ANTHROPOLOGY BETWEEN EUROPE AND THE PACIFIC: VALUES AND THE PROSPECTS FOR A RELATIONSHIP BEYOND RELATIVISM

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I AM GREATLY HONORED by the opportunity to deliver the Sir Raymond Firth Memorial Lecture this afternoon.[1] Greatly honored and, if I am to be honest, a little daunted. Daunted first of all by the towering legacy of Sir Raymond Firth himself, a man who maintained a commitment to the study of the Pacific Islands over the entire course of his very long life and one of only a handful of people who can truly be said to have helped lay the foundations for the still relatively young discipline of anthropology. But daunted also by the work of those in attendance here, so many of whom I am sure have forgotten more about life in the Pacific Islands than I will ever be able to claim to know. And of course when it comes to that other key term of the conference title, Europe, I have even more firmly to proclaim comparative ignorance—having hardly ever lived in Europe, and only recently moved to a nearby island, many of whose inhabitants as we all know have their own suspicions about those whom Epeli Hau'ofa (2008, 32), to whom we will return shortly, calls "continental men." So it is not hard to see why, when faced with addressing you in memory of Sir Raymond Firth at a conference entitled "Europe and the Pacific," my deep excitement could not help but be accompanied by a profound sense of my own limitations.

The title I have given this lecture is designed to remove any hint of subtlety about the strategy I have developed for finding a way forward without having to try to disguise these limitations. For the discipline of anthropology is something I have by now lived with for almost two-thirds of my life. I can claim it as one of my homes in a way I cannot quite claim Europe or the Pacific Islands. It

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is for this reason that today I want to talk about the nature of anthropology and the way it sometimes interposes itself between Pacific peoples and people living in other parts of the world. To be sure, the nature of anthropology and the way it insinuates itself in relations between peoples is a worthwhile topic for Oceania to an extent it might not be for other regions of the world. As Geoff White (2008, x) has recently pointed out, during the colonial period at least, anthropology was "the field of Western scholarship most entangled with Pacific societies," and in very many academic settings this remains true today. The import of this fact cuts both ways—anthropology has, for better and for worse, played an outsized role in representing the lives of Pacific Islanders in many places beyond the region, and, at the same time, work carried out in the Pacific Islands has played an outsized role in shaping anthropology itself. On the former point, one can only wonder at what general "European" images of the Pacific, often distorted enough even with anthropology's input, would be like if anthropology had had no part at all in helping to establish them. And on the latter one, it is hard to imagine what anthropology would be like without the work of Firth himself, Malinowski, Mead, Bateson, Sahlins, Godelier, Wagner, Strathern, and many others whose most influential writings have derived from their studies of the lives of Pacific Islanders. So without wishing to make any kind of ridiculous claim that anthropology is the most important thing that connects people in the Pacific Islands with those living elsewhere, I do, for reasons of my own competency, want to focus on how anthropology has made such connections in the past and how it might do so in some new ways in the future.

My move to look at anthropology as a mediating term in a relationship between people from different places, as something that makes connections, rather than as, say, a simple engine of knowledge production or conceptual innovation, is not an arbitrary choice. For one of my key themes is going to turn on some observations about the importance of relationship-making and connecting more generally for Pacific Islanders. The observations I make in this regard will not themselves be in any way new. At the heart of Hau'ofa's (2008) transformative essay "Our Sea of Islands" is an emphasis on the longstanding importance of connectedness for most Pacific Islanders. Hau'ofa's main point in that piece, after all, is that Pacific Islander commitments to forging relationships across all kinds of social and spatial divides render their worlds large and getting larger, rather than "belittled" and "small" as they appear in the accounts of so many "continentals"—anthropologists, policy makers, and nongovernmental organization workers alike. And this point about the importance of connectedness, if not the one about its role in enlarging worlds, is one anthropologists have not missed. So when Hau'ofa (2008, 36) calls "reciprocity . . . the core of all Oceanic cultures" we perhaps see not only his life experience, but also his anthropological training shining through—or at the very least, one imagines

almost all anthropologists of the region would be ready to stand behind him on this point. Thus my emphasis on the importance of connectedness in Oceanic cultures cannot count on its own as a novel contribution. But if we think of anthropology itself as a kind of relationship-making between the Oceanic region and other regions such as Europe, I think we may be able to raise new kinds of questions about how the Oceanic interest in connectedness itself might figure in this relationship. And it is when I finally turn to making this point, and in the journey I take to get there, that I hope I might be able to say something at least a little bit novel about the Pacific, maybe about Europe, and definitely about the way anthropology sits between them.

In getting the argument I want to make under way, let me return for a moment to Hauʻofa and also to Firth. Having mentioned Hauʻofa's training as an anthropologist, I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge that his relationship to the discipline was often a highly critical one. In one of his most forceful interrogations of the weaknesses of the field—the 1975 essay entitled "Anthropology and Pacific Islanders"—he notes that one of the problems anthropologists have in understanding Oceanic peoples is that they "know little about their systems of morality, specifically their ideas of good and bad, and their philosophies" (Hauʻofa 2008, 6). Even at the time it was written, some anthropologists might have at least gently contested this point, arguing that one could mine many ethnographies for material on Oceanic moralities. Indeed, Firth himself might have taken this position. For he took the notion of "values" to be a key part of what he and other anthropologists should study. One important aspect of values in his view is that they are "something wanted and felt to be proper to be wanted"—we do not just desire the things we value, but we think it is good to desire them (Firth 1964, 212). For this reason, if we take values seriously, we get quickly to moralities—ideas, as Hauʻofa puts it, about what is good and what is bad. More than this, Firth also noted that the conative, desirable aspect of values means that they engage our emotions as well as our intellectual sense of right and wrong, and by doing so they drive not only thought but also action (ibid.). Oceanic notions of social connectedness are values precisely in this sense—identifications of things people want, and that they think and feel it is good to want, and that they feel it is good to want in ways that lead them to seek to realize in action the states of affairs that the value of relationship-making and connecting defines as desirable.

I think anthropologists have known that connections and relationships are important for many Pacific Islanders for a very long time, but they have not thought about this knowledge as knowledge about Oceanic values, rather than as simply descriptive points about what Oceanic lives and conceptual worlds in many places are like. And in this sense, Hauʻofa's criticism is on the mark. Anthropology would be a very different kind of mediator between the Pacific

and Europe, and between the Pacific and other places as well, if it claimed to be representing not just Pacific cultures or worldviews or social structures, but also Pacific values and the moral philosophies they articulate, and if it insisted that they be taken seriously as values and as moral philosophies. To explain what I mean by this is going to take me a bit deeply into the history of anthropology and into its current condition. But before I take up those topics, maybe it would make sense for me first to show you what I think an anthropology of connectedness as a value in Oceanic societies might look like, even before I try to explain why I think an anthropology focused on showing this kind of thing might be good to develop.

For several years in the 1990s I carried out fieldwork among the Urapmin of the Sandaun or West Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea (PNG). A community of roughly 400 speakers of one of the Mountain Ok languages, the Urapmin live half a day's hard walk from the nearest airstrip, which is at the District Office in Telefomin. For present purposes, in explaining where the Urapmin live, it is perhaps even more important to mention that their territory is about four days walk south over the central Mountain range of PNG to Tabubil, a town built in the 1970s at the cost of one billion US Dollars to service the huge Ok Tedi gold and copper mine, which sits on the land of the Urapmin's Wopkaimin trading partners. While Urapmin still live largely outside the market economy, and the community has produced no long-term migrants who send remittances home, most Urapmin adults have visited Tabubil. The town, with its paved roads, stores, hospital, and twenty-four hour electric power, informs their sense of what might be possible by way of change for a small mountain-dwelling community like their own.

During the period of my fieldwork, Urapmin hopes ran high for a mine like Ok Tedi on their land. Just a year before my own arrival, representatives of the multinational Kennecott Mining Corporation had begun to helicopter in to Urapmin every now and then to prospect for gold and copper. Their prospecting efforts involved collecting soil samples, often by digging fairly deep trenches and sometimes by cutting down trees. It is, or was in the 1990s, a requirement of Papua New Guinea law that mining companies that carry out mineral prospecting of this kind must renew their prospecting licenses every two years by holding a meeting with community members and gaining their assent to continued work on their land. After I had been living in Urapmin for about eight months and had met the Kennecott prospecting team myself on several occasions, the head prospector, an Australian man named Buddy, who was very well liked in the community, announced that soon he would be coming back with a Papua New Guinea mining warden from Port Moresby to hold a renewal meeting of this kind.

From the Urapmin side, it took little discussion among people to establish that everyone in the community wanted to see the license renewed. Hopes for

the construction of a mine were by this time very elevated, and people had no complaints about how the Kennecott representatives had managed their affairs to this point. But people also felt strongly that the meeting itself would be an important event. As the Urapmin understood matters, the mining warden would be the most significant government official ever to visit the community, and this meeting was their chance to establish the kind of relationship with him (the mining warden was always spoken of as a man) and with Kennecott that would keep them both focused on Urapmin with sufficient intensity that they would continue prospecting until enough gold was found to lead to the construction of a mine.

Discussions about the meeting began shortly after Kennecott left from the visit at which Buddy had announced the meeting, and they quickly led to plans to stage a major, carefully scripted performance for the visitors upon their arrival in the community. Preparations for the performance soon got underway. And as it happened, the several months during which these preparations preoccupied the community marked a distinctive moment in my own fieldwork in a way that bears closely on my core concerns today. For in making these preparations, the leaders of the Urapmin community actively worked to involve me in the planning, hoping that I could contribute by helping them design their performance so that it would succeed in communicating what they wanted it to communicate to those who would come for the meeting.

The thought that I might be of some help in this effort was based on people's conviction that those attending the meeting would, like me, be what in the Urap language they call *tabalaseps* or, as they often put it in the Papua New Guinea lingua franca Tok Pisin, *waitpela* men. The Urapmin divide the population of the world into black people, the group to whom they belong, and white people. This is not all about skin color, of course, and people pointed out to me that even if the mining warden were to be a Papua New Guinean, as I kept mentioning I thought he likely would be, he would still be a tabalasep. And in the terms in which my argument here unfolds, it is noteworthy that all Europeans would also be whites, regardless of skin color. So for the months when preparations for the license renewal performance preoccupied the community, I learned a lot about how the Urapmin planned to engage white people in the hopes of bringing them on board to the project of building a mine in Urapmin, and a little bit about the role they wanted me to play in this.

As the script of the meeting took shape, I learned about a set of dramatic skills I had not previously had a chance to discover the Urapmin possessed. Having converted to charismatic Christianity thirteen years before I arrived, Urapmin did not practice their traditional rituals anymore, and their Christian rituals, while powerful in their own way, unfold primarily as talk or lyric-heavy song, and are understood to be largely unscripted so as to be open to the Holy Spirit's

prompting. The planned performance, by contrast, was to be carefully designed ahead of time and thick with complex visual imagery of a kind that I knew (from discussions with Urapmin elders and from reading anthropological accounts of now abandoned traditional men's initiation rites among their neighbors) would have been a staple of Urapmin people's own ritual life in the past.

One of the key messages of the performance was to be the claim that "we Urapmin are bush people." By "bush" (*bus* [Tok Pisin], *sep* [Urap]) here, the Urapmin mean the rain forest that surrounds their homes in distinction to the villages (*ples* [Tok Pisin], *abiip* [Urap]) in which they live. Urapmin spend a lot of productive time in the bush gardening and hunting, but they pride themselves on being village people who live in houses clustered around plazas they keep scrupulously clean of grass and other bush-like growth. Since their colonization in the 1940s, however, the growth of the District Office in Tabubil, the news of the big coastal cities some men passed through when going to work on plantations elsewhere in Papua New Guinea in the 1960s, and finally the spectacular advent of the mining town of Tabubil have led the Urapmin to see themselves at least some of the time as what they call a "bush line"—far removed from the centers of sophisticated life that exist elsewhere. Part of what they hope a mine might do is return them to a firm sense that they are, even in the changed terms of their contemporary understanding, village people, who use the bush to gain their livelihood but do not have to understand themselves as wholly identified with it.

In order to deliver to the mining warden and their other guests the message that as things stand the Urapmin have come to be bush people, the performance was to begin as soon as the helicopter landed. The mining warden would immediately be carried on a litter to the area in which the meeting was to be held, an act the Urapmin referred to as "metaphorical" (*weng do* [Urap])—it meant that "this is the bush, not the town, and here people have to carry you on their shoulders, not in a car." This meaning was to be made explicit in a song the young men of the community would sing to the warden along the route over which he would be carried. The lyrics of the song explained "we are bush, we don't go around in cars or planes, develop us." As the young men sang the song, a man and a woman dressed in a traditional penis gourd and grass skirt, kinds of clothing made from local bush products that the Urapmin never wear any more, and that Kennecott workers would never have seen them wearing, would further convey the equation linking the Urapmin to the bush.

To ensure that the presumably English-speaking Warden understood what he was supposed to do on disembarking from the helicopter, I was charged with making a sign to direct him to sit on the litter. At first, during one of the early planning meetings for the performance, people agreed that the sign should read "Welcome to Urapmin" across the top, and then beneath that "Please sit on the litter." Almost

immediately, however, as people recalled the overall message the performance was to convey, this was amended to "Welcome to bush Urapmin." Five days later, in the midst of another heated planning session, the sign was changed once more—this time to "Welcome to big bush Urapmin." "Big bush" refers to the densest, most intractable parts of the high forest, beyond the range where people hunt and garden. With this emphatic addition, the Urapmin in their own terms gave the strongest possible emphasis to their claim that in the contemporary world they had been pushed much too far into the bush to live as they wanted to.

Once the mining warden and others arrived at the meeting place, the task of carrying out the next, largely verbal, part of the performance would fall to the Urapmin Councilor (*Kaunsil* [Tok Pisin]), a man named Rom elected to represent the Urapmin to the government of their district. Kaunsil Rom planned in his speech to spell out the central messages of all the parts of the performance that preceded it. With regard to the people wearing traditional dress who jumped out of the bushes, he planned to say

> We surprised you with our penis gourds and grass skirts. But this is still what we are. If you have a mother and a father tear off our grass skirts and penis gourds and replace them with trousers. We must become just like you.

He would expand on this point by saying to the visitors that if they really have power, they should "destroy" (*destroim* [Tok Pisin]) the Urapmin ground and move the Urapmin as a community to some other place, a decidedly not bush kind of place, one with roads, an airstrip, and sawn timber houses.

But Kaunsil Rom planned to do more than explain what the visitors had already seen. He also wanted to point out to them that the Urapmin had previously given the company something of great value, and that this morally obligated the company to search for minerals as assiduously as possible. Toward this end, a rhetoric of gift and counter-gift figured prominently in the latter part of his speech. The valuable thing the Urapmin had already given to Kennecott was their land. And this land was not merely useless big bush land that the Urapmin themselves could not work in productive ways. In the Kaunsil's words:

> When Kennecott came here this [area they were working in] was not the big bush—there were just villages [there]. They were taking samples from underneath houses—this was not the bush. These are good places for planting taro, sweet potato, pandanus, bananas. You told us [when you left] not to touch the flagging tape or other things [you had put in place] and since I am a good man I no longer worked in those areas. I gave ['left'] them to Kennecott.

The argument here is that the land from which Kennecott has been drawing samples is not wild, unproductive forest, but is rather ground that the Urapmin have transformed and put to productive use. These village and garden lands are, as the Kaunsil put it in one of the planning sessions for his speech, "the children of men"—the products of human labor. The Urapmin have given some of this valuable land to Kennecott. Whether or not the company feels sympathy for the Urapmin plight as bush people, by the reasoning of this second argument it is now the company's turn to reciprocate these Urapmin gifts with a mine.

You will have noticed that in this part of the councilor's speech the fact that Urapmin have created villages out of the bush in which to live and gardens out of the bush in which to grow crops suddenly replaces their inescapable identification with the bush. In a different essay, this shift from talking about being bush to talking about working the bush and giving away the products of that labor could open up to a discussion of Urapmin understanding of what we might call nature, and the way their relationship to and identification with it was changing at the time Kennecott came to renew their license, but here I want to go in another direction—one that will tell us something about Urapmin relationship-making and the value they place on it.

I can begin to explain what I have in mind here by noting that all of those elements of the performance designed to identify the Urapmin with the bush—carrying the warden on a litter, wearing traditional clothes, explaining that Kennecott has power to transform their land that the Urapmin do not have—would be easy to read as conveying what Hau'ofa (2008: 29, 38) would call a sense of belittlement—a sense that the Urapmin are too small, too technologically weak, and situated too far from the big village lives of the tabalaseps and those like them to change their own conditions and pull themselves out of the bush. They would need Kennecott's help to do all that. And to be honest, I worried that the performance would be read in this belittling way by the visitors who witnessed it. But that was not at all how the Urapmin understood their performance, and my occasional protestations that it might be misread in belittling ways struck them as impossibly wrong headed. What the Urapmin performance was doing as its authors and performers saw it was attempting to make a relationship with Kennecott and the PNG Government and to do so using traditional relationship-making tools the Urapmin had perfected long ago.

This point returns us to the shift in the performance from emphasizing the Urapmin status as a bush line to reminding Kennecott that they have been given valuable, humanly transformed village land on which to prospect. What this shift marks is a move from one widely recognized Urapmin way of speaking and acting in order to elicit relationships to another. The first way of acting and especially of speaking is one the Urapmin call "sorry talk" (*amamin weng* [Urap]). Talking sorry aims to solicit the sympathy (*filin* [Urap]) of the other for

the plight of the performer. The Urapmin consider it the height of boorishness to directly request things from anyone but one's closest relatives. Hence, they use sorry talk among themselves to avoid making direct requests for food and other items. In sorry talk, one hints about what one does not have in the hopes that one's interlocutor will provide it as a gift. In planning for the performance, the Urapmin continually returned to the idea that they were asserting "we are bush people" in speech and action as a kind of sorry talk designed to bring the mining warden and Kennecott into a relationship in which they would be sensitive to Urapmin needs and wants.

When Kaunsil Rom shifted to the language of gift and counter-gift, he left sorry talk behind and turned instead to what the Urapmin call "hard talk" or "strong talk" (*kun weng* [Urap], *hat tok* [Tok Pisin], *titil weng* [Urap]). This is a genre in which a speaker strenuously reminds a listener of his or her duties toward the speaker. Here the point is not that the Urapmin are a bush line hoping to elicit a relationship of sympathy, but rather that they have already given substantial gifts of village land to Kennecott and they expect a relationship to develop with the company on the basis of a reciprocal return.

Urapmin regularly use sorry and strong talk among themselves. They are core tools for making and maintaining relations in the community, and skillful interactors know when to use one or the other and how to mix them to best effect. By putting them to use in their performance, the Urapmin hoped to ensure that the license renewal meeting unfolded on their own terms and toward their own relational ends. Their relationship with Kennecott was not in Urapmin reckoning to rest on a commercial transaction, they were asserting, it was to rest on a social one, and one that carried important expectations of moral behavior and cooperative work toward the realization of what they hoped would be shared relational values. The force of this claim would be brought home to me very strongly when the preparations for the performance came to an end and the mining warden, Buddy, and the other visitors coming for the meeting finally arrived.

In the event, the time of the meeting was greatly delayed. The first attempt to hold it was thwarted by a tragic helicopter crash, and after that it was many months before it again found its way on to the calendars of Kennecott and the mining office. When the date finally came, the helicopter arrived late in the day. By then the fairly frequent late afternoon rains were threatening, and the visitors were determined to move the meeting along quickly so they could fly out before the weather made their exit impossible. Given the circumstances, they were not in the mood for the elaborate performance the Urapmin had planned. The mining warden refused to sit on the litter and rushed past the man and woman in traditional dress. For the most part, the whole event was reduced primarily to the presentation of a truncated version of the council's speech, though

one in which he still managed to say that "my mother and father gave birth to me wearing a grass skirt and a penis gourd, so if you have a father take our land and move us to a town somewhere else." The positive vote on renewal was then quickly taken, and the pilot began trying to get all the visitors back into the helicopter.

As part of the renewal process, prospecting companies have to pay compensation for the land they have disturbed and the trees they have had cut down during the previous lease. I happened to be standing next to Rom when Buddy, the leader of the Kennecott team, tried to pay him the compensation money the company owed. It was a lot of money by local standards, maybe more than had entered the community in one lump sum before. But Rom refused to take it. Having worked in his youth during the colonial era as what he called a "house boy" for the master of a tea plantation, and briefly as a manual laborer helping to build Tabubil town, he was wise to the ways of market exchange, and he knew that by those rules if I give you something and you give me back a cash equivalent for it that means our relationship is over. With this in mind, he told Buddy "just keep the money and come back and build us a mine." Buddy of course insisted he wanted to give Rom the money, but Rom remained adamant in refusing it. By this time, the helicopter pilot was very anxious to leave. A few minutes later, Buddy had to relent, leaving with the money still in his bag.

Rom and all the many Urapmin who worked on the performance had bet on making a relationship—refusing to participate in the kind of exchange that they thought would have allowed the prospector and his company to walk away free of the kinds of reciprocal obligations about which hard talk reminds people. Rom's refusal was a good thing in Urapmin terms, and I never heard a single complaint about him forgoing the payment. Of course, Buddy, despite what I know is his strong personal affection for the Urapmin people, lives in an economy in which making relationships is not the ultimate value. A month or so later his firm sold the prospect to a different company, and by the time I left Urapmin a year later this new company had not yet shown up to carry out any further prospecting. And perhaps it would not have owed the Urapmin this payment in any case. Still, the Urapmin got out of this encounter with their main value of relationship-making intact, and that may have been worth more in the long run than the payment would have been.

In the course of making another kind of anthropological argument than I am making here, I could have talked about the Urapmin interest in making and maintaining relationships in a number of different ways than I have. I could have, as I have elsewhere, laid out the ways Urapmin undertake major exchanges of unlike items as part of making marriages, or discussed how they exchange exactly equivalent items at funerals and to resolve disputes (Robbins 1999). I could have talked about the massive sharing and exchanging of foodstuffs and

other mundane items they undertake every day. And I could have, in a different idiom, talked about how the Urapmin think of relationships as part of the very make up of persons—as fundamental to how the world is, and as embedded in a complex system of indigenous concepts and cosmological precepts. But here I have chosen instead to focus on the way their interest in relationships shows up in their planning for and performance at a prospecting license renewal meeting for two reasons. First, because as I have said, this performance and the planning for it marked a time when the Urapmin were determined to communicate to whites how important relationships are to them, and when they wanted me as an anthropologist to take some role in this. And second, because what they hoped to communicate was that they took relationship-making to be a value—to be something important in itself and tied in with key moral ideas by which they often try to live their lives. They wanted their audience to understand and to feel that when others express needs, a good person, one who values relations, will try to meet those needs at least to some extent, and also to understand and feel that having received something in a relationship one must then give something back. Theirs was a performance of relationship-making and maintaining precisely as a value, and one which called on its audience to recognize this value as making a claim on themselves as well. In the next section, I turn to talking about anthropology, and I suggest some reasons that learning to communicate people's values in something like the way the Urapmin tried to communicate their value of relationship-making and connectedness to the assembled tabalaseps at this prospecting meeting might be important for the discipline now.

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Anthropology has been entangled with Pacific societies from very early in the discipline's history. It has also from very early on been entangled with notions of what, as the field developed, would come to be called cultural difference—the idea that people who lived differently than did those who populated the societies from which anthropologists mostly came nonetheless lived coherent and meaningful lives that made sense on their own terms and were possessed of their own integrity. The most famous of the early anthropological monographs focused on the Pacific Islands made this point with great force. One thinks here of Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* with its challenge to taken for granted western notions of exchange and economy, and Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* and *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*, both of which aimed to upset taken for granted western notions of sexuality and gender. First in the United States, but later throughout the global academy, anthropological conceptions of cultural difference, the integrity of all cultures, and the possibility of presenting such differences to western audiences

in a critical spirit, with the goal of upending readers' settled pieties about their own ways of life, coalesced into what Clifford Geertz (2000, 44) has called the "ill-defined" notion of cultural relativism. Such relativism has been ill-defined in the sense that no anthropologist has ever quite made a systematic theoretical or philosophical program of it. But cultural relativism nonetheless became hugely influential, shaping the intellectual and the moral sensibilities of several generations of scholars, anthropologists, and others, who were led by it to be deeply interested in difference and its critical potential. Indeed, as Geertz went on to add, anthropologists quite generally came to rely upon relativism as the key tool they could wield to disturb "the general intellectual peace."

I have turned to this rather potted history of the role of difference and relativism in the making of anthropology both in the Pacific and as a discipline more generally because I think recent changes have threatened to render the anthropological interest in difference a thing of the past. At the very least, the sun seems definitely to have set on the heyday of cultural relativism. Geertz's remarks on relativism that I have been citing come from his well-known 1983 Distinguished Lecture to the American Anthropological Association entitled "Anti Anti-Relativism." His concern in the lecture was with countering some anti-relativist positions that were growing in popularity in the early 1980s. The essay itself, as was perhaps presaged by the fact that its title was in hindsight clearly too arch by at least half, was not one of Geertz's best. But uncharacteristically poor though his execution may have been, Geertz was on to something in his suspicion that by the time of his lecture, relativism was starting to need defending. Indeed, by the early 1990s I would suggest the doctrine had largely faded from the anthropological scene outside of undergraduate classrooms. A very informal survey of the anthropologists I have bumped into over the last few years makes the point, for it reveals that none can quite bring themselves to identify as full blown relativists, and this despite my confession to them, meant to encourage as much positive reflection as possible on their part, that I often think I might, or at least wish I could, still be one.

What happened to so decisively put relativism in the shade? Elsewhere, I have made the argument that the self-critical, reflexive period in anthropology, and in the social sciences and humanities more widely, that took up much of the 1980s and 1990s—the era of *Time and the Other* (Fabian 1983), *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986), and *Orientalism* (Said 1979), among many other works—served to make discussions of difference, cultural and otherwise, too politically tainted to seem worth risking (Robbins 2013a). In the wake of this development, I went on to suggest, anthropology enthusiastically adopted newly minted models of the universality of human experiences of suffering that suggested that even if people might differ culturally in some respects, they all suffer in similar ways when placed in broadly similar kinds of bad

circumstances. Soon, an anthropology no longer very comfortable with its commitment to cultural difference began to focus on people that suffered at least as often, if not more often, than it focused on those living integral lives in ways that were unfamiliar from the vantage point of the anthropologist's own. As anthropologists became committed to the project of witnessing to the existence of universal forms of suffering wherever they could uncover them, relativism was at best an irrelevance, and at worst it was a dangerous doctrine that could unduly complicate the clear humanitarian message accounts of suffering were designed to convey by suggesting that suffering might not be as easy to identify or understand cross-culturally as it has come to appear.

Since sketching out the historical account I have just summarized in an article published a few years ago, I have become convinced that in part anthropology's shift from studying difference to studying the suffering subject was not just a result of the field's reflexive moment. It was also caught up in a much wider transformation of the values by which many western countries organized their relations to the rest of the world. The historian Samuel Moyn (2010) has narrated this shift in his important revisionist history of Human Rights entitled *The Last Utopia*. Moyn's key claim is that the doctrine of human rights that is so influential at present was not a product of the enlightenment, the French Revolution, or even the postwar moment in 1948 that gave us the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights—a declaration it is worth remembering that the American Anthropological Association, at the height of its relativist self-confidence, famously opposed. Rather than being a product of any of these earlier moments, Moyn (2010: 87–88) argues, human rights as a value came to the fore only in the mid-1970s. And, crucially for the picture I am trying to paint here, what human rights replaced as a key western value for organizing international relations in the 1970s was the value of cultural self-determination that had dominated the previous period of anticolonial struggle and decolonization. On Moyn's (2010, 88) interpretation, "human rights entered global rhetoric in a kind of hydraulic relationship with self-determination: to the extent the one appeared, and progressed, the other declined, or even disappeared." An earlier anthropology of difference and relativism was strongly, if not always perfectly, aligned with the value of self-determination. Once the value of individual human rights had taken center stage, anthropology's turn to relying on universal models of suffering and its correlated adoption of the value of human rights seem almost a foregone conclusion.

Of course, if you asked most anthropologists if their abandonment of relativism and even in many cases of an interest in cultural difference followed simply from a change in values in the wider culture of which they are a part, they would likely answer in the negative. Dissenting from the suggestion that they were marching in step to dominant political trends in setting relativism

aside, most anthropologists would probably tell you that they dropped the doctrine because there were some compelling intellectual reasons for doing so (see Hollinger 2003). Foremost among these, they would explain, is that the very model of cultures as homogenous, bounded, and integral wholes upon which relativism rested had come to seem wrong headed—cultures are too internally contradictory and contested, and too fuzzy at the edges, to support arguments that they have a simple set of "own terms" on which they could be said to make sense. Moreover, given that cultures, whatever they might be, came to be understood to be internally diverse, it became simple to make the argument that they often disregard or even traduce the interests of at least some of their members, rendering any claim that they are morally coherent radically suspect. And finally, and in a slightly different register, how can any intellectuals responsibly hold to a doctrine that makes it impossible for them to confidently identify real evil in the world outside the borders of their own society and be prepared to respond to it? To the extent that relativism renders such identification and response difficult, it cannot help but be a morally crippling doctrine.

I find some of these intellectual reasons for abandoning relativism more compelling than others, just as I find some of them more blindly signed up than others to the individualist values that underwrite now dominant human rights discourses. But my purpose in outlining them here is not to interrogate them in any depth. Rather, I mention them because I think that there may be a way of recovering the anthropological commitment to difference and some of its critical force that manages to avoid many of the weaknesses that on these arguments are supposed to beset relativism. And if we can recover our commitment to difference without falling into what now appear to so many scholars to be dangerous relativist traps, I think this would be worth doing. It would be worth doing, I want to suggest, because in abandoning relativism and the commitment to difference that went with it, anthropology lost much of its critical vocation—and it certainly lost the central place it once briefly held as an innovative, vanguard discipline among the human sciences that could mediate in unique ways between regions such as the Pacific and Europe.

The simplest way to describe what I have in mind by way of recovering a critical commitment to difference for anthropology is to say that I want to set cultural relativism aside as the foundation of this commitment and replace it with a position that is known as value pluralism. As an intellectual doctrine, value pluralism is largely a philosophical affair these days. Its most well-known proponent is the intellectual historian and political philosopher Isaiah Berlin, though arguably it has its earliest modern roots in the work of the great sociologist Max Weber.[2] The core claims of value pluralism are easy enough to state, though their full import can be a bit hard to grasp at first glance. It can help to bring that import to the fore to start by noting that value pluralism opposes a position known as value

monism. Value monists argue that there are many different values in the world, but that when these values are properly understood, they can be arranged in an exhaustive hierarchy such that it is always possible to know which one of any pair of values is more important and which is less so. Value pluralists agree that there are a number of important values that exist in the world, but in contrast to monists they go on to suggest that rather than being arranged in a clear hierarchy, each of these major values is equally capable of supporting good ways of life, ones in which human beings can flourish. In addition, value pluralists also stress that some of these equally good values conflict with one another—they are, as Weber (1946: 147, 153) famously put it, "warring gods," equally powerful and equally jealous of human commitment. Because important values are equally good, when they do conflict it is impossible to choose rationally between them in the way value monists think you should—it is impossible, that is, to say that one has reasons other than one's own preference or tradition for committing to one equally good value over another. One must simply make what Berlin (1998, 239) liked to call a "tragic" choice that will allow you to realize the good represented by one value, but only at the expense of losing out on another good represented by the value that conflicts with the one you choose.

As is well known, Berlin was deeply entrenched in the liberal tradition, and many others who have articulated value pluralist positions have been as well. So the examples of equally good but conflicting values, the existence of which they often point to as evidence for their assertions, are familiar liberal ones. Taken as conflicting pairs, they range from such rather modest but important values as politeness and honesty to heavy hitters like justice and mercy, freedom and security, or liberty and equality. If you take a moment to think about how hard it is to square conflicting pairs of values like these with one another, but also how difficult it is to say with complete conviction which one is higher than the other, you can get a glimpse of the kinds of intuitions that ground the value pluralist position.

Having given this abbreviated account of value pluralism on the way to making some observation about what this position might mean for a renewed anthropological engagement with difference, let me pause to emphasize the ways in which value pluralism, though clearly a doctrine about differences, is not a kind of relativism. For value pluralists, it is a fact about the world that a number of values exist each of which can equally, though differently, support flourishing human lives. It is also true that societies differently rank and elaborate these values. This is one, albeit only one, reason that societies are meaningfully different from one another. But as long as societies are elaborating real values—ones that lead to genuine human flourishing—then we have no basis to suggest our own ways of life are superior to theirs, at least in terms of the values that shape them. It would be up to those who hold other values to consider ours and make the tragic choices that would arise for them by virtue of

them coming to know what it is like to live with our core values, just as one of our tasks should be to consider the values elaborated by others and make the choices, tragic though they may be, that knowledge of those values may raise for us. The real mistake would be to fail to learn about and consider the import of values one's own tradition has not elaborated—since then one would miss out on knowing about something real in the world that bears on the question of how human beings can lead good lives.

An anthropological approach to difference founded on value pluralism would take off from the ideas I have just laid out. It would endeavor not to present and justify the integrity of whole cultures, though it need not take a position on whether or not they actually exist. Instead, it would work to present the values of the people we study and offer accounts of how those values shape their lives with enough force and clarity that they can be felt as values by those who do not already hold fully elaborated versions of them. And this brings me back to the Urapmin performance at the prospecting license renewal meeting. What the Urapmin hoped to achieve by means of that performance was, I have argued, conveying to their visitors not just that they want a mine, but that they care deeply about relationships and want the mine to come to them along roads created by the kinds of relationships they want to form with moral persons who know when to feel sympathy and when to remember their obligations. One of the things anthropologists ought to be able to do is help communicate values across just the kinds of divides the Urapmin were trying to bridge by means of their performance. They had asked for my help with this in the case at hand, so their concerns entered my anthropological practice at their insistence, but I am suggesting that conveying the values of those we study to those living outside their societies ought to become a feature of anthropological practice more generally.

In order to be good at communicating what it is like to live by a wide range of important values, anthropologists might have to approach their work somewhat differently. They would need, for one thing, to focus more on studying values than they do at present. But more than this, they would for another thing have to develop skills in communicating them. And this may not be easy. To understand why, we can return briefly to Firth. Firth (1964, 221) noted that values "have a cognitive aspect, they may be conceptualized, have a shape in ideas" but, crucially, they "have also an emotional charge." To make those relatively unfamiliar with a given value, say that of relationship-making and maintaining, really understand what it is like, we will have to find ways to lead them to feel the emotional pull of that value, and not just to understand conceptually what it might be like to hold it. This is why I have here presented an account of an Urapmin performance—a performance designed to move an audience—and not a conceptually rich but emotionally flat analysis of all of the practical and intellectual contexts in which one can find evidence that the Urapmin care

about relationships and put relational values ahead of others. I have tried by this means to communicate that the Urapmin care first and foremost about what we might call, in language that is decidedly not theirs, the rights of relationships even more than they care about the rights of the individuals that are sometimes, as they see it, created by them.

I have been working a little bit lately on the question of how values are presented in ritual performance (Robbins 2015). But when beginning to think about this article, I was reminded about the Urapmin performance for the licensing meeting not by my research in that area but by my reading of a number of works focused on climate change in the Pacific Islands. In her article "A Sea of Warriors: Performing an Identity of Resilience and Empowerment in the Face of Climate Change," Candice Steiner (2015) documents a number of performances developed by people across the Pacific to communicate to wide audiences not only the facts of the effects of climate change in their region, but also what those effects mean for Pacific Islanders' ability to live their lives as they want to, as people who value being in close relationship with one another and with their ancestors. In talking to Steiner about one of these performances, the spectacular *Moana: Rising of the Sea*, my distinguished predecessor as Firth Lecturer Vilsoni Hereniko noted that as he sees it the arts will be crucial in transforming the world's approach to climate change because they engage "the area of feeling and emotion," they move "understanding the effects of sea level rise from the head to the heart" (Steiner 2015, 170). In one of his own recent writings on climate change, Hereniko (2014, 227) similarly talks about focusing on conveying "affective or emotional truth." I have been suggesting that this realm of emotions is crucial to the realm of values, and that if one wants to recover the critical force of difference anthropology once so powerfully put into play, one needs to attend to it, as have Hereniko and others working in the area of Pacific Islander art and performance, including in their own way the Urapmin. And if one is inclined to doubt the import of the emotional aspect of values, it is worth recalling that Firth (1964, 221) himself long ago pointed out that it is the "emotional element in values in particular which makes them promote and guide conduct." Without introducing people to the emotional force of values they have not yet considered, or not considered promoting to a high position in their own hierarchies of concern, we are unlikely to help push forward much by way of change.

Perhaps I can let things rest here, with the suggestion that we think about communicating values as something anthropology should do when it gets between people—be they Europeans and Pacific Islanders or any other two or more parties. We can justify this intellectually, I have argued, on the basis of a value pluralist position. And we can justify it practically by pointing to the fact that any real social change is going to have to involve value change if it is

to have any real world effects. As it happens, the time may be right in anthropology to recall us to our historical entanglement with difference. One of the most prominent contemporary intellectual movements in the field—the ontological turn—has explicitly revived the value of self-determination, making "the ontological self-determination of the collectives" that anthropologists study one of its main theoretical areas of interest as well as one of its most oft-repeated slogans (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 43). It has also strongly endorsed the study of difference, drawing heavily on earlier Melanesianist work as it does so. But by the lights of what I have been arguing here, the ontological turn's thoroughgoing focus on what Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2014, 48) calls "the creation of concepts" rather leaves out values and does not suggest they are something anthropologists should creatively convey. And certainly, to this point, the study of ontology has been far more interested in blowing minds than it has been in turning hearts. My point in saying this is not that the ontological turn is unimportant—it is laying out one crucial path toward recovering the force of difference in contemporary anthropology—but it is to suggest that it is not doing all the work along these lines that needs to be done.

Marcel Mauss, through his reading of Malinowski among others, was one of the first scholars to demonstrate how effectively anthropology at its best could powerfully communicate what people cared about across the Pacific Island–Europe divide. I might close with a quotation from him that I have used before, but that I think I have only in this article really laid the foundation for using the way I always hoped to. Mauss once wrote that "a civilization must be defined more by its deficiencies, it shortcomings, its refusal to borrow, than [by] what it has borrowed, the points it shares with others" (quoted in Fournier 2006: 269–70). I read Mauss as saying here that in the end societies may best be judged by the universally relevant values they refuse or are unable to see and will not learn about from those who have seen them clearly and elaborated them fully, rather than by the ones that they find it easy to recognize and to hold important and that they therefore most aggressively promote. In this vein, anthropologists might help Pacific Islanders in their own efforts to convey to others the importance of the value of relationships in their lives, and they might try to do so in ways that help those who put other values first to learn to feel the force of this one.[3]

NOTES

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years have gone into shaping the perspective I develop here, and his careful reading of the penultimate version was crucial to the final form of my argument. I dedicate this paper to him in gratitude to the many ways our relationship has helped to sustain my intellectual life and its engagement with Pacific Anthropology.

2. For a history of value pluralism, see Lassman (2011). For a very clear statement of the position in terms very close to those I adopt here, see Gray (1995). I have explored these ideas in anthropological terms more fully in Robbins (2013b).

3. This article has appeared in French as "L'anthropologie entre l'Europe et le Pacifique: valeurs et perspectives pour une relation au-delà du relativisme," *L'Homme*, April–June 2017, 222:2.

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