

Early European–Polynesian contact reenacted: Anutan “handling” of a foreign fishing vessel

ABSTRACT

This article recounts an incident in which many of the dynamics of early contact between European sailors and Pacific Islanders appear to have played out. The event occurred in 1973 on Anuta, a remote Polynesian enclave in the eastern Solomon Islands. Over a three-day period, islanders acquired highly valued commodities from a Taiwanese fishing boat through a combination of extortion and some very tough negotiations. This incident, I argue, helps to supply a missing piece in the puzzle of early contact. [*Polynesia, history, early contact*]

An enduring puzzle of Oceanic history involves the nature of early contact between European sailors and Pacific Islanders.¹ Typically, such encounters witnessed the exchange of manufactured goods, such as knives and cotton cloth or iron nails, for fresh fruits and vegetables. Often they also included sexual contact and the removal of objects (in both directions) without permission, either by stealth or force.² And, all too often, they included deadly violence.

The events themselves are reasonably well known. The intentions of the European actors have been recorded, although those records must be treated with a dose of cautious skepticism. The motivations and understandings of the islanders, by contrast, are almost wholly undocumented and have been subject to considerable speculative interpretation.³

In this article, I recount an event that occurred in early 1973, during my first period of fieldwork on Anuta, a remote Polynesian enclave in the eastern Solomon Islands. Anuta remains as undisturbed a Polynesian community as one can find in the contemporary world, and in 1973 life on the island appeared to resemble, in many critical ways, what most Polynesian communities must have looked like in the days of early contact, during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries.⁴

The incident involved a Taiwanese fishing boat that anchored off Anuta shortly before my departure from the island. Over a three-day period, Anutans managed to acquire substantial quantities of alcoholic beverages, cigarettes, rice, and other much-desired scarce commodities. This was accomplished through a combination of extortion and some very tough negotiations between parties who only spoke a few words of a common language.

The event in question is not a case of early contact, and I was the only “European” involved. Still, many of the dynamics of early encounters appear to have been played out on Anuta during those few days in 1973. I was literally a participant-observer of these events and knew the leading actors on the Anutan side quite well. I can speak with some confidence of their motivations and concerns and how the dynamics of the situation, at a certain point, took on a life of their own. Thus, I hope that my account can help supply a missing piece in the puzzle of “early European contact.”

I have been reluctant to publish this material because of potential repercussions for the individuals involved. But those constraints have eased with the passage of time. The event occurred more than 30 years ago, and most of the major figures are now dead. The ship itself may very well have turned to dust—or its nautical equivalent. And any statute of limitations for the crime of trespass into Solomon Islands waters has certainly long since expired.⁵

In recently reliving the event with several Anutans, I found it evoked a combination of pathos, empathy, and uproarious laughter. Clearly, the encounter continues to resonate with Anutan values and culture. In that respect, the story must be understood in light of long-standing Anutan—indeed, Polynesian—values and preoccupations, thus, supporting the position advocated by Robert Borofsky and Alan Howard (1989) in their review of early contact literature. The descriptions of experiences related here come directly from my daily journal, subject to minor editing to clarify key points and improve the narrative flow. In the concluding section, I suggest some of the issues that emerge from an analysis of the incident.

The encounter

On the morning of January 5, 1973, a ship was spotted on the horizon. I was awaiting a vessel that would take me back to Honiara, the British Solomon Islands Protectorate's administrative center, after almost a year on Anuta. It seemed too early to be the regular government ship. Nevertheless, Pu Tokerau—the island's catechist and brother of the senior chief, in whose house I had been living—told me to get ready just in case this was the craft on which I would depart.⁶

When the vessel approached the island, we saw that it was a foreign fishing boat.⁷ No canoe went out to meet it, as the passage was unusually rough, but a large group of men swam to the ship.⁸ At first I declined to join them, as I was recovering from a case of flu and still had a sore throat. Even when a group of older boys made it through the surf, I managed to restrain myself. But 20 minutes later, when a third group headed out, I could no longer check my curiosity.

The boat—*Hung Feng*, from Taiwan—was about 100 feet in length. It was an old workboat, without pretense of polish. When I got to the ship, I found the Anutans who had preceded me drinking beer on the deck. I was immediately escorted to the captain, who offered me a glass of Hennessy cognac. Next, I discovered Pu Toke, Anuta's one English speaker, conversing in very simplified (and drunk-sounding) language with the three crew members who also spoke a little of the common tongue. I soon discovered that he had already downed three full glasses of brandy (see Figure 1).

My first reaction was astonishment at the captain's generosity, with the prospect of nothing more than a few coconuts, bananas, and papayas in return. In the four hours or so that I spent on the ship, I was given four brandy snifters full

of high-quality cognac. We all were given as many cigarettes as we could smoke and a good Chinese meal of soup, greens, wonderfully seasoned pork, and rice. Except for the rice, I think I was the only one of our contingent to appreciate it; and, not surprisingly, I was the only one to eat with chopsticks. The fishermen also provided tinned mackerel for the Anutans, and this was much enjoyed by all. In addition, they supplied the Anutans with three huge ocean sunfish, which must have run around 100 pounds apiece, and several large dolphin fish to take home.

Pu Toke kept pestering the captain for two bottles of brandy, and the captain, although generously filling all the glasses he could find, made it as plain as he could in his almost nonexistent English that two unopened bottles would be forthcoming when a canoe arrived to carry him ashore.

I learned what was going through the captain's mind when he showed me his "girlie" pictures. I warned the Anutans to be careful if the fishermen did get to the island and explained what they were after. Pu Toke, by now thoroughly inebriated, told the sailors that he sympathized with them and would like to help but that he couldn't permit such activity because it was forbidden by the Church of England and the bishop of Melanesia. When I jokingly suggested that he give the captain his wife for the night, he responded that were it not for the church, he wouldn't object. "But," he said in English, "church stop that now." I also tried, unsuccessfully, to warn the captain that he was probably giving away his hard-earned supplies for naught. But mostly, I tried to stay out of the fray to the extent that I—as one of the two men who knew both Anutan and the contact language—possibly could.

Things went on like that for several hours, with Pu Toke demanding two bottles of cognac and the captain demanding that Pu Toke bring out a canoe to take him ashore. Pu Toke was willing to mobilize a canoe, but he wanted the captain to wait until the next day, in hopes that the surf would subside. He had also been out fishing the night before and wished to get a little sleep before having to deal with a boatload of sex-crazed sailors at large among his people. When it became plain that the cognac would not be forthcoming without a canoe, however, against his better judgment, Pu Toke ordered some of the Anutans to go ashore and bring one out. When the captain finally saw the canoe, he handed Pu Toke a bottle; and when Pu Toke said he wanted two, the captain complied without protest. He even supplied me with one, completely unsolicited. Pu Nukumanaia (Pu Nuku), always a strong but calming influence, later told me on the side that he disapproved of Pu Toke's pressure tactics. But he made no visible attempt to stop them, recognizing the futility of such an effort.⁹

Earlier in the day, some crew members who did not feel the need for a boat had swum ashore. When the canoe embarked for the island, it carried the ship's captain, other crew members, and the Anutan contingent. Pu Toke and I swam ahead of the canoe. Along the way, I kept having to remind



Figure 1. Pu Toke holding Kaurave War Club, said to have been brought to Anuta by the leader of the first immigrants, approximately 15 generations ago. Photo by Richard Feinberg (from *Anuta: Polynesian Lifeways for the Twenty-First Century*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2004).

my somewhat disoriented companion about where the island was, as he continually veered off course. So I was not in a position to observe the catastrophe. But there was no shortage of witnesses.

I knew that the canoe was badly overloaded when it left the ship, with people sitting on the bow and stern covers, and even on the outrigger. Several islanders jumped off at the surf line to haul in the fish that the captain had presented to them. Still, the vessel must have been severely overcrowded. In any case, it was caught by a large wave and dashed against the reef. The hull was split in two, and no attempt was made even to retrieve the pieces.

Fortunately, no one was injured, but the festive mood immediately turned somber. When an Anutan canoe is damaged beyond repair, it is given a kind of funeral, similar to that for a deceased person, complete with ritual wailing and singing of funerary dirges (*puatanga*). As I walked along the strand with the captain and one other sailor, I heard a middle-aged man named Arikitoro wailing alone in Maravai, a house in Muri Village, toward the eastern portion of the island. And when I returned to the house that

I shared with Pu Toke, I found him lying on his stomach, crying almost apoplectically while trying to get out a funeral lament between sobs. Two teenaged girls and several younger children were sitting nearby, smoking and watching quietly. Seven-year-old Joseph Poraumaatua explained that only the *tangata tau vaka*, those men who shared in the vessel's ownership, would wail. If the canoe named Patiaitu, for example, had been broken, Joseph's father, Pu Paone, would have been crying. But as the wrecked canoe was Taapurupuru, the main wailers would be Pu Tongotere, Pu Toke, and Arikitoro. Pu Toke said that sometime after the Christmas celebration, which was to go on for another week, a proper funeral would be held for the canoe. During all this activity, the captain showed surprising sensitivity and, despite an invitation to enter Pu Toke's house, decided to stay outside until the wailing had finished.

As I anticipated, the women were terrified of the visitors, and the sailors could not get near any of them. The four fishermen who remained on the island stayed in New House (the home that I shared with Pu Toke) and barely ventured out all night, even to get a breath of fresh air. They had a

dinner of fish—hardly a novelty to them—along with taro and banana puddings (*uoua taro* and *uoua puti*), which they did not devour with much enthusiasm. Pu Toke and I joined them as they ate inside the house rather than try to coax them into joining the community in the coconut-leaf shade house (*pare rau niu*) outside the main church. And the captain drank up the bottle of cognac he had given to me earlier. The ten or so glasses of cognac and gin that Pu Toke had consumed on the ship seemed to have affected even his cast-iron stomach, as he ate no dinner but asked for a couple of ship's biscuits afterward.¹⁰

Before church the next morning, Pu Toke asked the captain to pay compensation for the wrecked canoe. He said he wanted \$107, and the captain immediately agreed. After prayer, the captain swam back to the ship, abandoning the dignity of a half-dry canoe, to which his status should have entitled him. A second crew member swam back with the captain. The ship's radio operator and one other man failed to make it past the breakers. Then, as I got to the reef flat to investigate, I saw Pu Toke in the water, lining up with the former man and grasping a large ring buoy.¹¹

The radio operator was shaking and had turned a sickly shade of green. I called to Pu Toke to give up his plan, but when there was a short respite in the surf, the two of them quickly ran through. I joined them and assumed that once we made it past the breakers, the radio operator would be all right. From the way that he was floundering about and clutching at the ring buoy, however, I realized that he was not simply frightened of the surf; he couldn't swim at all. At that point, a huge roller started to break well out to sea. I dove under the wave to protect myself, but the men with the ring buoy didn't have that option. The wave caught the "life preserver," and Pu Toke and his companion, hanging on for all they were worth, were summarily tossed back to the reef flat.

When I realized what had happened, I swam back; with the large waves breaking in deep water it was easy to body-surf most of the way to shore. My intention was to tell Pu Toke to leave the man alone; that the two of us would swim out to the ship and inform the captain that he would have to wait until the surf went down. Much to my relief, he accepted my advice. As we were swimming through the ocean swells, Pu Toke shared his conviction that the ship would soon depart, whether all its men had gotten back or not. He then related his intention to adopt the radio operator and care for him as an Anutan.

When we arrived at the ship, however, all humanitarian compassion vanished. Pu Toke immediately approached the captain for the compensation money. When it became apparent that the captain was concerned about the fate of the radio operator, Pu Toke hit on a new scheme that might be fairly described as kidnap and ransom. He announced that he wanted "his" money "right now" and that, if it was not forthcoming, he would not return the radio operator or the

one other sailor still on the island. The captain offered to give me the money to hold, with the proviso that when his men were safely returned, I was to pass it on. Pu Toke reluctantly agreed, and the captain gave me \$100, asking me to sign and thumbprint(!) a receipt. Perhaps, I speculated, he was spending company money and needed an official-looking document. He also gave me a jar of instant coffee, a half dozen cans of condensed milk, and another bottle of cognac (this time, V.S.O.P.) to replace the bottle of Hennessy V.S. that he had drunk the previous night.

Around noon, Pu Toke and I swam back to shore for a big feast. This was the Day of the Epiphany and also of my departure ceremony, known as *te kaikai pakamaavae*. Earlier I had been suffering from laryngitis, but by noon my throat was feeling better, so I took the opportunity to deliver a "farewell address" to the island. The contrast between the love and friendship for which I thanked my hosts and the high-level coercion taking place only a few hundred yards away could hardly have been more striking.

After lunch, several Anutans decided to try again to get the two crewmen back to the boat. I was skeptical but agreed to their attempting it on the condition that they obtain a large plank, like a seat from a discarded church bench, for the radio operator to hang onto.¹² The ring buoy, although sufficiently buoyant, was apparently not large and stable enough to inspire confidence in a nonswimmer. And, by this time, the waves had become even bigger. As I saw the radio operator standing on the reef, shaking at the prospect of facing the sea once more, I insisted that the idea be scrapped and that we keep the two nonswimmers on shore until such time as the surf would allow us to launch a canoe.

Pu Toke, with an entourage of Pu Teakena, Pu Tongotere, and Pu Penuatai, headed out to sea again to deliver the news. They exited between the Ava Tii and Pangukoroo (see Figure 2). I crossed the reef in front of Te Pungaana Rai, where the water was deep enough for me to swim (as opposed to wading) out. I got to the ship, feeling good from the invigorating exercise. But once aboard, I found that I was standing in a pool of blood. While walking on the reef, I had stepped on something that cut out a section of flesh from my foot about the size of a nickel and perhaps a quarter-inch deep. It was cleanly scooped out of my right heel and was bleeding profusely. The ship's mate placed some kind of packing material on the wound, which helped stop the bleeding.¹³ He then dressed it with a long strip of gauze bandage. Only after that did the wound really hurt.

The four Anutans and I stayed on the boat for a couple of hours, listening to Chinese and Western music on the captain's mini-record player as I sipped his Hennessy V.S.O.P. and attempted to fight off the cigarettes that were pushed in my face as quickly as I could smoke them. I was given a carton and a half of cigarettes and, at 5 p.m., we headed back to shore. After the evening church service, our two guests

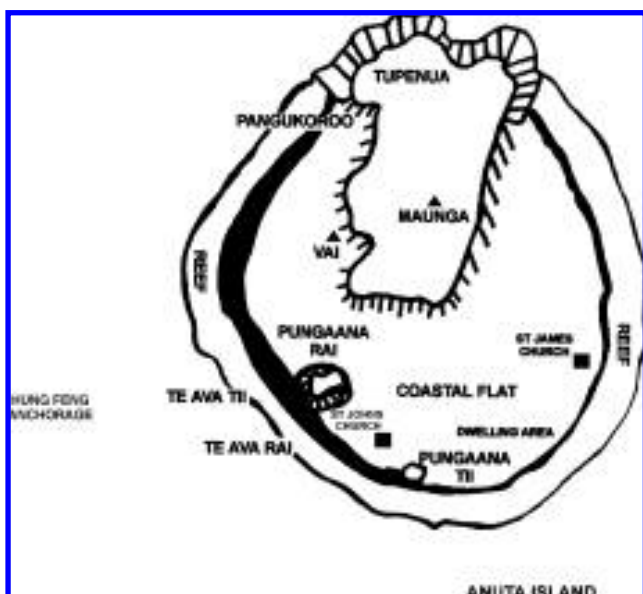


Figure 2. Map of Anuta Island, showing the dwelling area, two passages (Te Ava Tii and Te Ava Rai), and location of *Hung Feng's* anchorage (adapted from Yen and Gordon 1973).

let it be known that they were hungry, so I cooked a can of pineapple pork, which, combined with some taro pudding, seemed to tide them over. Soon afterward, they fell asleep.

Pu Toke and I ate in the shade house near the St. John Church, where we had a dinner of baked red snapper (*pakamea*)—one of my favorite Anutan dishes—in addition to various types of pudding. Around 9 p.m., I, too, went to bed.

The following day, after a rather lengthy Sunday morning service, we discovered that the surf had gone down—not a lot, but enough to make a difference. Some of the men went to get Puatau, one of the island's smallest canoes. With Pu Toke and Pu Rotopenua paddling, they transported the radio operator to the ship, then returned for the other seaman and some bananas and papayas.

My throat was still not feeling very good and my foot hurt quite badly, so I intended not to go to the ship unless I could get a ride in the canoe. But again, my curiosity got the best of me. The question arose of how to get the large ring buoy back to the ship. Pu Toke did not want to take it in the small canoe, and the men from the ship were having a tough time getting it through the surf. So I grabbed it and headed out. Slowed by that “sea anchor,” I did not make very good time; but the other swimmers were slowed by bunches of coconuts and bananas, and we arrived pretty much together.

As soon as I arrived, I was taken by the crew and led down into the hold, where I was given more rice than I could eat; Chinese greens; nicely flavored boiled fish; coffee, mixed with so much milk and sugar that it tasted like warm cof-

fee ice cream; beer; crumbly biscuits; soap; cigarettes; and other esteemed commodities. Soon I was led back to the deck, where the captain got into the act. In the end, they gave me a half-dozen bars of soap, seven cans of beer, a half-dozen cans of condensed milk, a one-pound tin of butter, two dozen biscuits, three dozen packs of cigarettes, four packs of chewing gum, five pounds of sugar, a pair of undershorts, several small face towels, two T-shirts, and a bottle of shampoo (I was told that it was especially good—made in Japan!) as well as a supply of medications with instructions written in Chinese, all to take back with me to the island.

Although being a “European” may have had something to do with my special treatment, the sailors said that, of all the men on Anuta, they liked me the best (“You Number One”), which is understandable given that I was about the only one who did not demand—or even request—anything from them. In fact, I would gladly have traded all my presents for one of the captain's brandy snifters and one of the crew's “coolie hats,” but I despaired of making myself understood. I feared that the sailors would simply take it as an additional request, which they might have granted. But I had nothing to give in return and was already embarrassed about the whole affair. Despite my embarrassment, however, I did nothing to discourage the sailors' generosity, as I knew that my Anutan friends would appreciate the merchandise.

When I arrived back on the deck, I found Pu Toke and the captain going at it again. Several large bunches of bananas had been transported to the ship, along with some coconuts and papayas, and the canoe had gone back to get a supply of chickens. The captain handed Pu Toke a half-dozen cans of beer, but the Anutan leader turned them back, saying, “We don't want this! We want whiskey!” Then this man—who had just preached a long sermon about how anyone who says he loves God but hates his brother is a liar—told me that unless the captain gave him four more bottles of cognac, he would order all the chickens and everything else the Anutans had brought returned to the island.

At this point, I was thoroughly exasperated with Pu Toke demanding one thing after another and, as soon as one demand was satisfied, threatening that unless a new one was also met, he would back out of his first agreement. I listed for him the many things we had already been given. He apologized but said he had no choice, “Because the people want whiskey!” I replied that he would have to fight this battle with the captain by himself—that I was not about to help, even at the level of explaining his demand. In the end, the canoe did come with four chickens and a basket of papayas, and Pu Toke got two bottles of cognac in return.

Throughout this episode, I felt as if I were living in the days of Captain Kidd. Or perhaps a better analogy would be the time of Finau and the Tongans who plundered William Mariner's ship two centuries ago (Mariner 1817). Or perhaps of Anuta's own Pu Notau, who led the pillage of a European

vessel in the early to mid-1800s (see Feinberg 1998:229–230). Certainly, in all the transactions, the fishermen came out on the losing end. Not counting their presents to me, they gave away at least four bottles of cognac to the islanders to take home, plus another four or five that were drunk on board. It wasn't top-of-the-line cognac, but neither was it an off-brand. They gave away at least two cases of beer, 10 or 15 cartons of cigarettes, and four large bags of rice. Additional commodities included coffee, sugar, condensed milk, clothes, and several other odds and ends. The radio operator paid Pu Toke \$7 in cash, apparently out of gratitude for getting him back to the ship alive. And there was, of course, the \$100 payment for the canoe.¹⁴ The 500 pounds or so of fish the sailors gave away also must have been worth a good deal, even on the wholesale market in Taiwan. By my conservative estimate, their three days on Anuta had to have cost them a minimum of several hundred dollars plus the lost income from three days of not fishing. I doubt that what they got in return could have been worth more than \$20 or \$30 at Honiara prices. When Pu Toke announced the payment for the wrecked canoe to the island, he publicly gloated over the \$100, estimating the vessel's true worth at \$30 or \$40.

The ship's crew almost lost a couple of its members, and those who had to battle the surf couldn't have enjoyed their stay, not knowing when—or even whether—they would be able to return to their comrades. Nor did they get the sex for which they had come. Yet their generosity continued, even after it became apparent that they would not achieve their prize and that they would receive only limited supplies of fresh fruit. Moreover, it continued even after the last members of the crew arrived back at the ship—right up until the time they left.

During my last visit to the ship with the Anutans, a boy named Joel was left to care for the canoe while the adults went aboard. The current, however, was running strongly to the north or northwest, and, despite his best efforts, Joel was being carried farther and farther away. As we were getting ready to leave, I waved to him to come and pick up the goods. In response, he waved his paddle, indicating that I should swim over to help him maneuver the canoe back.

Going with the current, I reached Joel in no time. We had just started back to the ship, when we saw Pu Nuku and Pu Aatapu swimming an empty oil drum to shore. It appeared to have gotten caught in the current, and they were having some trouble; so we went to pick them up before proceeding to the ship. I knew the captain was getting ready to leave and wanted to go back immediately to retrieve the goods before they had to be swum through the surf, but our passengers insisted on taking the oil drum to shore first. When the ship's crew saw that we were going to the passage, they quickly weighed anchor and took off, although only after bringing the Anutans to a better location from which to swim across the surf line. We picked up Pu Toke and all the goods and headed for the Ava Tii.

After the first day's experience, Pu Toke wasn't taking chances with the canoe in the heavy surf, and when we got to the breakers, he had all the goods removed so that they could be swum through the passage. I swam ashore myself despite my bad foot; if anything were to happen to the canoe, I didn't intend to be even partially responsible. Pu Toke took the stern and Pu Rotopenua climbed into the bow. They told Joel to get out and swim, but he refused for fear of the surf. The beach became jammed with onlookers to witness the entry. The paddlers waited perhaps 20 minutes for the appropriate moment, then made it through, shipping only a few drops of water. Nau Akonima turned to me and commented in admiration, "Tou ingoa e maatea na maarama" [Your namesake is really talented].¹⁵

Once ashore, Pu Toke, who had been so avaricious on the fishing boat, became a paragon of generosity. He had been given a bag of goods only slightly smaller than mine, and the contents were immediately distributed. I don't think that he kept anything for himself. The two bottles of cognac were taken to Nukutaukakara to be drunk by everyone at the dance that was scheduled for the following day.¹⁶

After breakfast the next morning, a dozen cans of beer and two bottles of cognac were brought out, and a spontaneous "kava circle" was formed. All the men sat around in a large circle while Pu Avakope, Pu Rotopenua, Pu Teaokena, and Pu Raveiti carefully measured out the drinks and distributed them, along with cigarettes, to the rest of us. The women and children sat outside the circle and did not drink.

This seems to have been the first time that anything of the kind was done on Anuta, and it is as sociable a style of drinking as I can imagine. But someone got the bright idea that mixing the cognac with seawater would make the alcohol more potent. It was enough to make one want to cry! When the drinking was finished, around 1:30 p.m., we began a ceremonial dance.

Discussion

Throughout this incident, I was astonished at the Anutans'—particularly Pu Toke's—behavior. These were people with whom I had been living for a year and whom I had found to be among the kindest, most generous, and most considerate that I had ever known. Yet, in this encounter, they seemed greedy, self-centered, erratic, and ready to resort to pressure tactics, including extortion, to get their way. What was I to make of this Jekyll-and-Hyde routine, and what might it reveal about early Polynesian–European contacts?

Borofsky and Howard (1989), following Irving Goldman (1970), have cited status rivalry as a common Polynesian trait underlying much of the islanders' behavior in such circumstances. Among the most important responsibilities of a Polynesian leader is to ensure his people's material well-being. The classic Polynesian chief is descended from divinity, giving him extraordinary mana. He is then

expected to use his mana to ensure the productivity of gardens and fishing grounds, safety from invasion, and success in warfare.¹⁷

In the Anutan case, the issue is less rivalry than validation. Pu Toke was the senior chief's brother and the island's highest-ranking clergyman.¹⁸ As such, he did not have to subdue an adversary, and there was no active challenge to his authority. Still, he was expected to demonstrate that he deserved his generally accepted status by promoting his people's welfare. When understood in this light, his use of all means at his disposal to liberate whatever he could from the Taiwanese fishermen on the community's behalf becomes intelligible. It makes sense that, when I confronted him on the ship during the last day of the encounter, he was somewhat defensive but replied that he had no alternative "because the people want whiskey." And this is also why, after his prodigious and successful effort to procure valued commodities, he kept nothing for himself.

Still, personalities were a factor. Pu Toke was ambitious and assertive. Although he knew he never would be chief because of his position as the second brother, he was not quite reconciled to that reality. In fact, other Anutans have described his *modus operandi* as *pia ariki* (lusting after the chieftainship). If he could not gain the title, at least he might attain some chiefly deference and admiration. But that required a dramatic demonstration of his ability to provide for the community. In a sense, then, status rivalry, indeed, became a motivating factor.

To some degree, Pu Toke's actions were modeled on historical precedent. Oral traditions show that visitors to the island were either incorporated into the community, or they were driven off or killed. There was no middle ground. And, in at least two remembered cases, Anutans attacked European ships. In the first encounter, islanders took the ship by surprise, massacred the crew, liberated all the objects that they deemed to have value, and destroyed what remained to avoid leaving a trace. In the second, the crew was able to retrieve its guns and fend off the assault. On both occasions, according to traditions, the leaders' motivations were to obtain European goods, thereby achieving renown both as warriors and as providers for their kin.

Traditions also show ambivalence about attacking a potentially powerful enemy. Concerns included both fear of reprisals and moral misgivings about unprovoked killing. Anutans in 1973 evidenced no fear of the Taiwanese fishermen, but some islanders raised doubts and disagreements about the morality of their behavior. Pu Nuku explicitly expressed his disapproval. And 28 years later, in reminiscing about the event, the senior chief (who was absent from the island when it occurred but had heard detailed descriptions) characterized it as "nga tukutukunga kovi o tou ingoa" [your namesake's evil doings]. Similarly, doubts, disagreements, and debates must have arisen among Polynesians of the

17th, 18th, and 19th centuries about the most appropriate and advantageous way to deal with interlopers. Such deliberations rarely show up in the historical record. In one noteworthy encounter, however, Western scholars know that a Tongan attack on Captain Cook's crew was canceled because an omen at the last moment foretold failure (Mariner 1817). Surely, the Tongans debated the issue before determining their course of action.

Although the *Hung Feng* incident, in some respects, resembles early contact, it is far from *first* contact. Anutans in the 19th century, before discovering firearms' destructive power, imagined that they could take what they wished from passing European ships without risking retribution. In that way, they bring to mind a few New Guinea highlanders' depictions of their first encounters with Australian gold prospectors (Conolly and Anderson 1982, 1987). By the 1970s, however, Anutans had no doubts about the power of outsiders. At the same time, unlike Bob Conolly and Robin Anderson's New Guineans or Sahlins's (1981, 1995) Hawaiians, 20th-century Anutans recognized that visitors from distant lands were neither gods nor spirits but ordinary human beings. Furthermore, they clearly grasped the relative worth placed by foreigners on various commodities. Although they might still have fashioned ornaments from metal scraps or colorful food labels, they understood quite well that, from the viewpoint of the global market, such items were mere trash. The scene depicted in the documentary film *First Contact* (Conolly and Anderson 1982) in which a New Guinean is careful to avoid detection while absconding with a tin can lid would seem as ludicrous to present-day Anutans as to any Western audience. Still, as in New Guinea's highlands, Anutans sought exotic goods largely for their local exchange value. Once appropriated, commodities became transformed from instruments of direct personal gratification into elements in a system of redistribution through which a hereditary leader hoped to enhance his standing.

An important parallel to documented cases of first contact is the critical importance of kinship. In the *Hung Feng* incident, the absence of a kin connection largely freed Anutans from a sense of moral obligation. At the most basic level, Anutans recognize two kinds of people, kin and enemies. Enemies may be either real or potential, but how to treat non-kin is less a question of morality than of tactical advantage. Government vessels and trading ships are not attacked because Anutans know that they would suffer reprisals and because they recognize the value of establishing long-term positive relationships with people who are likely to return to their island. Because the prospect of a useful long-term relationship with the Taiwanese fishermen was nil, force became a realistic option. Still, it was not inevitable.

Another Taiwanese fishing boat visited Anuta a few months earlier, but it stopped well over a mile offshore. Several of us swam to the ship, but there was neither a good

opportunity to exercise leverage nor any obvious indication of useful supplies to be removed. Pu Toke sought to lure that crew ashore, remarking that “we want to love you”—more or less what *Hung Feng*’s personnel were hoping for. But the captain of the earlier vessel was not interested. It would have been interesting to see what happened had he decided differently. But even so, it is by no means certain that the encounter would have been unpleasant.

Pu Toke’s interest in adopting the radio operator also speaks to kinship’s value as a means to fashion trusted friends from would-be enemies. Traditions cite such cases as that of Paovaka, a Samoan immigrant who was incorporated into Anuta’s kinship system and was instrumental in repelling several Tongan invasions. In another instance, a Rotuman named Keve (Pu Raropita) is said to have been incorporated into one of Anuta’s four “clans” (*kainanga*) and to have been responsible for the clan’s continuation eight generations ago when it would otherwise have died out. In 1971, a U.S. research team spent two months on Anuta, and its three investigators were integrated into local families, as was I when I arrived the following year. In each instance, Anutans have maintained contact with the researchers and have attempted to employ that contact for their benefit. Although what benefit the *Hung Feng*’s radio operator might have offered the community is unclear, he clearly had skills and knowledge that might someday have been of use. In any case, Pu Toke was convinced that he might come to be a long-term resident and recognized that everyone would be more comfortable if he were made a full member of the community rather than being held at arm’s length.

Strikingly, Anutan women, although they figure as objects of interest to the men, were not active participants in this drama. In many Polynesian communities, women have been assertive political actors and often altered the course of events in profound ways.¹⁹ An obvious question is whether the timid demeanor exhibited by Anutan women was a consequence of Western contact and the influence of Christianity.

Although I cannot offer a definitive answer, the available evidence suggests that the pattern was entrenched on Anuta long before missionary contact. Polynesian cultures are not uniform, and Anutan gender relations appear to differ from those on many of the larger, better-documented islands. In 1973, Anuta had only been Christian for about half a century, so the time available for the new religion to have produced profound cultural change was limited. Moreover, Anuta closely resembles neighboring Tikopia, which Raymond Firth (1936, 1939, 1970, and elsewhere) studied at a time when half the population was still practicing the pre-Christian religion. Gender relations on Tikopia in the 1920s, as documented by Firth, were similar to those that I observed on Anuta. Anutan oral traditions (Feinberg 1998) depict a few unusually assertive women becoming in-

involved with foreign interlopers, but they portray such situations as exceptional. Furthermore, as time has passed since 1973, women have become much more—not less—outgoing in their relations with outsiders, a fact that bothers local traditionalists.

Encounters involve at least two parties, and in the case of *Hung Feng*, the fishermen were not exactly innocent victims. The captain made his intentions quite clear: He wanted something that he knew was in some sense improper, and he was prepared to resort to bribery to obtain it. His plan involved getting the Anutans drunk so that they would suspend their better judgment and offering a variety of inducements to keep them favorably disposed. But it backfired, largely because the fishermen were unfamiliar with Anutan geography—particularly the difficulty of traversing the passage. The weather then conspired to provide the Anutans with a powerful bargaining chip. Again, such factors must have played a role in many early encounters, but they often are obscured by self-serving journal entries.

Once the chain of events was set in motion, it took on a life of its own, as the participants’ actions were largely dictated by circumstances. When the sailors got the Anutans drunk, the islanders lost their inhibitions and behaved in a way that they would not have permitted when sober. Anutans are aware of this pattern and describe drunkenness as *varea*—a crazy, irresponsible, and sometimes anti-social state. At times, they use alcohol consumption to their advantage. They drink at dances to remove their inhibitions and enable themselves (in their estimation) to dance better, thereby increasing their enjoyment. But inebriation can also have the opposite effect.

At the same time that the Taiwanese were getting the Anutans drunk, they were demonstrating that they had large stores of alcohol, tobacco, soap, rice, fish, and other coveted commodities. Clearly, there was something to be won. When the weather handed the Anutans power to attain their prize, the temptation became irresistible.

Throughout the affair, the fishermen treated me extraordinarily well. I had little to offer of a material nature, but I was valuable because of my ability to broker the situation. Other than Pu Toke, I was the only one who spoke both Anutan and a common language, English. What the fishermen thought of me is hard to know, but they clearly recognized that I was different from the others. I differed in appearance, dress, and mannerisms and also in that I requested nothing from them. They needed a mediator whom they could trust to be relatively neutral, and I was the best they had. At the same time, for me to assume that their interest in cultivating my friendship was purely a matter of calculated self-interest would be unfair. In one sense, I may have been a curious anomaly, but the sailors also appeared to be genuinely appreciative of my attempts—however feeble—to intervene in a constructive way.

My narrative has necessarily focused on the events of January 1973, but the story is not limited to those three days. The Anutans' sense of identity, like that of many peoples, is historically constructed (cf. White 1991).²⁰ Their behavior was shaped by their understanding of the past, and the incident, in turn, became part of their history for future generations. Few Anutans assert mastery of traditional narrative, but most enjoy listening to others recount stories of their island's past, and they readily express their own opinions. Such tales purport to explain where the Anutans came from, their relationships to non-Anutans, and what makes them special. Anutans have a sense of moral ordering in which the world's communities are ranked on a unilinear scale, and they call on history (*nga araarapanga tuei*) and "custom" (*nga tukutukunga*) to justify their conceptual order. For that reason, literally dozens of Anutans assisted in my study of their oral traditions. They continually ask me whether I believe their stories to be true (*to-tonu*), and over my three decades of interaction with them, that is the project in which they have taken the greatest interest.

The *Hung Feng* incident bears multiple disjunctive messages. In one sense, it is a morality play, and one that carries for Anutans more embarrassment than satisfaction. They frequently cite *aropa*—"compassion" or "empathy" as expressed through economic generosity—as their most cherished value. Yet, in this encounter, it was the Taiwanese and not themselves whose actions appeared to embody *aropa*. Although the lack of freely offered generosity can be explained by absence of a kin relationship, as Christians, Anutans are taught that they should love their neighbors, whether kin or not. Hence, the chief's comment, cited above, on his brother's most unbrotherly behavior. Although Anutans value *aropa*, they also admire strength and courage; and although it is a virtue to treat everyone as kin, it can be acceptable to take advantage of outsiders to support one's relatives. Thus, success in gaining and redistributing valued commodities through coercion backed with force has come to be a point of local pride.

It is easy to exaggerate this episode's importance to Anutans. For me it took up several days out of a one-year visit to the island. For them, it was a few days out of a lifetime. In my subsequent returns, Anutans have only spoken to me of the incident when I have raised the subject. As an anthropologist, I make a living by recounting and interpreting my field experience. Thus, retelling such events as this is a professional act through which I draw attention to myself and, ultimately, from which I earn my salary. The Anutans also see my job as to record their history and customs, but their concern is cultural preservation, not theoretical analysis.

Finally, as I reread my account, I am aware that I maintained neither a stance of scientific objectivity nor cultural relativism. Many of my comments and descriptions are judg-

mental, and I repeatedly acted on the basis of my judgments to influence the course of events. My performance raises questions about the proper role of anthropologists and our effects on the people whom we study. Moreover, as a U.S. visitor, I had the luxury of being judgmental. All the items that the Taiwanese gave the Anutans, whether freely or under duress, were commodities that I can easily obtain in ordinary life. For outer islanders with little cash and less external contact, such objects are rare treasures, and their allure is proportionately greater. Thus, their willingness to compromise their moral sensibilities in the effort to attain them. I may have been living on Anuta for a year; still, I knew my stay was temporary and that I would return to a land of incalculable abundance. That realization should serve as a powerful antidote when one is tempted to give in to feelings of moral superiority. As I remind myself of this reality, I am transformed—to borrow an expression from Philip DeVita (1989)—into a "humbled anthropologist."

Notes

1. The word *handling*, as it appears in the title, is my translation of *taute*, the term that Anutans use in describing the encounter. *Taute* normally means "to make" or "to do," as in "Koa au mea taute?" [What are you doing?]. Thus, "taute te vaka" could be rendered as "doing the ship." *Handling*, however, seems to approximate more closely the connotations that Anutans intend to convey in this context.

2. I avoid using the term *theft*, as that begs the central question of how the participants understood their actions.

3. For example, see Borofsky and Howard 1989 as well as the debate between Marshall Sahlins (1981, 1995) and Gananath Obeyesekere (1992) over the events leading to Captain Cook's death on Hawai'i in 1779.

4. As has been repeatedly observed (e.g., Feinberg and Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1995; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Jolly and Thomas 1992; Keesing and Tonkinson 1982), the resemblance between any contemporary community and its forebears of a century or more ago, especially in the absence of written historical records, is problematic. There have, in fact, been many changes on Anuta over the past several generations, ranging from the adoption of Christianity to (a small degree of) communication with the outside world and the availability of a few Western goods. Still, Anuta is extraordinarily isolated and was even more so in the 1970s. A government ship arrived at intervals of anywhere from one to many months. The island had a shortwave radio, but it was out of operation more often than not. Only one Anutan spoke passable English. Economic production was almost entirely for local use rather than for sale. Political authority was vested in a hereditary chief and dependent on possession of extraordinary mana, or spiritual power. Despite involvement in the Anglican Church, Anutans retained many pre-Christian beliefs, including notions of ritual purity and pollution. Aside from visits by government ships, Anutan contacts with the outside world were limited primarily to those few men who had moved overseas to work for wages as well as several children who had left for school and had not returned to the home island. In addition, the mission ship *Southern Cross* stopped at Anuta every year or two. For further detail on Anuta, see Feinberg 1978, 1981, 1995, 1996a, 1996b, 2004; Firth 1954; and Yen and Gordon 1973.

5. The British Solomon Islands Protectorate ceased to exist and the Solomons came into existence as an independent nation five and a half years after the events in question.

6. Pu Tokerau was the marital name (*ingoa pakamaatuaa*) of Basil Katoakitematangi. Many Anutan names have shortened forms, and Pu Tokerau was usually known as Pu Toke. That is how I refer to him in the remainder of this narrative.

7. Fishing boats from Taiwan, Japan, China, and Korea occasionally ventured close enough to Anuta to facilitate personal contact. Owing to the area's remoteness and the lack of administrative patrols, the Solomon Islands government found it impossible to stop illegal fishing. In the 1980s, after national independence, the government formed a cooperative tuna-fishing venture with the Japanese Taiyo Company, and the consortium hired many Solomon Islanders. As a result, the frequency of legal fishing temporarily increased, and the number of Asian fishermen in Solomon Islands waters declined. The civil war that traumatized the Solomons during the late 1990s eventually led Taiyo to withdraw from the consortium and, by the start of the new century, the status quo ante had largely returned.

8. The main passage is a relatively smooth spot on Anuta's fringing reef, where the waves break constantly, even during calm periods. About one-third of the time, it is too rough to traverse by canoe without risk of major damage. On most days, however, one may get to sea by swimming through the breakers.

9. Pu Nuku was a member of one of Anuta's two nonchiefly "clans." He was well liked and respected because of his quiet demeanor, sound judgment, physical strength, and abilities as a carpenter and navigator. As a commoner, however, he had little authority in potentially explosive situations such as this.

10. I was impressed on several occasions by Pu Toke's ability to withstand the most severe assaults on his digestive system. Once, a friend in Honiara sent me a can of cat food. Pu Toke refused to "waste" good tinned meat on a cat and insisted on eating it himself. Another time, a tin of meat that I had ordered from a Honiara supplier arrived on Anuta with a puncture. I wanted to discard it but was unable to prevent Pu Toke from consuming the spoiled meat instead. To my enormous relief, he suffered no ill effects from either of these culinary experiments.

11. This was one of two ring buoys that the ship's swimmers had brought to the island before the morning prayer, with the thought that it might help some of the sailors return to the vessel.

12. Women are precluded from attending church during their menstrual periods and, in case of accidental contact with menstrual fluid, church benches are retired from service. They may still be used as flotation devices (*pakaranga*), however, or for other secular purposes. For Anutans, as for other Polynesians, blood is symbolically charged, and menstrual blood especially so, as it is not subject to normal social control (Hanson 1982; Howard and Kirkpatrick 1989; Shore 1981, 1982). Church, by contrast, is a locus of control par excellence. Anutan attitudes toward menstrual pollution appear to predate their island's conversion by the Anglican Church's Melanesian Mission in the early 20th century. Although some denominations have attempted to eradicate such vestiges of a pre-Christian past, Anglicans in the Western Pacific have consistently permitted—and sometimes actively encouraged—maintenance of traditional practices as long as they do not directly contradict church doctrine. Anutans continue to impute ritual significance to the open sea and interisland voyaging but treat routine activities on inshore waters, particularly during daylight hours, as profane. Hence, the evident lack of concern about menstrual contamination of boards used for flotation.

13. The mate's name, I learned, was Chen Yi Chuan. He was the brother of the captain, whose name was Chen Min Fu. After treating my wound, he proceeded to show me how to write these names in Chinese.

14. The \$100 from the captain plus the \$7 from the radio operator totals to the \$107 that Pu Toke had initially demanded. How he came up with this figure, I cannot say.

15. Because we were living together, which entailed sharing food, supplies, a house, and many experiences, Pu Toke had given me his Anutan name. Today Anutans know me as Pu Toke and refer to the chief's brother as my "namesake" (*ingoa*).

16. Nukutaukakara was the name of Pu Nuku's house.

17. See, for example, Feinberg 1978, 1996a; Feinberg and Macpherson 2002; Firth 1960, 1964a, 1964b, 1970, 1979; Howard 1985, 1996; Marcus 1989; and Sahlins 1985 for discussion of what makes a Polynesian leader. Watson-Gegeo and I (1996) suggest that these characteristics are not limited to Polynesia or to chiefs but, in some permutation, are widely distributed through the Pacific islands.

18. He was the head catechist. Although Anutans had been affiliated with the Anglican Church since 1916 (Feinberg 1998:249–250), no one from the island would be ordained as a priest until the early 21st century. For brief periods on two occasions, priests from other islands in the Solomons have lived on Anuta, but there was none in residence during any of my visits.

19. Among the best-known instances of a powerful Polynesian woman shaping history is the abolition of Hawai'i's system of religious prohibitions (*kapu*) at the instigation of Ka'ahumanu, Kamehameha I's widow and (formerly) favorite wife (see Linnekin 1990; Sahlins 1981; Webb 1965). For a more wide-ranging discussion of Hawaiian women as political actors, see Linnekin 1990 and Sahlins 1985.

20. Because of history's association with identity and morality, notions of "tradition" or "custom" have become extraordinarily contentious both for anthropologists and the people whom we study (see, e.g., Feinberg and Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1995; Handler and Linnekin 1984; Hanson 1989; Hobbsbawm and Ranger 1983; Jolly and Thomas 1992; Keesing 1989, 1991; Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; Linnekin 1983, 1991, 1992; Trask 1991). That they are equally contentious for Westerners becomes apparent any time one reads a newspaper, watches television, listens to the radio, and tunes in to the so-called culture wars that permeate contemporary public discourse.

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