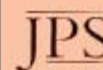


THE JOURNAL OF THE POLYNESIAN SOCIETY

[Home](#)[Browse](#)[Search](#)[Links](#)[The Polynesian Society](#)[Feedback](#)[Conditions of Use](#)

Volume 91 1982 > Volume 91, No. 4 > Some observations on a Polynesian naming system: personal names and naming on Anuta, by R. Feinberg, p 581-588

[Previous](#) | [Next](#)

- 581

SHORTER COMMUNICATIONS

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON A POLYNESIAN NAMING SYSTEM: PERSONAL NAMES AND NAMING ON ANUTA

Richard Feinberg *Kent State University*

Names, the relationships that they establish, and the messages that they communicate, have been for many years a subject of both general and anthropological interest. Lévi-Strauss (1966), has drawn on the writings of earlier ethnographers to illustrate that names, like totemism, caste, and allied phenomena, are used both to differentiate and forge relationships among individuals and groups.

The major purpose of this paper is to present data from Anuta, a small Polynesian outlier in the eastern Solomon Islands, which bear upon the larger problem. In the course of this presentation, I suggest that on Anuta, the sense of identification of a person with his name may be as intimate as in the West, and that potent social bonds are frequently established through the naming process. None the less, the permanence and exclusivity that Westerners associate with names is often absent.¹ In the concluding section, I make some suggestions as to why names are such potent vehicles, both on Anuta and elsewhere, for helping to shape the bearer's sense of who he is and where he fits into his universe.

TYPES OF NAME

The Anutans have three distinct, although interrelated, naming systems. These are the *ingoa tangata* or *ingoa pouri*, the traditional 'personal name', the *ingoa pakauku tapu* 'Christian' or 'baptismal name', and the *ingoa pakamaatuaa* 'marital' or 'parental name'. Each Anutan, in the course of a normal life, is given at least one *ingoa* 'name' of each variety, but the names are given at different times during one's life and indicate somewhat different things about the individual.

'Personal Names'

If Anuta's nearest neighbour, Tikopia, may be taken as a reliable guide, the original Anutan term for the 'personal name' was probably *te ingoa tangata*, *tangata* meaning 'man' or 'person'. Since the arrival of Christianity, this type of - 582 name has been termed *te ingoa pouri*, literally 'darkness name', indicating that it is the type of name that people had before the Church "brought them the light."² The names are generally long strings of morphemes which have meaning by themselves in the Anutan language (e.g., Katoakitematangi 'All to the Wind', Tearaamanu 'Path of Birds', Kiripakatuu 'Skin Cause to Stand', Kirimanongi 'Fragrant Skin', Tauvakatai 'One Canoe', etc.).³ However, the literal translation of the names is taken to have little significance. As in the West, where one does not today assume a man named Smith to earn his livelihood by making horseshoes, that Mr White is an albino, or that a girl named Melody will be a great musician, Anutans say that Kirimanongi, Tauvakatai, etc., are *te ingoa pero* 'a name only'. Appellations such as Vakangoto 'Sunken Canoe' for a girl who was named after a canoe that sank on a voyage to Patutaka, an uninhabited island 30 miles away, are very much the exception. This is not to indicate, however, that 'personal names' are insignificant. People are named either for illustrious Anutans of times past or for their direct (generally "patrilineal")

ancestors.⁴ This implies an identity between the present-day Anutans and their namesakes from the past, thus emphasising the continuity of descent lines and implying a merging of the present with the past. In addition, it is hoped that by sharing a name with an ancestor of some stature one will come to share other characteristics of the ancestor who bore it.

The 'personal name' is given at or shortly after birth, and it is chosen either by the parents or some other close relative. Sometimes several people vie for the honour of naming the child, and several names may be proposed. Usually in such a situation, all parties but one concede the honour. However, occasionally contenders refuse to give in and a child carries two or more 'personal names'. Also, emigrants to Tikopia are sometimes given a new personal name by their hosts.⁵ For persons bearing multiple 'personal names', I could discover no system for determining which name would be invoked, but in every case just one name was in common use and some probing was required to discover that the individual in question had others.

Anutans are associated more intimately with their 'personal names' than with names of any other type. This is seen most vividly in the taboo on calling parents, parents-in-law, parallel siblings-in-law and certain other relatives by their 'personal names', even in modified form. By contrast 'marital names' have forms which may be invoked in special circumstances without any implication of disrespect, and use of 'baptismal names' for these relatives is generally avoided for different reasons. Despite the intimate association of the 'personal name' with its bearer, however, it is sometimes temporary, can be superseded by another later in life, may stand side by side with other names of the same type, and for many people is but rarely used. In common parlance, lengthy names are often shortened (e.g., Katoakitematangi becomes Matangi, Topetuiteava becomes Tope, Kiripakatu becomes Pakatu, Poraumaatua becomes Maatua, etc.).

'Marital Names'

When Anutans marry, they are given a new name of a different type. The husband and wife share the same name, which is prefaced by the title Pu in the man's - 583  case and Nau in the woman's. Pu and Nau are perhaps analogues to the English Mr and Mrs, but unlike the latter system, a woman does not take a name initially borne by her husband. When the couple is referred to as a unit, they are called Ta— 'The—s'. (e.g., Pu Tokerau and his wife might be designated Ta Tokerau 'The Tokeraus'.)⁶ After marriage, 'personal names' become inoperative for most purposes; thus, married people are usually referred to and addressed by kin terms or 'marital names'.

Most often the 'marital name' was previously held by an ancestral couple in the husband's patriline—commonly the paternal grandparents—but this is not always the case. Frequently, the former bearer of the name was an illustrious personage in a collateral line, and on occasion an entirely new name is created. I did not record a single case in which a couple was given the name of either party's parents, a fact which stands in striking contrast to the Tikopian naming system.⁷

Upon a spouse's death, the survivor maintains the 'marital name' until he or she remarries, at which time the old name is abandoned and the couple is given a new one. Formal divorce is not presently accepted on Anuta; therefore, widowhood followed by remarriage is the only situation requiring a name change. Occasionally, a name is changed, however, while a marriage is still in effect. In the only such occurrence to take place during my study, a widower named Pu Ropanga remarried and became known as Pu Nukurava. Ta Nukurava lived together for several months under that appellation. In November 1972, Pu Avakope, Pu Nukurava's FFBS, returned from two years' residence on Tikopia. During this period, Pu Avakope had stayed with his domestic unit's *tauranga* 'Tikopian bondfriend', Pa Ngarumea. Pa Ngarumea, in order to cement his relationship with Pu Avakope's unit, sent a message with the latter man when he returned to his home island that he wanted Pu Nukurava to share his name. Pu Nukurava accepted the suggestion, and during the last weeks of my investigation, became known as Pu Ngarumea, the namesake of his unit's Tikopian friend. 'Marital names', thus, may change, and it is not unusual for someone to have two or three 'marital names' during the course of his lifetime. Unlike 'personal names', however, an Anutan has but one at any given time.⁸

On occasion, an unmarried person may be called by a 'marital name' for honorific purposes. Thus, Pu Tokerau, in whose house I was living, wished to emphasise his connection with me by having me share both his 'personal' and 'marital names'. Most Anutans continued to call me by my English name, Richard, most of the time, but occasionally I was addressed as Pu Toke, and on very rare occasion, Katoakitematangi. In my case, the 'marital name' was used to assert an identification of myself with Pu Tokerau. More often, however, it would be used for an unmarried person to indicate respect for age. Arikitoro, for example, was a bachelor in

his forties, and it was generally assumed that he would not marry. Yet, he was at an age where marriage would have been appropriate, and in recognition of this fact he sometimes was called Pu Totoro.

As in the case of the 'personal name', 'marital names' are frequently shortened in normal discourse. Thus, Pu Tokerau was usually "Pu Toke". Pu Tepuko was known as "Pu Puko". And Ta Penuakimoana were "Ta Moana".

The identity between a married person and his 'marital name' is potent, and the - 584 familiarity implied by addressing or referring to a 'parent', 'aunt' or 'in-law' (other than the cross-sibling-in-law) by the 'marital name' is unacceptable. However, if one's 'parent' or 'in-law' must be specified, there is a variant which may be used. Pu and Nau may be replaced by Mana i — 'Father in —' and Papae i — 'Mother in—' respectively when speaking of or to a 'parent', either classificatory or "real". A 'father-in-law' may be addressed or spoken of as Mana i — or Te Maatuaa i —, a 'mother-in-law' as Papae i —, and a man's 'brother-in-law' as Tangaata i —. A parallel sibling-in-law may also be referred to or addressed as Tau ma i — regardless of sex. The existence of these forms suggests that the association of the individual with the 'marital name' may be perhaps a bit less intimate than that with the 'personal name', although names of this variety should not be taken lightly.

'Baptismal Names'

According to oral traditions and genealogies, names of the first two types have been in use as long as the present population has been on Anuta. (The first settlers are said to have been led by men named Pu Taupare and Pu Kaurave. Their sons were known as Toroaki and Ruokimata, respectively.) 'Baptismal names', of course, are a recent introduction, coming with the Christian Church.⁹ They have been incorporated into the Anutan naming system, but their association is perhaps somewhat less profound.

'Baptismal names', as the term implies, are usually presented at a child's baptism. Some children are given a Christian name at or shortly after birth, usually by their parents, and are commonly known by that name from that time onward. It is not formally recognised, however, until presented by a church official at the youngster's baptism. Because of the infrequency of ship contact, a child may well be a year old before anyone of sufficient stature in the Church gets to the island.¹⁰

'Baptismal names' are generally common English names, biblical names, or more rarely Mota names. The Mota names were introduced because for many years the Mota language, from an island in the New Hebrides, was the *lingua franca* of the Melanesian Mission. Whatever the source, 'baptismal names' are pronounced using an Anutan phonology, and most people on the island are not accustomed to writing so that it was difficult to get them to spell their names for me. Thus, it took me many months to figure out that "Araples" was really Alfred, that "Ata" was Arthur, that "Elena" was Eleanor, etc. Anutan spelling of names is sometimes unorthodox, leading to such constructions as Ezikel (presumably Ezekiel) or Edor (Etta?). Occasionally, a name is given to a child of the "wrong sex" (e.g., Pu Notau had a daughter named Sylvester). And in some cases, I was unable to identify a 'baptismal name' even at the end of my study. In these instances, I assume that names like Linges, Nomleas, Altaban, or Kasta are Anutan renderings of Mota names, but I am uncertain.

Often Anutans are named for a biblical character, and to share a name with such a person implies additional connections or resemblances. Thus, when Pu Tokerau decided that I should be baptised on Anuta, he selected John as my 'baptismal name' in honour of his favourite saint, St. John the Beloved. Alter- - 585 natively, one may be named for a church official. One child, for example, was named Alfred for a recent bishop, and a man had been named Patteson for the bishop who was martyred early in this century. 'Baptismal names' it seems, are never used, however, to establish a connection between two Anutans, and there was only one case of a Christian name being bestowed in honour of a fellow Pacific Islander—Harry Matakiaipo, the son of the senior chief, was named for Mama Harry, a priest from Gizo in the western Solomons, who spent a year residing on Anuta about 1960 (see Feinberg 1979, 1980 for an account of Mama Harry and his impact on the island).

'Baptismal names' are sometimes changed, but this is rare. The one case in my records involves a girl who had been baptised as Gwendolyn. When she was due for confirmation, Pu Tokerau had her confirmed under the name Cecelia because he thought Gwendolyn too difficult to pronounce.

The use of Christian names does not seem to be tabooed in the manner of 'personal' or 'marital names'. This may be in part a function of the fact that these are names of a new type, introduced by an institution operating according to different rules, and thus

perhaps exempted from older Anutan custom. Still more significant may be the fact that persons who may not be called by name because of their relationship are generally in the parental generation (or in the case of parallel siblings-in-law, are at least adults) and, therefore, are likely to be married. Thus, they are unlikely to be called by their 'baptismal names' despite the fact that this would not be strictly tabooed.

'Baptismal names' are used almost exclusively for unmarried people. Some children are called by their traditional 'personal names' while others are almost always addressed and referred to by their 'baptismal names'. I was never able to discover why Anutans felt that one or the other type of name was more appropriate for a particular individual. As far as I could tell, the choice was arbitrary, but once determined it was followed consistently. Thus, Robert Pakapu invariably was known as Pakapu while Judah Mataamako was generally called Judah. In any case, once one marries one is called by one's 'marital name' and both the 'personal' and 'baptismal names' fall into general disuse.

The major exception to this generalisation is in dealing with Europeans. Anutans are aware that Europeans often find their traditional names difficult to pronounce and remember. Therefore, in presenting themselves to Europeans they tend to identify themselves by their 'baptismal names'. For purposes of official records, which the Government and other European-derived institutions attempt to keep, Anutans are expected to provide a given name and surname. For the former, the 'baptismal name' is presented; the surname is usually an abbreviated form of the 'personal name'. Thus, John Topetuuteava is known as John Tope, Pu Tokerau (Basil Katoakitematangi) was known as Basil Matangi, etc.

Observations

Marcel Mauss (1967) described gift-giving as a "total social fact", and a similar point could be made about Anuta's naming system. Names are used by the Anutans to identify living people with their forebears, thereby metaphorically asserting the continuity and essential unity of their history. Names also may be - 586  used to identify contemporary people with each other. They may express a formal friendship or a bond of solidarity as in the case of *tau ingoa* 'namesakes' who are thought to be closely related by virtue of the shared name and are expected to assist each other periodically through the presentation of material goods and services. Shared names may assert equality in what might otherwise be a hierarchical relationship. Or conversely, competition for the privilege of bestowing a name may become a means for expressing one's superiority over another. All three types of name are capable of being used for all these purposes, although in somewhat different ways.

The power of a name to affect its bearer is not limited to human beings, but appears to be a fundamental premise of Anutan metaphysics. It is assumed that objects with a common name share other characteristics as well. This is well illustrated by the case of Pu Tokerau's cat, Communist. Pu Toke had heard over the chief's radio that the Americans were fighting "the Communists" in Vietnam. The Americans, through the Pacific Campaign in the Second World War, had developed a reputation for being a powerful military force, and yet the Communists appeared to be holding their own. Thus, Pu Toke reasoned, Communists must be pretty tough, and he named his cat Communist in the hope that he would "grow up to be a strong fighter."

Names, then, are potent symbols for expressing close relationships. This, I would suggest, is because names, both on Anuta and elsewhere, are in a unique position to create metaphorical and metonymic relationships simultaneously. A name is attached to a person and the attachment of two persons to the same name creates a relationship of contiguity between them. Simultaneously, a name is "possessed" as an essential characteristic and sharing a name is similar to sharing hair colour, facial features, height, build, sex, age, or any other feature intimately associated with the individual.

While sharing a name creates both metaphorical and metonymic bonds both on the West and on Anuta, however, there are important differences between the two naming systems. For Westerners, the primary relationship appears to be between the individual and his name, as when we show concern about protecting our "good name", whereas for Anutans the major relationship is between people, with the name mediating between them, forging the relationship.¹¹ While an American or Western European identifies *with* his name, an Anutan identifies with other people, groups, or objects *through* his name. As a result, an Anutan may have several names—even names of the same type—simultaneously, and go through many shifts of name during a lifetime without feeling any threat to his identity. An Anutan may go through an identity crisis, but if he does, it is for reasons other than alienation from his name. Thus, the woman struggling to express her identity after marriage by retaining her maiden name may be

intelligible in terms of Western culture, while in Anutan terms the problem is unthinkable.

- 587 

REFERENCES

- FEINBERG, Richard, 1973. "Anutan Social Structure," in *Anuta: A Polynesian Outlier in the Solomon Islands*. D. E. Yen and Janet Gorden (eds). Pacific Anthropological Records, No. 21. Honolulu, Bernice P. Bishop Museum, pp. 9-21.
- ——— 1978a. "Rank and Authority on Anuta Island," in *Adaptation and Symbolism: Essays in Social Organization*, Karen Ann Watson-Gegeo and S. Lee Seaton (eds). Honolulu, The University Press of Hawaii, pp. 1-32.

- 588 

- ——— 1978b. "Anutan Epistemology: The Roots of 'Knowledge' on a Polynesian Outlier." *Micronesica*, 14(2):127-37.
- ——— 1979 *Anutan Concepts of Disease: A Polynesian Study*. Institute for Polynesian Studies Monograph No. 3. Laie, Hawaii, Institute for Polynesian Studies.
- ——— 1980. "Supernatural Sanctions and the Social Order on a Polynesian Outlier." *Anthropological Forum*, 4(3):331-51.
- ——— 1981a. "The Meaning of 'Sibling' on Anuta," in *Siblingship in Oceania: Studies in the Meaning of Kin Relations*, M. Marshall (ed.). ASAO Monograph No. 8. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, pp. 105-148.
- ——— 1981b. *Anuta: Social Structure of a Polynesian Island*. Laie and Copenhagen, Institute for Polynesian Studies in co-operation with the Danish National Museum.
- FIRTH, Raymond, 1954. "Anuta and Tikopia: Symbiotic Elements in Social Organization." *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 63(2): 87-131.
- ——— 1963. *We, the Tikopia: Kinship in Primitive Polynesia*. Boston, Beacon Press.
- LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude, 1966. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- MAUSS, Marcel, 1967. *The Gift*. New York, W. W. Norton.
- SILVERMAN, Martin G., 1971. *Disconcerting Issue: Meaning and Struggle in a Resettled Pacific Community*. Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press.

In other words, one is not assumed to keep the same name without significant change throughout his life, and the same individual may simultaneously bear several names, even of the same type.

For further discussion of the light and darkness metaphor on Anuta, see Feinberg (1978b).

Many Anutan morphemes have several possible meanings. Thus, my "literal translations" should be taken as plausible suggestions rather than definitive statements about the meanings on which these names are based.

"Patrilineal" is used here in a very loose sense since one can become a member of an Anutan "descent" group on the basis of an appropriate behavioural as well as a genealogical tie.

Each Anutan *patongia* 'elementary domestic unit' has a special relationship, referred to as *tauranga*, with one or more Tikopian *paito*, the analogous unit on that island. Visitors and emigrants seek out their *tauranga* units immediately upon their arrival, and the members of those units provide food and shelter for their guests for the duration of the visit. See Firth (1954, 1963); Feinberg (1973, 1981a, 1981b).

'Marital names' on Tikopia follow a similar form, with some minor variation in phonology. Aside from these two islands, the closest ethnographic parallel that I have found in Oceania is on Banaba where "Na, Nam, Nan, or Nang is placed before names of males . . . and Nei before names of females" (Silverman 1971:25n).

The Tikopian practice of a married couple taking on the husband's parents' names is seen particularly in the chiefly lines.

Sometimes Anutans may use two or three 'marital names' in referring to the same person, but as far as I could tell, this is only done when the designated individual changes his name and the speaker either has not yet become accustomed to using the new name or has some emotional commitment to the older (e.g., if the person in question was known by the earlier name at a time when he was married to a close relative of the speaker). Such a situation, however, would be characterised by the Anutans as one person calling another by the latter's former name, not as one person having two names.

According to Anutan informants, the Anglican Church was established on their island in 1916 by a group of Tikopian missionaries. See Feinberg (1978a, 1981b).

No native Anutan has ever risen higher than the rank of catechist in the Anglican Church, and priest have only been in residence on the island on two

occasions for short periods each time. Catechists are not normally permitted to perform baptisms, and thus the Anutans must wait for the visit of someone bearing at least priestly status for their children to be baptised.

¹ This may be associated, at least among Americans, with the ethic of "rugged individualism" and a consequent tendency to express one's identity by asserting individuality. Anutans, on the other hand, emphasise collective action and co-operation in most facets of their lives, and for them personal identity is expressed through their identification with others.