

# Introduction



## On Fieldwork Methodology

The fieldwork methodology I use involves following a select number of individuals, and their social networks, over a period of time and across the variety of social contexts their life-trajectories may take them. At least this is my recollection of how Prof. Fredrik Barth, during a discussion of how I should approach my second fieldwork, formulated it at the time.<sup>1</sup> I took this advice very seriously. This method, if followed through, is bound to result in a high degree of familiarity with the life-world encountered and experienced by the people one follows, with their interests and desires, conflicts and concerns. It also reveals the whole spectrum of culturally significant roles and statuses, institutions, arenas, and situations constituting the social field covered by the study.<sup>2</sup>

To the participant observer, the fieldwork process broadly takes the form of a gradual and partial assimilation of unfamiliar practices, to a degree where the new information is transformed into internalised knowledge, much of which exists in an embodied form. In this process, the unfamiliar routines, gestures, postures and expressions that one gradually adopts during fieldwork become unconscious habits; that is, they are reproduced automatically and without reflection. Illustrations of such embodied knowledge would, in my case, be to bow down, to walk in a crouching posture if I have to pass in front of a person of higher status, or to demonstrate my pleasure in a gift by lifting it over my head. These kinds of routines may be made the subject of reflection and may serve as a source of information (Bloch 1990). To subject oneself to such a socialisation process, to be an instrument in one's own research in this reflexive manner, means to create a new *social personae* for oneself (see also Hastrup 1989, and Goward 1984). To play with one's social identity in this way is

bound to have some effect on one's post-fieldwork practices and attitudes – in short, to also have some influence on the researcher's life out of the field. During my first visit to Samoa, my host-family Aiono (in Fasiotoouta) renamed me Ina. The Tokelau equivalent would be Hina, but even there, the name 'Ina' stuck and it has stayed with me ever since. It is as Ina that many people came to know me. It is as Ingjerd that I write this book. The two differ in that they are part of separate social networks, do different things and have, at least in part, different concerns. I recognise myself in both of them, and I have even had the experience of witnessing the occasional encounter between the two. For instance, when I was about to leave at the end of one of my longer stays in New Zealand, I had shifted my mental frame of reference without realising it – from 'Ina in the field' to 'Ingjerd going home'. In this state of departure, I made a phone-call to one of my Tokelau associates and introduced myself by saying 'This is Ingjerd, is Ina there?' instead of 'This is Ina, is [...] (the name of the woman I called) there?' It was a most concrete experience of role dilemma, and for me a very comic one at that moment. I laughed and laughed, and as I laughed I realised that I was very sad indeed to leave. Of course, the personal names of 'Ina' or 'Ingjerd' are in a sense only name-tags and labels, but the shifting references may serve to illustrate the role dilemmas that are a part of the role- and code switching that participant observation (but also other social situations) often requires (see for example, Blom and Gumperts 1972; Barth 1971).

However, the fact that my life so far has frequently presented me with opportunities to develop and manifest many, and sometimes widely different, social incarnations, is of little relevance to the events I describe in this book. In the following, therefore, I choose not to dwell on my own story in or out of the field, except in the very few places where it impinges on the interpretation of the material I present. The distancing process achieved through what may be called a double return, both from the field and from achieved embodiment back to externalised knowledge, in the form of writing or other media, is obviously more dominant towards the end of a research project, but a certain movement between closeness and distance is always present as part of any fieldwork experience. Learning always occurs in the gaps between the world, as one knows it from previous experience, and the world as it is encountered during fieldwork. In the attempt to establish an acceptable social persona, one tries on new roles and fails at fulfilling the role expectations that others have for you. In short, one learns in a constant movement, between more or less successful adaptation, and heroic or pathetic mistakes.

There are many competing metaphors for the role of the fieldworker and many of them are negative: s/he is like a spy; s/he is someone who betrays the confidence s/he has been entrusted with, by the shameless telling of other peoples secrets (Hastrup and Ramløv 1988). The more pos-

itive or self-congratulatory metaphors liken the anthropologist to Hermes, to a cultural translator, healer or broker, one who mediates between worlds and contributes knowledge as a common good (Crapanzano 1986; Tyler 1986).

In Tokelau terms, as in many other Pacific societies, there are, at least, two seemingly opposed models of knowledge. The dominant one is based on the conceptualisation of knowledge as a limited good, and as a personal or collective possession (see eds. Thomas, A., I. Tuia and J. Huntsman 1990, on the concept *taoga*, or treasures). It is ultimately genealogical in form (Charlot 1983; Hoëm 1994) and constitutes an important basis for leadership positions. To possess, and to be able to use, such knowledge to further the interests of one's extended family and allies, such as for example to substantiate claims to land rights, is of crucial importance in village life. This kind of knowledge is not something to share freely. To gather such knowledge is to take something away, and to disseminate it is threatening – doing so is easily perceived as undermining the established power structure. The Elders' position in the Village Councils (*Fono o Taupulega*), and their power to rule the village affairs (*pule*)<sup>3</sup> is based on a perception of them as knowledgeable persons (*poto*). Their deliberations are traditionally not made known to the villagers, only the outcome of their decisions, and the basis for the decisions is not usually openly questioned. To share 'the knowledge' is also undesirable from a local point of view, because it inevitably presents one version of current relationships, thus backing one group at the expense of the others. These attitudes are important to note, as they represent the rationale for the patterns of communication in the villages that the theatre group described later comes up against, and which they more or less deliberately set out to challenge (see, in particular, Chapter one).

I have been confronted with this conception of knowledge as personal property in many different ways during fieldwork. In some ways, this mirrors the professional accumulation of symbolic capital, where fieldwork sites are easily turned into academic turfs. I have thus been told that I am just like a *palagi*, meaning that I take what I learn away with me, rather than to stay and pool my resources with some Tokelauan group. In this context, I have had my fieldwork likened to the activities of the slave raiders who came to Tokelau and took most of the able-bodied men (i.e., their strength and productive power, *malohi*) away. In this light, I come, I take what I want, and then I go away and invest what I have received somewhere else. On the other hand, and according to the other part of the model, to take is to engage in a pattern of reciprocity. From this perspective, one is always a part of an exchange relationship, of give *and* take. This relationship is performative: as one cannot refuse another's right to take, one cannot avoid the obligation to give.<sup>4</sup> To choose not to participate is not an option. How the knowledge (or other resource) is provided, and

concomitantly, whether breeches of etiquette are seen to be serious or not, depends very much on the context and the manner in which the 'taking' and 'giving' of it is conducted. I have asked about things which people didn't consider fitting for me to know, and have been brushed off, more or less politely. By these and other breeches of 'proper conduct' I have learned about patterns of communication and concomitant moral codes, and about different speech contexts.<sup>5</sup>

Knowledge that cannot be used or uttered in a political meeting without grave consequences may be playfully presented in a song. Such a performance may also have social, even political, consequences, but not necessarily of a fatal nature for the performer.<sup>6</sup> The dividing line between contexts of uttermost importance and seriousness and contexts of playfulness is very thin: clowning and fun is part and parcel of Tokelau life. In this light, then, the act of giving is also a moment of taking something away; however, at a later stage something is always returned – otherwise the relationship ceases to exist. Whether the return contribution will be accepted as *malie*, as a pleasing *mea alofa*, a thing of love, depends as much on the spirit in which the gift is offered as it does on the memories of the recipients of the interaction preceding the return. As the play, which is a central case in this work, eventually came to be presented as such a gift (see Chapter one), so my writing also represents a return contribution.

M. Hertzfeld (1997) draws our attention to what he calls areas of great sensitivity and self-stereotyping that exist in every society. He labels them areas of 'cultural intimacy', and observes that once a fieldworker enters into some degree of social intimacy, that is into the commensuality that members of a society regularly partake in, he or she is exposed to and included in reflections on areas of cultural intimacy. Writing within the context of the self-presentation of nation states, he observes that the images that the nation state (or local community) wishes to project to the outside world are a matter of great sensitivity and are always subject to editing and suppression. His position is that anthropologists inevitably, and with good reason, recount part of these 'intimacies', the narratives of local perspectives, to the public. He sees this as a politically important activity, as representing counter stories to the polished narratives that tend to accompany the nation state.

In other words, the description and analysis of social fields (Grønhaug 1974) emerging from the social networks encountered during fieldwork, and of the narratives people tell in the course of everyday life, is different in significant ways from the same people's self-presentation in highly sensitive and politicised contexts, such as when presenting Tokelau to the New Zealand public, either in the media, or through so-called cultural performances. The tensions and discrepancies between these two levels of representation will be explored further in this work. In this sense, the title of this work, *Staging Identities*, can be read in many ways. First of all, it

points to the fact that self-presentation is always relationally situated. Furthermore, it points to the exposure to widely different representations of ways of life faced by the younger generation of Tokelau today – and to their responses to this situation. Finally and most concretely, it designates what the Tokelau theatre group, Tokelau Te Ata, attempted to achieve – that is, to present an alternative way of living to the Tokelau Communities in Tokelau and in New Zealand.<sup>7</sup>

Awareness of the situated character of cultural knowledge is heightened by the methodological approach to the field described above. The fact that one encounters most people involved in the social field under study, and experiences the main institutions and the array of significant arenas and contexts while following the people to whom one has attached oneself, provides – as all approaches do – only a partial view of the sociocultural system one describes. However, and in contrast to much other research, it gives an experience-near view of the workings of society, and of processes of structuration, as opposed to purely structural analyses. In the process of creating viable (or not so viable) ways of being in the Tokelau communities, the existence of new tools of expression, and of new media, such as newsletters, video recorders and TV sets, and of new genres such as written poetry and theatre, is central. Therefore, in this work I have set out to explore how new experiences and media enter into previously established communicative practices and affect patterns of identification.

## Contemporary Argonauts

A special issue of *Pacific Studies*, devoted to the strategies developed by Pacific islanders ‘for settling in new places’, suggests that we leave the practice of drawing ‘absolute boundaries around geographical and cultural areas’. Instead, they propose that we focus on ‘movements and processes [...]’ (2002: 03). Still, most scholars in the study of movement keep as their main focus the consequences that the conditions for migration have on the organisation of community life. In my work, I suggest that we leave the boundaries of community studies and instead explore trans-local networks, hence the subtitle ‘Tokelau and New Zealand’. With the phrase ‘contemporary argonauts’, I point to the deep continuity that exists between present-day movements in the Pacific and the journeys of earlier periods. I wish to draw attention to contemporary movements back and forth between urban centres and village communities, to point to connections *and* also to discontinuities, following Sahlins’ suggestion that we see Pacific communities as consisting of agentive networks expanding into new regions, rather than as passive victims of large-scale processes (Sahlins 1993). To the growing field of ‘displacement’ studies, we need to add ethnographic studies of contemporary movement of a different,

perhaps more ordinary, kind. This is a kind of movement that cannot be adequately described as labour migration, nor as a direct result of large-scale economic factors, but perhaps rather should be treated as a part of an expansive form of sociality. The ethnographic material presented in this work may be read as illustrations of this kind of social practice.

### *A Lament*

The song rendered below was first presented to the Tokelau communities in the Wellington area as part of the repertoire of a New Zealand Tokelau song group named *Tagi*. In the song, the group addresses the issue of growing up as first generation, New Zealand-born Tokelauans. They are living in a cultural setting where the dominant values are quite different from those associated with life in the atoll environment of Atafu, Nukunonu and Fakaofu – the three atoll communities comprising Tokelau. Later on, the song was included in a theatre play also called *Tagi*, or ‘lament’, produced with the explicitly stated intention of reflecting upon and confronting the communities with the situation that the Tokelau population in New Zealand faces. The play *Tagi*, and another play called *Mafine*, ‘woman’, will be described and discussed within the framework of this work as reflections of the shifting realities and processes of identification that present-day ‘argonauts of the Pacific’ may experience.

Taku Tama e	O My Child
Te leo kua he lagona	You don't understand the language anymore
ka ko na kupu koi manatua	but you recognise the words.
Taku tama e	O my child.
Te lumanaki o to ta nuku	The future of our village.
Tuku mai ko au ke fano	Let me move towards
hea nei ko na fakakupu mai ai koe.	what the words are that you speak to me.
Aua kua malama oku mata	Because my eyes have caught the light
ki lanu kehekehe o tenei olaga	of the different colours of this life.
Ko ai nei e ia mafaia te kavega	Who then is capable of bringing
te fatu ma te lotu	the heart and the spirit
e teu e toku nuku	by which my village beautifies itself?
Ka ko (t)oku tino nei kua ola	So that my body here can be brought alive
i te huamalie o tenei olaga	by the sweetness of this life.
Te leo kua he lagona	You don't understand the language
ka ko na kupu koi manatua	but you still remember the words.
Taku tama e	O my child.
Te lumanaki o to ta nuku	The future of our village.

(From the cassette *Lagi a Tokelau*, produced by the Tokelau song group *Tagi*, New Zealand. Transcription and translation mine.)

As the words of the song *Taku Tama e* indicate, there is a big difference between the passive knowledge of a language and vague familiarity with a way of life, and the active mastery of the same. However, and as the song poignantly reflects, the process of learning about the unfamiliar life-world, whether Tokelau or New Zealand, can be reciprocal and of mutual benefit. In this view, an opposition between local mores and the experience of modernity, and between life in and outside of Tokelau, need not be irreconcilable. The suggestion that second-generation Tokelauans in New Zealand could learn from things pertaining to Tokelau, and that those familiar with Tokelau could benefit from seeing the different colours of life in New Zealand, is, however, not a vision that is unani- mously shared.

### *Communicative Practices*

The child addressed in the song (one of the new generation of New Zealand-born Tokelauans) is said to represent the future of the ‘village’ (*nuku*). The village or community, in common conceptions, is the foundation of a life lived ‘the Tokelau way’ (*faka-Tokelau*). To live a good life, and to ensure that this way of life continues in the future, it is essential to be in touch with ‘the heart and the spirit’ through which the village may ‘beautify’ (*teu*) itself. The narrator is searching for a means to convey to the child the experiences this implies. However, the narrator also expresses a wish to understand what it is that the child sees: to understand what the different experiences are that the child speaks of.

This last wish is somewhat unusual, expressed within a Tokelau context. As in other Austronesian societies, a main criterion for social differentiation is relative age (see J. Fox [1995: 223]; see also the ethnographic background later in this chapter). The concomitant communicative practice is expressed in a pattern where the senior person commands (*pule*) and the younger person obeys (*uhitaki*). That is, the older, knowledgeable person controls the flow of information, and the younger person assumes responsibility for carrying out an order – without being entitled to question the contents of the command. (For an illustration of this communicative pattern from Samoa, see E. Ochs 1988.) Therefore, the vision contained in the song is, at least partly, in violation of dominant communicative practices and principles of orientation.

In this connection, the expression ‘to beautify’ is of particular significance. It represents a key concept informing communicative practice. The terms (*teu, teuteu*), carry the additional meanings ‘to decorate, to prepare, to resolve’ and ‘to settle differences’. In other words, what we find here is a reference to local ways of conflict management. The terms most specifically designate the actions needed to (re)establish social harmony (that is: *fealofani*, mutual love; *maopoopo*, harmony, consensus, collective coherence

and cooperation) after a disruption. This is most commonly done through the deliberations of a *fono*, or meeting. *Kupu teuteu*, ‘words to settle differences’ are used at the end of such meetings (cf., TD 380). (See A. Duranti [1990: 647] for an illustration from Samoa.)

This semantic field points to a culturally close connection between violence and beauty and to the often precarious balance struck between them (E. Valentine Daniel 1994; Hoëm 2000). To establish a culturally acceptable balance between disruption and harmony, deliberate action is needed. To transform what is disgusting, ugly or bad (*mataga, kino*) into something beautiful, acceptable and good (*gali, lelei*) is a serious and important activity. As such it contrasts with so-called ‘things of no account’ (*mea tauanoa*), the unimportant, non-serious activities. Disciplining action may involve the use of force, and to do so in a socially acceptable manner requires and cultivates knowledge (*poto, iloa*). Uncontrolled eruptions of violence are strongly disapproved of. The goal of disciplining action is to achieve an aesthetically pleasing social harmony and cooperative spirit – that is, the smooth running of village and family affairs. Such social control is an aspect of most Tokelau activities, informing everyday as well as festive occasions.

A need for such harmony-generating action is expressed in the song, and true to Tokelau exegetical practice, the appeal may be interpreted on multiple levels. It speaks of the challenge involved in listening to the child, and transforming its message so that the message may benefit the village. It speaks of the work involved in bringing the child in touch with the heart and spirit of the village. The song may also be read as asking, in a self-abasing manner, the audience to bear with its potentially disruptive message in a way which ensures that harmonious relations prevail.

### *Matters of Life and Death*

One important aspect of the activities associated with ‘beautification’ is what is commonly labelled face-work (cf., E. Goffman 1959). Tokelauans discuss and experience this culturally important part of life in terms of a rich vocabulary, centred around key concepts such as ‘face’ (*mata*), ‘front’ (*mua*) and ‘back’ (*muli, tua*). A marked characteristic of a main proportion of the terms employed in this connection is their spatial *reference*. Historically, these terms are linked conceptually through the pervasive pan-Polynesian dual cosmogonic concepts of *po* (night, nightside) and *ao* (day, dayside), the relationship between which is governed by the practices associated with the concepts of *tapu* (or *ha*) and *noa* (see Gell 1993, 1995; also Shore 1982, 1989; Thomas 1995, and Hoëm 2000). Through these practices, distinctions are established between formal and informal, restricted and unrestricted persons, things and situations, and between important and unimportant activities (see also Mageo 1998). The ultimate

rationale for the continued importance (and semantic productivity) of such distinctions, currently co-existing in a syncretistic manner with various Christian beliefs and practices, lies in how they constitute a frame of reference for regulation and control of the fecundity of the human and the natural environment. In other words, this framework is part of the means by which Tokelauans relate to matters of life and death. A similar observation is made by N. Besnier based on his research in the atoll society Nukulaelae, in Tokelau's neighbour nation-state Tuvalu (see also Mageo 1998). In my analysis, in Tokelau conceptions fecundity is achieved through aesthetically and morally correct action, furthered by the exercise of legitimate authority. In other words, patterns of authority and leadership, of gender roles and everyday conduct, are informed by these underlying principles and patterns of differentiation.

To illustrate: in the atoll societies, any situation of scarcity of a vital resource (*oge*, 'famine'), such as water, is commonly interpreted as caused by somebody having acted in an anti-social fashion. To remedy the situation and bring about a state of abundance, the misdemeanour must be discovered and public redress must be made. Throughout this book, we shall see many illustrations of how such central conceptions manifest as particular expressions of the previously mentioned ancient cosmological patterns, coexisting with versions of Christianity and other, more recently adopted ideas. I shall draw attention to how local forms of sociality may be seen to constitute a pattern of orientation, or what I refer to as *a sense of place*.

### *Relationships and Representations of Agency*

In language, these patterns of orientation are expressed in the most general manner through constructions of agency. Agency in common usage is used synonymously with freedom of action; that is, agency is perceived as a quality of action, most often associated with the individual subject. In this work, however, I approach agency in a more general sense that is also more applicable cross-culturally – namely agency will be used to mean locally held theories of causality (Duranti 1994). Through taking into account how relationships of causality are represented linguistically, we gain an additional and potentially very valuable intake to local cosmology and theories of self (Sahlins 1985; Rosaldo 1980, 1983, 1984; Tonkin 1992; Mageo 1998). All forms and levels of representation of relationships also colour our perceptions of the same. The relationships of command and responsibility, of authority and submission, may be expressed in many ways by employing a variety of resources (Duranti 1990; Keating 2000). For example, the spatial, kinetic and the linguistic dimension may all be drawn upon, and may work simultaneously to express the qualities of a particular relationship.

Thus, the relationship between a person summoned to appear before a meeting (*fono*) of the Council of Elders (*taupulega*), and the village authorities in Tokelau, is expressed in a very concrete manner through the spatial arrangements of the meeting house. The Elders are seated along the posts or walls of the house, in a row (or rows) according to relative status, and facing the offender. The person summoned sits in the middle of the floor, directly in front of the Elders. The character of the relationship is also expressed kinetically: the Elders sit cross-legged with straight backs, looking directly at the offender, while he or she sits, also cross-legged, but with a bowed neck, and with downcast eyes. Furthermore, the relationship is expressed in language. For example, the Elders might speak at length, and the person who has been summoned would respond in short sentences and with a barely audible voice. In addition, the relationship may be expressed linguistically by more subtle means.

For an illustration of the linguistic resources that may be employed, we can return to the songline presented earlier in this chapter: ‘Who then is capable of bringing the heart and the spirit by which my village beautifies itself?’ This sentence construction employs the strongest available grammatical means of expressing causal responsibility (the ergative marker, *e*). This choice of expression is of social consequence. The action of beautifying the village is explicitly represented as ‘belonging to’ the village, that is, by the ergative agent. An alternate way of expressing the responsibility as weaker would be to say, ‘the village is beautified’, but leaving the ‘by whom’ unstated. In the last case, no relationship of command and responsibility would be indicated.

In this manner, space, kinetics and language may equally function as resources, by means of which important aspects of social relationships (including social events) may be expressed. How relationships of different kinds are shaped in Tokelau society, and what philosophy of action people have developed, will be described in this book through a particular focus on how agency is represented, produced and experienced by differently positioned subjects.

### *Macropolitical Influences*

Finally, in the most general sense, the song-text presents dilemmas inherent in the situation that the people of Tokelau presently face. A tension between the ‘different colours of this life’ and the ‘sweetness’ associated with the Tokelau way of life is perhaps most strongly felt within the Tokelau communities in New Zealand, but it is also a part of the realities of life in the villages in the three atolls comprising Tokelau. The search for contemporary ways and means of expression, how such a desire manifests itself, and what this project signifies in the light of common practices within the communities, both in Tokelau and in New Zealand, therefore

constitutes the main proportion of the material presented in the following.

It is too early to say to what extent the more recent developments concerning Tokelau's political status will retrospectively come to be seen as representing radical change in the area of political institutions and leadership structure. However, from the material I present here, it is obvious that the local patterns of communication, hinging as they do on the exercise of gerontocratic, male authority in the village institutions, and on the complementary allocation of rights and responsibilities between the genders, and between *tamatane* (offspring of brothers) and *tamafafine* (offspring of sisters) sides within the extended kin groups, are affected by new work institutions, by the growing monetary economy, and by new tools of expression, in a manner which represents a qualitatively different situation to that which any previous generation has had to cope with. In this context, this book represents a study of micro-historical processes in the making (Handelman 1998). In the following chapters, the recent political developments and the concomitant infrastructural changes in the atoll societies will be described more fully in light of what little is known about Tokelau's pre-contact history, and of the comparatively well documented period following the advent of the papalagi<sup>s</sup> from the mid-eighteenth century.

## Ethnographic Background

The three Tokelau atolls – Atafu, Nukunonu and Fakaofu – lie approximately 500 km. north of Samoa, in what is most commonly defined as the Polynesian part of the South Pacific. The fourth Tokelau atoll, Olohega, is currently American territory, but is still claimed by Tokelau. The atolls support a population of around 1600 people and are close to the Equator. Each atoll consists of hundreds of small islets that are connected by coral reef at low tide, and which surround relatively extensive lagoon areas. Anchorage is difficult, and there are no harbours. The main contact with the outside world is by freight ships which also carry passengers. These ships are chartered to run between Samoa and Tokelau, and when they reach the atolls they stand offshore, while cargo and passengers are transported through the reef channel in locally manned aluminium dinghies with outboard motors. At the time of writing, the inter-atoll vessel Tutolu had undergone structural modifications and run back and forth to Samoa every fortnight.

The total land area of Tokelau approaches 12 square kilometres. None of the islets rise above 5 feet. There is very little fertile soil and few sources of fresh water besides rain. Tokelau's fisheries zone covers a large area, about 290,000 sq. km, and is still abundant in fish, although foreign

trawling vessels take their toll on the stocks. Coconuts and pandanus fruit, fish and other kinds of seafood, as well as pigs and chickens, constitute the main ingredients of Tokelau food (Hovdhaugen 1992a). In addition, the local cooperative stores provide oil, fat, sugar, flour, tinned food and other additions to the traditional staples. The mean daily temperature is 28° Centigrade (approximately 82° Fahrenheit), with seasonal variations with respect to rainfall and types of winds, ranging from calm to the increasingly frequent hurricanes accompanied by tidal waves.

In 1982, the total number of people living in Tokelau was approximately 1650, and it is about the same today. Due to overpopulation on the islands, a government-sponsored migration scheme to New Zealand was started in the mid-1960s, and there are now about 4000 to 5000 Tokelauans living more or less permanently in New Zealand and in smaller enclaves in places such as Australia, Hawaii and mainland U.S.A. On each of the three atolls, the population is concentrated on one islet on the western, leeward side of the atoll. On both Atafu and Nukunonu, the village islets are relatively large. On Fakaofu, the village covers the whole of a smaller islet of about eleven acres, Fale, which has been built up over the years and in part reclaimed from the reef and the lagoon bed.<sup>9</sup> Since 1966, the village has expanded to the larger adjacent island, Fenua Fala, where the school and hospital are located.<sup>10</sup>

There was sporadic contact between people living on the atolls and various visitors on seafaring vessels during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Missionary activity, both Catholic and Protestant, arrived in the early 1860s. This activity coincided with the most tragic incident in the known history of Tokelau: in 1863, slavers engaged in the Peruvian slave trade raided the three atolls. More than 45 percent of the population, mainly adult males, was lost in this raid (Maude 1968). After this incident, the establishment of the missions met with little resistance (Hooper and Huntsman 1972). In 1889, Tokelau was declared a protectorate of Great Britain. In 1910, it was incorporated into the Gilbert and Ellice Island Protectorate, which in 1916 became the Gilbert and Ellice Islands colony. De-annexed in 1924, the islands came under the New Zealand Administration of Western Samoa in 1925. As a consequence of the dramatic decimation of the population (by the slave raiders and due to a dysentery epidemic coinciding with the period of first extensive contact with representatives from the world outside the Pacific), the pre-contact system of social stratification, of chiefly lines and of fights for ascendancy (Fox 1995),<sup>11</sup> was disrupted. Fakaofu's overlordship was formally ended by colonial decree in 1915 and with this, the until then chiefly form of leadership was transformed and retained in a new shape in the institutions of Village Councils (*Fono o Taupulega*) where, since then, the Elders (*Toeaina*, men from approximately their mid-sixties and above) have ruled (Hooper and Huntsman 1985).

Until the 1950s, contact with New Zealand was in the form of short-term visits by officials. The churches had representatives staying for longer periods, but these were selected from other parts of the Pacific, in the main from Samoa (Huntsman 1980). Apart from this, Tokelau was left largely to itself (Hooper 1982). Western Samoa became independent in 1962, and in 1964 Tokelau was given the choice of becoming affiliated with either Western Samoa or the Cook Islands. In response to this, Tokelau asked to be allowed to continue their association with New Zealand. In terms of UN classification, Tokelau is today a 'non self-governing territory', but it is currently assuming more responsibility for its own government and administration.

The mother tongue is the Tokelau language, which belongs to the Polynesian branch of the Austronesian language family. Linguistically classified as belonging to the Samoic Outlier Subgroup of Polynesian, it is closely related to the languages of its neighbouring countries, Tuvalu and Samoa, to the languages of its Polynesian speaking island neighbours in the east, Northern Cook Islands, Pukapuka, Manihiki and Rakahanga, and to the languages of the so-called Polynesian Outliers in the west, Sikaiana and Luangiuva in the Solomon Islands (Hovdhaugen *et al.* 1989). As I have described elsewhere (Hoëm 1995), Tokelauan was long thought by outside observers to be on the verge of becoming extinct. This may be because most official communication in earlier decades was conducted in Samoan, the language of the church and the school, and later in English. Samoan was also used to some degree in formal, ritual speech in the Protestant congregations. However, Tokelauan has always been, and still is, the language of everyday speech in the villages and among the older generation in New Zealand. The young generation in New Zealand differ to what extent they are able to speak Tokelauan, but most are able to understand it (cf., the song presented above). Kindergartens where only Tokelauan is spoken, so-called language nests (*kohaga leo*), have been established to counter this tendency. This project is modelled on similar experiments among native Hawaiians in Hawaii and the Maori population in New Zealand. In Tokelau, Tokelauan is now the primary language of instruction, and English is taught as a second language. This is a radical break with school policy in the 1960s and 1970s where children were punished for speaking their native language at school.

All villagers either have rights to land on the island or else are married to someone who does. Land is inalienable in the sense that it is forbidden by law to sell it. The village councils mentioned above (*Fono o Taupulega*) still consist of male elders (*toeaina*) on Fakaofu and Nukunonu; on Atafu they also elect *matai* (titled male family heads) to sit in the councils. The village councils hold weekly meetings where they decide upon the 'timing of all major activities of the population, the days for village work, for communal fishing enterprises, village-wide games etc.' (Hooper 1982: 17).

In other words, the village councils have the right to order people to do jobs for the village, such as when the women are ordered to weave hats, mats and fans as gifts for guests to the village, or to prepare a feast for them, or when the men are ordered to clear the reef channel of stones, or to help construct a house. The Village Councils also adjudicate in village disputes, such as those concerning land rights. They have the power to settle conflicts, and decide on family internal affairs. such as cases of extra-marital pregnancies. In recent years, the councils have had to work in closer cooperation with the Tokelau Public Service, and they elect representatives to partake in the Inter-atoll Assembly: the General Fono.

Describing the position of the Village Councils and the dominant leadership structure in the late 1960's and throughout the 1970's, A. Hooper comments that, at the time, 'this centralised direction is one of the keystones of Tokelau community structure, and it is not called into question by any notion of "individual rights"' (ibid.: 19). As we shall see in the following, this pattern is currently undergoing some changes, particularly in connection with the transition to a market economy.

The Tokelau kinship system is cognatic (Huntsman 1969: 220), and its internal workings have been studied extensively. Huntsman describes how the extended family (*kaiga*, *kau kaiga*) is divided into two sides: the *tamatane* side, which consists of the offspring of the sons of the original founding couple of the estate; and the *tamafafine* side, who are the offspring of the daughters of the founding couple. She presents the *tamatane:tamafafine* relationship as being modelled on the relationship between brothers and sisters. The relationship between brothers and sisters is said to be highly dignified (*mamalu*) and there are clear interactional restrictions (*tapu* or *ha*) on this relationship, which is called *va* ('respect', or literally, 'space between', 'distance'). The interactional pattern between brothers and sisters (after puberty) is one of avoidance and mutual deference. They are bound together in the vital relationship regulating the flow of goods and services within the extended family group, *kaukaiga*. This relationship takes place between the brother (or most commonly, group of brothers) who provides for his natal family (not the one he has moved into upon marriage) and offers his collected share of food to his sister who resides in the family homestead and who is responsible for distributing his goods to the extended family. The *tamatane* have the power and authority, *pule*, over productive property and its use – that is, the right to control land, and agricultural and fishing equipment and its use. *Tamafafine* have the right to live on the land and to control and distribute the produce of cooperative enterprises and other property associated with the *kaiga* homestead (Hooper 1968: 239). The senior male *tamatane*, the *pule*, or 'ruler', supervises the activities of the *tamatane*, and represents the *kaiga* members in the Council of Elders (Huntsman 1971: 330). The *fatupaepae*, literally the 'foundation stone', defined as 'the senior female

*tamafafine* residing on the *kaiga* homestead' (ibid: 330) supervises the activities of the *tamafafine*, and may call meetings in the family – or ask the senior male *tamatane* or *matai* to do so. The members of a *kaiga* use the land areas they hold together. Earlier, these estates were in principle broken up approximately every fourth generation, as a result of strict rules against marrying closer than third or ideally fourth cousins: since people who hold land in common are per definition counted as kinsmen, and the cognatic nature of kinship implies that everybody has kinship relations, however distant, to everybody else, in difficult cases this dilemma is solved by dividing up land areas when distantly related cousins marry (Hooper and Huntsman 1976). Briefly then, this demonstrates how, ideally, a Tokelau extended family is organised internally, in terms of task allocation and respective positions and domains of power.<sup>12</sup>

The economy of the village's subsistence sphere is run through the institution of *inati*, that is, a system which dictates an equal share distribution of any major catch of fish, or of any other major collective food resource, to all members of the villages, and in the main regardless of age and social status. One man is appointed by the village council to work as a distributor (*tauvoaega*) of *inati* shares. When there is a major distribution, he collects the goods to be distributed on the village *laulau* (a word referring to a plate or table, which in this case denotes a raised concrete platform) and he calls out the names of the share groups. The share groups, commonly represented by a child, come and receive their share and take it to their *kaiga* homestead to be distributed among its members. Young children, in general, serve as errand boys and girls, and go as messengers between adults in different households. The goods prototypically distributed in an *inati* are the *ika ha*, sacred fish. This category includes such species as turtles, swordfish and shark, and is an interesting category, in that, by definition, it is a kind of fish that must be shared with all (but which is taboo for some families). It is explicitly forbidden to keep such a catch within the family group. This restriction on consumption also applies to any large catch of fish (for example if the catch counts over twenty skipjack, it must also be shared with the village). Other goods are also distributed to the village in this manner: it happens that the surplus from the village cooperative store, or the remains from some public project, is divided out.

In this very fundamental sense, according to its system of redistribution of subsistence goods, Tokelau is an egalitarian society. This is in contrast to other, more stratified Pacific societies, such as Samoa, where distribution of subsistence goods serves a marker of social differentiation. In particular, food distributions at *feasts* epitomise allocation of difference (Keating 2000). In Tokelau, this is also the case to a certain degree, in that prominent elders, village leaders, the pastor, and other visiting dignitaries frequently receive a better share in feast situations. However, the common

distributions of subsistence goods are explicitly geared towards levelling social differences and ensuring that everybody receives an equal share. This mechanism is stressed and strongly valued in Tokelau. In her analysis of Phonapei society, E. Keating writes about how unequal shares of food may be seen as associated with hierarchy and equal shares of food as typical of egalitarian structures (ibid.). As examples of hierarchical and egalitarian structures, she refers to Phonapei and Duna respectively. Typically, Tokelau may be said to express both hierarchy and egalitarianism. The dominant collective orientation and the egalitarian ethos serve to contain or place a ceiling on the existing social hierarchy, which is tolerated within certain limits.

A prominent trait of Tokelau social organisation is its complexity. This complexity provides a certain flexibility, which seems to be a prerequisite for swift and efficient organisation of people in relation to specific tasks. People constantly group and regroup for various work- and pleasure-oriented purposes, and an appreciation of the value which is placed on this capacity may be gleaned from the concept of *maopoopo*, meaning 'to be well organised', 'to go smoothly', 'well run', 'harmonious', but also quite simply 'to gather, to congregate' (Hooper 1982; Hooper and Huntsman 1996).

Life in the villages may be seen as a cycle fluctuating between ceremonial occasions of feasting with competitive presentations of lavish displays of food, speech making, dancing and clowning, and the lean periods in between such spectacular events, during which the events are prepared. Societies in this region have been described as culturally 'thin' (Marcus and Fisher 1986:45). However, as I have argued elsewhere (Hoëm 1995), rather than attributing this apparent 'thinness' to acculturation, this cultural pattern may be seen as an expression of the codes of behaviour that dominate everyday interaction, namely an avoidance of overtly competitive and expressive behaviour. This 'thin' pattern of behaviour may then be seen to alternate with the 'thick' behaviour at the ceremonial gatherings and competitive dances and games, where clowning and boisterous behaviour is expected. Thus, behaviour ranges from the 'thin' to the 'thick', just as village life fluctuates between lean periods of little activity and hectic, bustling times that are associated with abundance.<sup>13</sup>

### *The Emergence of New Forms and Means of Social Stratification*

As has been thoroughly documented elsewhere,<sup>14</sup> Tokelau society has experienced major upheavals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the historical period with which we are familiar. Since inclusion into the British Empire brought about the abolishment of the clan-based kingship system, major changes in social organisation have taken place. From a situation which seems to have been characterised by a limited number<sup>15</sup> of

large kin-based estates (the clans being called *pui kaiga*, literally 'the walls or borders', 'the limits around', in other words what protected an extended family group), the society apparently went through a stage of fission which resulted in a proliferation of kin-groups (*kaiga*) and a splitting up of the larger land areas. In the early situation, occupational statuses, such as warriors, communal distributors and so on, seem to have followed the clan groups within a framework of totemism. This state of affairs changed rather fundamentally with the abolishment of chiefly leadership.

The subsequent historical period is characterised by what Hooper refers to as *the neo-traditional order* of Tokelau society, and carries in syncretistic fashion, traits from the old order along with other traits, many of which can be traced to the church institutions. A very strong communal or group orientation is evident throughout this period. Since the 1960s, a new state of affairs has been apparent, however. This new state has been brought about by a convergence of factors. Among the most important of these are the introduction of a market-sphere, the establishment of a Tokelau Public Service,<sup>16</sup> and an increase in migration from Tokelau to New Zealand, which had an incentive in the Tokelau Migration Scheme. The introduction of a scholarship-scheme and the establishment of education in Tokelau outside the churches have also played an important role in the last twenty to thirty years.

For a long time, the introduction of a monetary economy took the form of the establishment of a new economical sphere,<sup>17</sup> and Tokelau society was still essentially subsistence-based. The circulation of subsistence goods and tribute, gifts or *mea alofa* (lit. 'things of love') took place outside the monetary sphere, and in the main followed the principles of the *inati*- or communal share-system. For approximately twenty years, the subsistence sphere was dominant, but the monetary sphere steadily gained importance as the number of people who received TPS salaries increased. Hooper, in his 1982 working paper 'Aid and Dependency', describes how he observed what he calls a class awareness emerge on Fakaofu. The material changes he describes have been seen to bring about a difference in attitude. Where earlier ego-oriented attitudes towards material goods were severely condemned, now more and more people speak up for the legitimacy of 'looking out for one's interests' (*e kikila lava te tino kiate ia*) (Hooper 1982).

With the increase in wage labour, the importance of communal cooperation has diminished accordingly. The fact that individuals now receive salaries has supported a further step towards a social atomisation, in that wage earners are no longer solely dependent on their relatives for material support. The nuclear family is of growing importance, at the expense of the brother:sister relationship, and this trend is happily welcomed by many, as, among other things, it relieves the burden of work and obligations involved in the running of an extended family. The system

of communal distribution and sharing, and its associated values of egalitarianism and caring for those with few resources, has persisted in the face of this development, however, as it is still unseemly to exchange fish for money for example. On the one hand, this points to the continued existence of sphere-barriers, with concomitant restrictions on the flow of goods and rules of exchange. On the other hand, it is undeniably the case that money-oriented activities account for an increasing proportion of the total amount of labour carried out.

For those who are concerned with the upholding of communal values, and who have the responsibility of making the villages run, this development has been the cause of many worries. The Councils of Elders (the *Taupulega*) have, for a long time, attempted to control this development, by placing a total ban on private enterprises for example. I believe that it is of telling significance that during the 1990s, this ban was partially lifted as a result of public demand.

To conclude, there has been a relatively recent growth in the importance of the principles of market economy, and following this, significant socio-economic differences between families have emerged. There are many new factors to cope with at present: along with the emerging socio-economic differences, great differences are apparent when it comes to mobility, for example, whether a family can afford to go to New Zealand, or to send for a family member to attend a wedding or a funeral. New tools of expression, such as videos that are sent between family members in New Zealand and in Tokelau, also serve to expand the possibilities and to demonstrate the limits of the knowable world.

Recent years have seen socio-economic divisions emerge that were previously non-existent. At the same time, new social institutions and networks have developed. Alongside the trend towards atomisation is a trend working in the opposite direction, which in a certain sense counters the effect of this atomisation. This second trend is manifest in the very high number of Tokelau organisations and institutions that have been established since the early 1960s, mainly in New Zealand, but also elsewhere.

### *Age, Gender and Kin: 'Sided' Relationships*

Huntsman (1971) has pointed to the existence of what she sees as three structural principles informing social organisation in Tokelau. The first she calls 'sequential', the second 'complementary' and the third 'similar'.

In short, she describes the principle of seniority (the hierarchy of relative age) as 'sequential', and the roles relating to the dimension of gender as being of a 'complementary' nature. That is, in her analysis, the relationship between men and women is described as 'complementary', in that men and women occupy mutually dependent, but separate and dif-

ferent, domains over which they are in exclusive command.<sup>18</sup> The same relationship of complementarity exists between the two sides of the kingroup. The third structural principle she calls 'similar'. This relationship exists between any number of individuals or groups which occupy structurally 'similar' positions, such as the members of a particular age-cohort, or, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, sports-teams, dance groups and so on. These relationships are highly context-sensitive as parts of ongoing social interaction. That is, which one of them dominates a sequence of interaction depends on the definition of the situation (Goffmann 1959, 1974). For example, in a group of boys, the factor of relative age can easily enter into the situation and thus turn a 'similar' and competitive situation into one where the 'complementary' command/obedience pattern of interaction is dominant.

The principle of similarity, in Huntsman's definition, allows for relationships that are *competitive*. This is what really sets them apart from relationships defined by the principle of complementarity, at least if this concept is restricted, as in her analysis, to denote gender relations and the sided relations within the extended families. When describing other relationships of unequal status, such as between the political leadership and the villagers, that is, hierarchical relations, we may be satisfied to explain the existence of hierarchy by reference to the principle of seniority (what Huntsman calls 'sequential' relationships). However, to do so obscures the fact that fighting for ascendancy, which per definition is part of any interaction between similar groups, may also dominate interaction between groups of unequal status. Also, as I have described elsewhere, a seemingly non-political, non-serious situation, such as dancing at a feast, may be the occasion for people or groups to make claims for political status, precisely because this situation is outside of the formal political arena. However, this does not mean that such acts of identification, and such claims to ascendancy cannot and will not have consequences in the political arena proper at a later stage. In fact, and counter to Shore and Mageo's interpretations of the relationship between formal (political) and informal (entertainment) settings, based on material from Samoa, I would argue that it is most likely to have such consequences (Hoëm 1998a and b).

In short, I believe that we need to address the issue of how the dominant values of egalitarianism and the concomitant importance placed on communal cooperation and integration relate to the status rivalry that keep people preoccupied so much of the time. An illustration: not all elders possess or exercise leadership authority. To command respect in a most general sense is the prerogative of any older person, but if the position to command others has not been worked upon, that is, if the person in question has not achieved the support of a number of people, an elder may suffer the experience of being left to die on his or her own, with a

dwindling food supply and with a steadily diminishing number of visitors and caretakers. If, on the other hand, the person has taken an active part in the establishment of his or her position as important, there will be supporters around to allow for the exercise of authority.

To fight for ascendancy, by making claims to positions of authority through public acts of identification (see Hoëm 1999), is an important part of village life, and no one escapes having to 'stage' oneself or one's group, to place oneself or the group one represents in a public position or *tulaga*. This fighting can be of a non-serious nature, for example, it can take the form of a mock fight, such as when two sides of a village compete to outdo each other in dancing. Alternatively, it can be serious, for example as part of political deliberation between two atolls. The sides that Huntsman describes as complementary (e.g., the two sides of a kin group, or the men and the women in the village) differ from the similar ones in that they do not usually engage in fights over ascendancy *with each other*. However, such complementary sides may easily turn into and function together as a similar side vis-à-vis structurally similar groups outside of, for example, the extended family. Thus, a kingroup (consisting of two different sides) is one of many (similar) kingroups and competes for ascendancy with these on an equal basis. In the same manner, the men and women of the village may combine as one dancing team, and thus being on one side, they can challenge an equal group from another village. Thus relationships between complementary (different) sides may easily be transformed into one collective, i.e., into one undifferentiated (similar) group facing a similar team. The dynamics of these transformations is ultimately controlled by the political leadership in the villages, that is, the Elders: they may, for example, decide that the competition between the two sides of the village has become much too serious, that it threatens village stability and therefore that the sides' activities should be abandoned for a while.

I believe that it was a variant of this mechanism that Robert Borofsky witnessed in Pukapuka (a society that closely resembles Tokelau), and that he profoundly missed the historical continuity that this mechanism of social transformation has in these societies (Borofsky 1987; Hoëm 2002). Through the creation of sides, a relationship is established. New sides may always be created, but the principle of 'sidedness' is not new. The control, regulation and orchestration of sides are the prerogative of the political leadership: in short *it is what they do*.

In other words, and to my reinterpretation of Huntsman's analysis: I find competition for respect, honour and status typical of what she describes as 'similar' relationships (which frequently turn into attempts at establishing a hierarchical relationship). The 'complementary' relationships between genders resemble the pattern described as common to so-called 'honour and shame' societies – that is, systems where a man's

honour rests on the shame of the women of his family (their modest or shy behaviour, in Tokelau terms, *ma*). The 'sequential' relationships may be read on the one hand as expressions of an ideology of 'natural leadership', based on the principle of relative seniority, where everybody gets to be on top occasionally. On the other hand, it is also a social fact associated with the hierarchy of political leadership, of positions within the family, and of governing etiquette in village interactions.

In my analysis above, I have built on the structural analysis presented by Huntsman, but I have chosen to interpret the relationships in a dynamic perspective, as part of ongoing social processes. Furthermore, I ask whether the 'sidedness' of relationships found in Tokelau at present is a form of sociality that serves to keep both egalitarianism and hierarchy in check. I choose to describe the patterns of sociality as part of an ongoing social process, both because I believe that this gives a more true to life description of the dynamic workings of society, and also because new forms of social stratification are slowly emerging, and new media of expression are now available. How these factors may come to affect ways of life and representations of identities will be the subject of the following chapters.

## Notes

1. A reworking of the field methods implied by the 'extended case method' developed by the Manchester School (P. Brown Glick 1984: 237–38.) See also E. Venbrux (1995) for an innovative application of this approach.
2. See F. Barth on fieldwork methodology (Barth 1993).
3. Mageo (1998) in her analysis of Samoan conceptions translates this term as 'secular power'. This sets the term in contrast to the 'spiritual power' exercised by women in their role as sisters. This opposition is also relevant for Tokelau (see Hooper and Huntsman 1975). However, as the secular and spiritual aspects of power have been intertwined historically (see Macgregor 1937 on the *vakataulaitu* or priest/ chief), and as the 'spiritual power' (*mana*) today is only explicitly associated with the Church, in practice secular power has spiritual aspects and vice versa. There are still some differences according to gender, with respect to what kind of power(s) and control is attributed to men and women. See also Hoëm (1995).
4. See Huntsman and Hooper (1996), Friedman (1998).
5. See also Senft (1987).
6. See Hoëm (1998 a and b).
7. See Hoëm (1998 a and b).
8. Lit. 'sky-bursters', Europeans or Westerners. Now most commonly used to refer to Caucasians.
9. Ian Prior and John Stanhope (1980: 996).
10. For an overview of the Tokelau communities in New Zealand, see Sallen (1998).
11. On the 'days of war' see (Hooper and Huntsman 1985).
12. For a more thorough discussion of the concept of *kaukaiga*, see Huntsman, (1971: 327).

13. See Mageo 1998 for a description of the relationships between formal, political activities and informal entertainment in Samoa from a historical perspective.
14. See, in particular, Hooper and Huntsman 1972, and Hooper 1982.
15. Nine or ten 'houses' existed on Fakaofu, seven on Atafu and four on Nukunonu. For further information on this subject, see Hoëm 1992, Chapter two.
16. This particular institution can be dated to the 1950s. See Hooper and Huntsman in Wessen *et al.* 1992.
17. The use of this concept in economical anthropology is usually attributed to P. Bohannan. See also F. Barth 1967. For an application of this concept to economic developments in Tokelau, see Hooper and Huntsman 1972.
18. This last point may be contested on the basis of the fact that men as a group (outside of the family) can exercise the right, through the Village Councils, to direct and control women's work, but not the other way around (Hoëm 1995).