho is dedicated to the history of its extraction, as well as the forestry of the tree itself. As far as I could detect on a visit in 2009, the museum makes no mention of Firth's MA project, which as Macdonald points out, would have been unorthodox for an economics thesis since it included data gleaned from first-hand interviews with Māori and Dalmatian gum diggers about their work and lives (Hayward 1982; Bozic-Vrbancic 2005).

The first-class distinction given to him by Professor Nicholson granted him free passage to the UK to pursue his postgraduate studies. Before that, however, in the summer of 1921–22, he tramped through Tuhoë, the mountainous region of East central North Island (Burton 1924; Huntsman 2003). At this point, he had attained a basic knowledge of the Māori language. In 1923 he returned to Auckland Grammar School, this time to teach (Form 3C), whilst also studying for a Diploma in Social Science. For this, he was taught by William Anderson whose broad scholastic interests in psychology and philosophy Firth found inspiring.

Free passage

In the mid-1920s, an eager graduate approaching his 25th birthday, Firth decided to take up the free passage opportunity and pursue his Ph.D. research in London. At the time he was engaged to the daughter of his parents' friends. It appears that Eileen Pope, Reo Fortune's second wife and a friend of Cedric Firth, was present on one occasion when Mrs Firth publicly broke this news (Thomas pers. comm). In 1924, a few months before leaving, his father agreed to support him with £250 a year towards his doctoral studies and arranged for him to take some elocution lessons to reduce his Kiwi accent.⁷

At first Raymond stayed in a hotel in the centrally located Bloomsbury area. He then lodged with a Boots store manager in Hendon, a Northwest suburb in the Borough of Barnet where, funnily enough, his room looked over a field of sheep. Initially planning to do an economic study of New Zealand's frozen meat industry, he instead fell under the influence of Bronislaw Malinowski [1884–1942] upon arriving at the LSE because the economics professor he had intended to work with was abroad on holiday. The two were introduced by Charles Seligman [1873–1940], when Firth had visited his office to express an interest in taking some anthropology modules.⁸ This encounter with Malinowski, whom Firth had already had the opportunity to read, ended up in both a change of topic and of discipline, after about six months of attending the now famous research seminar that converted so many researchers in cognate fields of study.

Malinowski eventually became the doctoral supervisor for Firth's economic anthropology thesis,⁹ his first student to successfully complete. He would strategically choose George Pitt-Rivers [1890–1966] as the external examiner because of the huge influence that Pitt-Rivers had in the world of anthropology and ethnology.

Firth's Ph.D. project focused on the exchange system of pre-European Māori society. *Primitive Economics of the New Zealand Māori* was completed and published nearly 90 years ago, in 1929. Aotearoa was not such a fashionable term in those days, whereas expressions such as primitive and savage were prominent in a number of key anthropological publications (by Lévi-Strauss and Malinowski for instance). The word 'primitive' was subsequently dropped in the 1959 edition. Firth's study, based mostly on library archive research with some of his own memories and personal tramping experience complementing methodologically, still holds the attention today's economists. Its main premise is to unpack how traditional Māori society coped with exchange, production, possession and work without the infrastructural institutions (banks, prices, standardized currencies, loans, wages and so on) that Western societies are immersed in and take for granted. Nearly a century of further research has amended, contested, elaborated upon and even corrected Firth's analysis. Nonetheless, several of his basic conclusions are still considered valid (Easton 2001).

Traditional Māori tribal clans had successfully operated for generations on the grounds of the accumulation of *mana*, (a type of prestige and community respect) rather than accumulating wealth, as measured in monetary terms. A central concept upon which the entire project hinges, *mana* is to this book, what *hau* is to Mauss' gift (1925). To illustrate this point, Firth even dedicates the whole work with the loaded statement 'TO DR BRONISLAW MALINOWSKI Teacher and Friend under whose *Mana* this book was written' (1929: 5). By working with honour, Māori citizens added to their own personal *mana*, as well as to the *mana* of their *whanau* (family group). In such a system, labour is regarded as an honoured and valued activity. Even chiefs and elders were expected to contribute to various forms of physical labour. To this day, the *ohu* (work group) continues to be a powerful force within Māoridom.

Compared with most Western economic settings, traditional Māori society did not produce as many physical possessions since they were not in the same level of demand. Firth's project shows how concepts of ownership were themselves fundamentally different from what they are today. Possessing land was part of an exceptionally complex set of systems and the discrepancies with the European colonial model of ownership are behind some of the most violent episodes in the history between Māori and *Pākehā* settlers. We should think of the Māori, he demonstrates, as holding land in a community trust, which gave the individual the right to work it, but not to dispose of it. A Māori's land enhanced their own personal *mana* and gave them *turangawaewae* – a strong sense of self in community. Sensitive and astute as it is, even such an interpretation obscures the emotional attachment and inalienability of the land. This is something the work of one of his doctoral supervisees at the LSE, Joan Metge (1976; 2002; 2004), would demonstrate from her more fully immersive participant observation perspective.

Joan defended her Ph.D. in 1958. As one of his most gifted anthropological protégée from New Zealand, her career profile itself helps illustrate the two-way exchange of ideas between Firth and indigenous Māori scholars/topics. His own continued engagement with those doing ethnographic fieldwork on Aotearoa/NZ issues, right up to

1990s is not mentioned more explicitly in this paper since this is the idea behind a further collaborative study; one that considers the work of Māori scholars and other intellectuals from the Pacific who visited him at home or in the field in order to learn. Outlining the trajectories of those who became leaders and/or scholars in and beyond Oceania would help identify some of the shifting points in anthropology's mid-twentieth century development (e.g. Lavolette and Munro, *forthcoming*).

While Māori were involved in exchange, they did not actually barter, buy, borrow, loan or sell things in the way in which we understand such terms. Instead, clothing, food, ornaments and other exchangeable items were given by one group to another. Typically there would be no immediate payment for gifts. Yet a principle of reciprocity, classically outlined by Marcel Mauss (1925), placed an obligation on the recipients to make *utu* at some later date. Such 'repayment' carried with it the expectation of being of a higher value than the original gift. Such exchanges were not enforced as such. If the *utu* was not met, however, then the recipient would lose *mana* and in practical terms this would mean that future opportunities for exchange would disappear. Firth and Mauss [1872–1950] met for the first time in 1926 in Paris via Malinowski's introduction. They did not converse much themselves on this first encounter, but met again several times afterwards. Firth remembered that Mauss was happy to show off a limited knowledge of indigenous terminology with him and recalled later that he was quite unconvinced that the Parisian had actually understood the real dynamics of *hau* circulation (James 1998, 22–3).

Likely influenced by his friendship with Edward Evans-Pritchard [1902–1973], Firth has intended to show with his doctoral thesis that a rationale existed behind the 'magical' elements such as *tapu* (sacredness) and *rahui* (prohibition). In his eyes, these frequently had common-sense economic foundations. Used to protect the land and environment from undue economic exploitation, they underlined the significance of production processes for the entire community. Our own modern European systems demonstrate certain similarities with the features of the economics of pre-colonial Māori life. Though not recognized in such terms, our economic dealings within family, friendships, the community and work groups often involve concepts like *mana*, *ohu*, *utu* and even *tapu* and *rahui*. But only a fraction of these similarities derives directly from our understanding of Māori culture. Rather, many of these aspects are remnants of the pre-industrial, pre-commercial time in Western Europe.

In my boyhood, the Māori wars were over, but the aftermath was very visible – a Māori people compressed from total ownership of the land into limited areas, often of marginal quality, and facing many problems of adaptation. So, right from my boyhood, idea of ethnic difference and discrimination, in culture and resources, were present to me and stimulated my anthropological interests. (Firth quoted in Parkin 1988, 328)

Raymond Firth became a fully-fledged ethnographer of Tikopia, an island of under 1300 inhabitants in the Southwestern Pacific Ocean. It is part of the Solomon Islands of Melanesia, but is culturally Polynesian in character. He 'chose', or rather was allocated Tikopia, due to the options available by the Australian National Research Council in consultation with Alfred Radcliffe-Brown [1881–1955] and Ian Hogbin [1904–1989] after his arrival in Sydney during November 1927.¹⁰ The island was manageable in size as well as remote, thus uncultured as a fieldsite (to use an old-fashioned expression that depicts the relative limited influence of the outside world). He spent 50 weeks in Tikopia and returned

numerous times afterwards. His work there, largely outside the scope of the present article, developed into the publication of nine monographs – a historiography that has already been well documented elsewhere (e.g. see Davis 2004).

Before undertaking this now-famous Tikopian fieldwork, however, Firth published several papers independently from his doctoral thesis (1927a), demonstrating an ability to prolifically adapt his research material into succinct essays. These include four pieces published in 1925. Two appear in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* and two in the Royal Anthropological Institute's (RAI) journal *Man*: a classic paper on Māori carvers, which demonstrates his interests from an early stage in the anthropology of art, a subject he would continue to pursue throughout his career (1925b); an article about Māori economic psychology, a summary of sorts of his main thesis (1925c); a short descriptive piece about store houses (1925d); and a piece on the ancestral lands of the Korekore pa. Again, anticipating his interest in art, he noted in this article: 'One of the most interesting features of the pa is the presence of carvings in the sandstone wall of one of the rectangular pits' (1925a, 8).

Two articles were published the following year (1926a, 1926b), one on normal dwellings 'Wharepuni' and another about Polynesian proverbs, mostly Māori ones. The year he defended his thesis also saw the publication of two articles. The first was an abridged version of the dissertation's introduction in the journal *Economica* (1927a) and the other an article on Māori hill forts that features in the first issue of the archaeological periodical *Antiquity* (1927b). A review of Sir Te Rangi Hiroa's (i.e. Peter Buck [1880–1951]) book about the changes in Māori clothing was published in 1929a the same year that his doctoral thesis from the LSE on the economic systems of the Māori was published 1929b. Finally, a descriptive inventory paper on the Māori artefacts held in the Museum of Vienna was published in *JPS* (Firth 1931). The publishing inactivity during 1928–29 is easily explained as the time of his first ethnographic fieldwork in Tikopia, when he was a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Sydney. In an interview with the economist from New Zealand Brian Easton in 1979, republished 20 years later, Firth reflected on his own upbringing:

I would not choose to live in those older societies. Modern life offers me too many things, unknown to my ancestors. Nor would I argue that the ancient Māori was inherently morally superior to us today. But as a New Zealander I count myself lucky to have within my community a reminder that it is possible to organise economic life on principles other than the greedy acquisition of wealth. I would be even luckier if we were to manage to develop a lifestyle where these alternative values played a more prominent part. ([1979] 1999, 183)

Firth's interpretations of cross-cultural cognition were indeed quite progressive for the times. In his paper on Māori economic psychology he writes:

Not, that as some theorists allege, primitive man thinks in a manner entirely different from what we do. He has the same mind-structure, the same logical methods, as we have. But the reason for our frequent inability to understand the mentality of the native lies in the fact that his starting point is not ours. (1925c, 340)

It is also clear that, despite shifting to a new Polynesian terrain for which he was quickly becoming the global expert (something he could never attain in Aotearoa/NZ given the significance of such figures as Peter Buck and Elsdon Best [1856–1931]), he maintained more than a distant interest in Māori issues and ethnography (Delgado Rosa 2018). For example, he wrote an obituary for Bishop Herbert Williams [1860–1937] in 1938 and a decade later reviewed the book by the Beagleholes *Some Modern Maoris* (Firth 1947).

South Pacific and abroad

Malinowski assisted in securing an important academic appointment for his young acolyte, notably the position in Sydney with Radcliffe-Brown that would allow him to finally do a full stint of participant observation fieldwork in the Pacific. But in the end Firth spent little time in Australia itself (1931–32), working as the acting chair of the Anthropology Department and the acting editor of *Oceania* when Radcliffe-Brown decided to try his hand in Chicago. Firth justified his resignation on the basis that the University had refused him leave to attend Malinowski's seminars. Shortly before this, he had offered Reo Fortune a position in Sydney, but Margaret Mead [1901–78] refused to move to Australia so Fortune had to decline (Thomas pers. comm).

Firth's mentor was also responsible for tempting him back to London by offering to appoint him to a lectureship at the LSE in 1933. And eventually, though indirectly this time, as his own successor as Professor of Social Anthropology in 1944, a position which Firth finally took up in 1945, after turning down a similar offer from the Institute of Anthropology at Oxford. He was on the selection committee for the Oxford professorship, the other members of which unexpectedly colluded to offer him the job after the candidate interviews. He declined, however, insisting that Evans-Pritchard would be the best person.¹¹ He married Rosemary Upcott, the upper-middle-class daughter of a civil servant, two years beforehand in 1936. Ten years later, their only child Hugh was born. Firth worked for naval intelligence, compiling Pacific island handbooks, throughout the Second World War. During this time the LSE had evacuated to Cambridge and it is here that he became acquainted with fellow kiwi and Pacific studies enthusiast J.W. Davidson, who worked as his assistant for NID5. In 1944–45, he was involved in setting up the Colonial Social Science Research Council. This part of his biography is well documented in Shepperton, Hair, and Munro (2000), Bloch (2002), Kitchin (2002), and Clout and Gosme (2003).¹²

In the late 1940s, Firth became a member on the Academic Advisory Committee of the then-fledgling Australian National University (ANU), along with Professor Sir Howard Florey (co-developer of medicinal penicillin), Sir Keith Hancock (Chichele Professor of Economic History at Oxford) and Sir Mark Oliphant (a Professor of nuclear physics who worked on the Manhattan Project). Firth's role was particularly focused on establishing ANU's Research School of Pacific Studies. During that time he rekindled his friendship with Jim Davidson who was appointed, upon Firth and Hancock's own recommendations, as the founding chair of Pacific History in the School. Many years later, Firth recalled being impressed by Davidson's open mindedness.

anthropologist Raymond Firth, is adamant about Davidson's 'ethnic "colour-blindness", completely unconscious of anything but the personal and intellectual qualities of the people he was with'. (Munro pers. comm. 2008, recalling his own correspondence with Firth in a letter dated 30 Sept. 1997)

Firth is referring here to one of the visits that he, Jim Davidson and Oskar Spate (ANU's Geography Professor) had made together to Papua New Guinea in 1951 when they travelled together for three weeks (e.g. Spate 1991). Their task was to report to the Australian government on social and economic matters.

Firth was presented with a *festschrift* in 1967 for his contribution to British economic anthropology (Freedman 1967). After his retirement the following year, he accepted six

invitations as visiting professor from several important anthropology departments at North American universities until 1974. These were: Hawai'i (1968–69), British Columbia (1969), Cornell (1970), Chicago (1970–71), the City University of New York's Graduate School (1971), and UC Davis (1974). Similarly, after this six-year stint, his American colleagues, mainly those part of the ASAO (Association of Social Anthropologists of Oceania) collated a second follow up *festschrift*, this one focused on his conceptual formulations of social organization and transaction (Watson-Gegeo and Lee Seaton 1978).

Sir Raymond was presented with many such accolades for his contributions to social anthropology, receiving honorary doctorates from eight prestigious universities around the world: HonDPH Oslo; HonLLD Michigan; HonDSc British Columbia; HonDLettHum Chicago; HPhD Krakow; HonDLitt (3x) ANU; East Anglia; Exeter. His other recognitions and degrees are: MA Aucks; PhD Lond; FBA; CNZM.¹³ He was one of the Life-Presidents of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the Commonwealth (ASA); was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1949; served as the Honorary Secretary of the RAI from 1936–39; acted as the RAI's President in 1952–53; received the AAA's Viking award in 1958; was knighted in 1973; was presented with the Bronislaw Malinowski Award in 1981; and in 2001 received both the Polynesian Society's Nayacakalou Medal as well as being appointed to New Zealand's Order of Merit. In 2002 he was awarded the Leverhulme Centenary Medal, but did not live long enough to collect it in person.¹⁴

Dame Dr Joan Metge, who I meet on a few occasions from 2007 to 2009, said that the person who most reminded her of her former supervisor and mentor, in terms of demeanour, physical stature and general mannerisms was Jeff Sissons, an anthropologist who works at Victoria University Wellington (pers. comm. 2007). In my opinion, it is not surprising that she chose another New Zealander for making such a comparison, revealing that Firth's land of birth and early upbringing often occupied his thoughts on the historical consistency necessary in the making of good scholarship. For instance, in an obituary to Bishop Herbert Williams, Firth makes reference to the last article of this philologist of the Māori language, which appears in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society*. Indeed, in the short piece he gives us an insight into the value he placed on being lucid in older age, something for which his family has been gifted, when he writes: 'revealed how he preserved even in his 77th year his critical faculty and scholarly approach to a problem' (Firth 1938, 75). Such a statement could stand as a mantra for the anthropologist himself, who was still writing until the last months of his life.

Conclusions: towards home anthropology

A contemporary cross-cultural dimension exists in Firth's early Māori work, especially as understood by his analysis of Dalmatian/Eastern European migrant workers of Kauri gum. This is found in the Baltic fascination with amber. Recently a journalistic piece by Natalia Maiboroda (2018, 36) called 'The Jewel of Kaliningrad' discusses the importance of amber for Northeastern Europe. She writes of how, since the twelfth century, there exist the first recordings of the 'Sun Stone'.¹⁵

The relevance to Firth and his work in the area of economic labour production is clear when we start thinking of how Poland (Prussia) also boasts being the heart of prehistoric origins for the precious stone (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania equally feature). So through tourism, nationalism and a precious mineral material, we see many overlaps conceptually

to why Firth's subtle ethnographic economic determinism is not really that extreme as a form of deterministic interpretation (Easton 2001). His was simply a 'slow ethnology' that became increasingly globally comparative as he travelled back and forth between Pacific and Atlantic time. This does make him an anthropologist and a theorist, the latter embedded in his 'polyglotness', rather than simply an ethnographer fascinated by empiricism, as his work is sometimes accused of being.

From the material presented here, another concluding tangent might be to propose how (to a certain degree at least) all social anthropology is simply biography – of a culture, ethnic group, conflict, belief system, ritual, region and whatnot. Would it be so outrageous to suggest that Raymond Firth's main legacy to the discipline was to be the biographer of Tikopia? It is likely that he would not have approved of such an analogy, judging by his reaction to a paper that Judith Macdonald (2000; 2004) wrote on his influence in shaping the future ethnographic interpretations that were possible in Tikopia after his corpus had been read by certain informants there:

I always sent copies of everything I wrote to Raymond and he hated this paper. When I talked to Raymond's son Hugh at Raymond's 100th birthday celebrations Hugh said Raymond had given him the paper to read and Hugh thought it perfectly fine and couldn't understand why Raymond was so exercised over it. (pers. comm. Macdonald 2018)

So perhaps the distinction is to argue that ethnographers are cultural biographers and the anthropology dimension of our work is when we enter into the terrain of conceptualization, cross-cultural comparison and theory building. And so, I'd suggest this paper is a biographical exploration into Firth's early career, when he was an ethnographic biographer of traditional Māori culture – not his main contribution, but no less his entry point into anthropology, his disciplinary 'apprenticeship' as the Pacific historian and Jim Davidson's biographer Doug Munro (1996) might call it.

Tangents aside, the main concluding point we can make regarding Firth's initial investigations into traditional Māoridom is that here we have one of the first examples of 'at-home' anthropology, even though it was not consciously articulated in such terms. Raymond Firth was obviously not an insider when it came to the mores of traditional Māori ways of life. And yet, from a young age, he had learnt a basic knowledge of the language, immersing himself into several types of participative explorations of indigenous identity, labour and culture. It is perhaps for this reason that he was permitted to present an archival based piece of research for his doctorate,¹⁶ at a time when the merits of first-hand ethnographic fieldwork were being celebrated so vehemently in the celebrated Malinowski seminars at the LSE. Indeed, there are cross-cultural biographical examples to show how the inspiration for some of Firth's interests in topics associated with anthropology at/of home was likely a direct influence of his close relationship with his former supervisor and mentor (Lebow 2019).

The discipline is certainly well aware of a narrative that Firth's (1956) early studies into English kinship paved the way for establishing an academic framework whereby the anthropology of the familiar would become credible. But is it such a stretch to suggest that the intellectual roots for justifying the anthropology of/at home pre-date this time. Raymond Firth would not return to live or work in New Zealand after he started writing his Ph.D. in London. Yet it is a project based on what he knew as home at the time. Can we therefore not realistically connect the research of a young Pākehā amongst the

Māori in the rapidly changing bi-cultural society of 1920s Aotearoa/New Zealand to a context approximating the values embedded within the anthropology of/at home? The economic historian Richard Tawney seems to have anticipated as much when he wrote the closing lines of his preface to Firth's *Economics of the NZ Māori*:

One who has been charmed and enlightened by Dr Firth's book may be allowed to confess that the sentiment uppermost in his mind, as he lays it down, is the desire that an equally gifted Maori anthropologist should write an equally faithful account of the people of Great Britain. (Tawney in Firth 1929b, 15)

Following such a comment, I would contend that it is no coincidence for the habitus of this very same centenary to run alongside the now familiar innovations connected with 'home/away from home' approaches in social anthropology.

Notes

1. For example, see Peter Gathercole's 2006 article in *Antiquity*.
2. The journal *Review in Anthropology* published a special double issue on 'biographies of anthropologists as anthropological data'. My article examines five volumes about 'British' anthropologists through the lens of a disciplinary self-reflexivity – what we could call here 'an archaeology of us' (Lavolette 2008).
3. Through the visual anthropologist Rolf Husmann (Göttingen), a visiting fellow at Victoria University Wellington in 2008/9, Doug Munro gleaned my interest in Firth when speaking with Rolf so contacted me since he's been working on a number of intellectual biographies. Ever since, we have lured each other into deeper interests in the many relationships existing between Pacific history and global anthropology. At one of our many meetings in Wellington, he even gave me a photocopy of a set of letters and postcards he'd exchanged with Firth from 1997 to 2001.
4. This article, published in 1924, has been difficult to locate. Dr Hugh Firth has found a reference in his father's notes: 'Article on the Royalty system'. See reference Firth (1924b).
5. There seems to be dialect differences across the country regarding the pronunciation, as well as spelling variations. Certain people pronounce it between a D and R, closer to a soft D sound, which probably comes from rolling the 'r' and is 'd-like', rather than actually the sound of a 'd'. Something like CowdRiy (KB & MM pers.comm. 31.7.18).
6. In 2009 scientists detected a serious threat on Kauri forests. Referred to as dieback, a fungus-like water mould pathogen (*oomycete Phytophthora agathidicida*) it spreads with soil movement, attacking the tree's roots. Incurable at present, the disease deprives the Kauri of the ability for effective nutrient uptake, eventually starving the host. The organism is related to the pathogen that caused the great potato famine in the 1800s. Over the past five years the disease has doubled so that allegedly it now infects up to 20% of kauri in the forest. The government has implemented its highest level of biosecurity regulation (NPMP, developed under the Biosecurity Act 1993) to protect the iconic species. An NPMP implies a nationally coordinated, long-term management of kauri dieback disease. At the time of writing (2018) kauri have been reclassified as a threatened species for the first time in history. Large areas of public access to forest footpaths are now closed off as a result.
7. The 9th Provost of UCL, Professor Sir Malcolm Grant, from New Zealand's Otago region, has also taken such courses after moving to the UK in 1972 to take up a law lectureship at the University of Southampton (MG pers. comm., March 2007).
8. Indeed, at the beginning of his interview with Alan Macfarlane, Raymond Firth (1983) states that:

Anthropology was a hobby at first. As a schoolboy in New Zealand I became interested in the Maori people and learnt a certain amount of Maori; first piece of fieldwork was on economics of rural populations in New Zealand; came to England with thoughts of following a career in economics but decided on anthropology.

9. He registered as a PhD candidate with Malinowski as his supervisor on 16 December 1924 (H. Firth pers. Comm. 2018).
10. Tikopia was seen as an ideal fieldsite at the time. Reo Fortune's [1903–79] application to the Australian National Research Council was to study Tikopia. At the same time applications were received from Ian Hogbin who got Rennell Island, as well as from Firth who was given 'Melanesia'. Since there was no boat to Tikopia until April 1928, however, it was decided that Fortune should work in the eastern portion of Papua in the d'Entrecasteaux Archipelago. Firth was therefore allocated Tikopia as a result of this delay which fit in well with his schedule (Thomas pers. comm.).
11. Firth had been unsuccessful with his application to the William Wyse Professorship at Cambridge 10 years beforehand, in February 1937.
12. Several other anthropologists assisted in the war effort in similar ways. 'After service in the research department of the Foreign Office during the war, Daryll Forde became Director of the International African Institute in 1944 and Professor of Anthropology at his old college (UCL) a year later' (Lewis 1973: n.p. available online: <http://www.therai.org.uk/archives-and-manuscripts/obituaries/daryll-forde>).
13. Margaret Clark, emeritus professor of politic science at the University of Victoria Wellington, told historian Doug Munro that she was instrumental in getting Firth the CNZM honour in New Zealand (DM pers. comm. 30.7.18)
14. Firth has been interviewed about all sorts of topics on a number of occasions. He and Rosemary feature in three documentaries about the history of anthropology worth special mention (e.g. Macfarlane, Rosemary, and Firth 1983; Singer, Christophe, and Dakowski 1986; Husmann et al. 1993).
15. Allegedly Kaliningrad is the 'home' of 90% of the world's amber, which seems unrealistic if solidified/crystallized Kauri gum is also classified as 'amber'.
16. Several interesting parallels exists with John Victor Murra, the Romanian anthropologist who 'was the *nom de guerre* of Isaak Lipschitz, born on August 24th, 1916 in Odessa, into a Jewish family' (Anăstăsoaie 2014, 22).

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