NUKUMANU KINSHIP AND CONTESTED CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION

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In 1972, when I first arrived on Anuta, a Polynesian island in the eastern Solomons, it seemed as if the entire community had come to greet me. Before I left the ship, several men swam out to tell me of their plans for my visit. Pu Paone, soon to be among my closest friends, declared that once ashore I should be sure to “follow” him. I was informed that I would be “living with” the senior chief. Once on the beach, I was immediately made guest of honour at a formal greeting ceremony, introduced to the two chiefs and treated to a ceremonial meal. Over the ensuing months, I was incorporated into the community and assigned a status in Anuta’s kinship system, and I was repeatedly assured that I was as much a part of that system as if I had been born on the island. In 1983, when I returned with my wife and two young children, we were greeted almost as conquering heroes. And, to this day, I find myself consistently treated as kin by everyone in the community.

In contrast with our Anutan experience, after arriving in March of 1984 at Nukumanu Atoll in Papua New Guinea’s North Solomons Province, my family and I almost felt as if we were in residence for weeks before anyone noticed our presence. The difference hardly could have been more striking. We were provided with a house but left largely to our own devices. People were courteous but treated us with caution, and most social interactions occurred in response to our initiatives. We eventually did become close friends with several Nukumanu and members of one family, with whom we were especially close, used kin terms in addressing us. For most people, however, we were clearly visitors rather than members of the community. Few islanders attempted to treat us as kin, and even our host family often appeared to use kin terms out of hospitality.

As time has passed and my 1984 study was followed by a second, 16 years later, my initial impressions of the Nukumanu kinship system have remained essentially unchanged. Nukumanu’s kinship terminology differs somewhat from Anuta’s, but resembles that of other central and northern Polynesian outlier atolls, and Nukumanu rarely make an effort, as Anutans do, to incorporate outsiders into their kinship system. This reticence, moreover, is in keeping with a sense of atomism that permeates Nukumanu social structure. Households are more autonomous than on Anuta and inter-household conflict somewhat more pervasive. In 1984, the atoll was rife with land disputes, many
of which had been referred to the provincial court system. Those disputes have subsided somewhat with the death of the leading protagonists, but they have been replaced by equally vigorous disagreements over religion. Fundamental differences over socio-political status are ubiquitous, leading to widely divergent renditions of the atoll’s history and genealogies. Such seemingly straightforward matters as the number of descent groups, how they are constituted, whether or not they remain significant in Nukumanu’s social order, even their names, are hotly contested.

That said, I must be careful not to overstate my case. Despite many disagreements and occasionally hard-fought conflicts, I found Nukumanu by and large to be considerate, responsible and empathetic. Most of the time most Nukumanu work together well. Every Nukumanu person with whom I spoke in Bougainville, Buka and Port Moresby expressed attachment to the atoll and intended to return there on retirement. And, in times of crisis, the community can come together in impressive displays of mutual support. The disputes depicted in this article are real, but they are just one part of Nukumanu life. They are largely confined to factional antagonism that many people ordinarily ignore, and which is to some degree ameliorated by intermarriage between members of the two main factions.

In this article, I review the structure of Nukumanu kinship and descent, what is agreed upon and what is subject to negotiation and dispute. Nukumanu data, I will argue, affirm points made by Keesing (1989) and others about notions of “tradition” (see Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; also Feinberg and Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1995, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) and their manipulation for a variety of political purposes. I will attempt to show that the contested character of Nukumanu kinship is connected to the islanders’ reticence about incorporating outsiders and to a well-founded sense of insecurity, deriving from a combination of ecological, symbolic and historical factors. My perspective coincides with many kinship studies of the past two decades (for example, Bourdieu 1977; Carsten 2000; Peletz 1988, 1995; Stone 2004; Yanagisako and Collier 1987), in which earlier concern with harmony, stability and integration have given way to interest in contradiction, power, rivalry and change.

BASES OF INSECURITY

Reasons for Nukumanu insecurity begin with the atoll environment. Sandy and infertile soil, a paucity of rainfall and the absence of reliable fresh water sources render agriculture problematic. Earthquakes, storms, volcanoes and tsunamis are a constant threat. Inter-island voyaging is intrinsically hazardous because of the atoll’s low profile and treacherous currents, and many islanders over the years have disappeared at sea. According to the most detailed genealogical accounts, the atoll was first settled a little over 15 generations ago. Since that
time, the community has endured a series of momentous social disruptions. Over
the past century and a half, it has been subjected to: military conflict resulting
in the transfer of power from traditional sacred chiefs to an essentially secular
administrative leader, mortal combat with invading forces from an island
identified as “Tokelau”, and imperialist domination from Western Europe.
During the late 19th century, Nukumanu was incorporated into “Queen” Emma
Forsayth’s copra empire. The people were banished from their most productive
coco plantations, became dependent on imported foods, were forced to work
for wages and were required to join the Roman Catholic Church. Between the
two “great wars”, the Anglicans came temporarily to dominate the atoll. The
community suffered catastrophic depopulation during the plantation period (see
Bayliss-Smith 1974, 1975a, 1975b), which lasted until the Second World War.
During the war, seaplanes landed and bombs were dropped in the atoll’s lagoon,
with terrifying effect. Then, when peace was finally restored, a foreign copra
company nearly succeeded in re-establishing the atoll as its private domain.

Under these conditions, it is not surprising that many Nukumanu are
cautious about outsiders and their intentions. Yet, with an expanding
population and limited resources, they have grown increasingly dependent
on the world market economy, and capitalist influence has encouraged the
long-standing tendency toward social fragmentation. Mutual suspicion among
households has led to arguments, feuds and land disputes, and genealogical
information is often kept hidden since it may be decisive in the outcome of
court cases. Lists of ancestral spirits, pagan prayers and spells are kept in
private notebooks, and are held as carefully-guarded family secrets. Limits
on the extent and intensity of Nukumanu’s kinship networks, I will argue,
are intelligible in light of such considerations.

AN OVERVIEW OF NUKUMANU KINSHIP

If one views Nukumanu kinship in terms of its superficial structure as
genealogically defined, it constitutes a fairly typical Polynesian outlier system.
One term (tipuna) applies to grandparents and ancestors, another (mokopuna)
to grandchildren and descendants, both regardless of sex. By the time of my
2000 study, the Tok Pisin term pupu was commonly used in place of tipuna
for ‘grandparents’ . Siblings and cousins of the same sex are termed taina; those of opposite sex are kave. As is true of most other outliers, but in contrast
with many islands of the “Polynesian Triangle”, particularly those of East
Polynesia, the Nukumanu do not make a terminological distinction between
older and younger ‘siblings’. The father, his brothers, and male cousins are
called tamana; all female consanguineal kin in the parents’ generation are
tinana, a word that is often shortened to tinna. The mother’s brothers and male
cousins are lamotu, a term that a man uses reciprocally for the children of his
sisters and female cousins. A man’s children and the children of his brothers are called *tama*, and a woman uses that term for all consanguineal kin in the children’s generation. *Avana* is the word for ‘spouse’ of either sex. Affines of one’s own sex and generation are termed *ma*; those of opposite sex and the same generation are *taina*; and affines of adjacent generation, regardless of sex, are *hinaona*. Affines other than the spouse are also often designated by the Tok Pisin word *tambu*. These terms and provisional genealogical definitions are set out in Table 1.

In general, the behavioural requirements associated with each of these kin categories also reflect common patterns found among the Polynesian outliers, especially the outlier atolls. Grandparents and grandchildren are expected to

Table 1. List of Nukumanu Kin Terms and Approximate Genealogical Definitions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NUKUMANU</th>
<th>ENGLISH GLOSS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>tipuna</em></td>
<td>‘grandparent’; ‘ancestor’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>tamana</em></td>
<td>‘father’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>taina</em></td>
<td>‘mother’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>lamotu</em></td>
<td>‘mother’s brother’; ‘sister’s child’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>kave</em></td>
<td>‘sibling of same sex’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>tama</em></td>
<td>‘sibling of opposite sex’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>mokopuna</em></td>
<td>‘grandchild’; ‘descendant’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affinal</th>
<th>ENGLISH GLOSS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>avana</em></td>
<td>‘spouse’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ma</em></td>
<td>‘brother-in-law’ (male ego)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘sister-in-law’ (female ego)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>taina</em></td>
<td>‘brother-in-law’ (female ego)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘sister-in-law’ (male ego)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>hinaona</em></td>
<td>‘parent-in-law’; ‘child-in-law’</td>
</tr>
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be close and informal in their interactions. One respects one’s parents, but
the relationship is not overly formal; and in contrast with Anuta and Tikopia,
children address parents by their proper names.

Siblings of the same sex (hai taina) are supposed to work together in an
atmosphere of mutual support and friendly camaraderie, while siblings of
opposite sex (hai kave) are mandated to practice avoidance similar to that
found in Samoa, Tonga, and most other West Polynesian communities.9
Brother and sister may speak to each other outdoors and in public, but they
should show each other the utmost respect. A man should not joke with his
sister, and after adolescence they should not be seen together inside the same
house. If it does become necessary to share the interior of a building, they
should not be physically close to one another, and direct communication is
minimised. Should they have to spend a night under the same roof, they are
expected to locate themselves at opposite ends of the building. This pattern
applies, in theory, regardless of the kave’s genealogical distance from one
another, and whether or not they are living on Nukumanu. For distant kave,
especially when dwelling in one of the nation’s urban centres, however, the
rule is sometimes difficult to enforce. One young man, who had returned
to Nukumanu for a brief visit after more than a decade living overseas,
complained that he did not know the identity of all of his distant kave, and
that the effort to abide by the avoidance rule had grown burdensome. The
brother-sister avoidance rule was also cited as the major reason that men and
women rarely spend time together, with the exception of married couples at
night (see Feinberg 1986).

At the same time that brother and sister are expected to avoid each other
to show respect, I was told—perhaps paradoxically—that they should be
emotionally close and mutually supportive. Older sisters take care of younger
siblings while they are children, and that relationship, in principle, continues
through adulthood. If a man has a problem, his sister should provide assistance;
if he becomes sick or hungry, she should make sure to send him food.

While siblings of the same sex are expected to work together in an
atmosphere of easy camaraderie and mutual support, the prescribed solidarity
often gives way to conflict, either over control of resources or access to
positions of power and authority. For example, Temoa Atoi started a trade
store some years before my first visit. The business, by including Temoa’s
sons but excluding his elder brother, Teriko, created a rift between the brothers
that never healed. Similarly, during my 1984 study, David Hakamara was
serving as community government chairman. Hakamara was the second son
of Francis Kipano, the administrative chief (te tuku). The fact that Kipano’s
ever elder son, Tepuri, had been bypassed for that position, created strain between
the brothers—a strain that was expressed to me repeatedly in conversation.
The *hai lamotu* relationship, i.e., between ‘mother’s brother’ and ‘sister’s child’, is a very special one on Nukumanu. It is extraordinarily close and is infused with metaphysical significance. For example, I was told by one consultant that if the mother’s brother has an emotionally-charged experience, the sister’s child will share the same experience in a dream. However, this relationship is differs from the classical avuncular relationship described by Radcliffe-Brown (1952) and others, in which the sister’s son may take special liberties with his maternal uncle. In fact, the mother’s brother must be treated with extreme respect. *Hai lamotu* must not touch or strike one another in anger, and to even harbour unfavourable thoughts about the *lamotu* is to court disaster. Nor may the maternal uncle’s requests be refused, on pain of severe illness.

On this latter point, a man who had been living overseas most of his life, reported that his sister, mother and mother’s maternal uncle, at some point, were together in Honiara, the Solomon Islands’ capital. The mother’s uncle was about to leave by ship for Ontong Java and asked her for some taro to sustain him during the journey, but she was occupied with other matters and was slow to respond. Immediately, her daughter became very sick. When a diviner determined that the girl was sick because the mother’s uncle was not given the taro he had requested, it was quickly taken out to him on the ship, and the victim began a dramatic recovery. I was told by others that this pattern may apply to any kin relationship, but it is particularly pronounced with respect to the *lamotu*.

The husband/wife relationship emphasises complementarity in the household division of labour, and there can be a close emotional bond. However, it is often fraught with tension and gender antagonism, which is expressed symbolically in dance patterns (see Johnstone and Feinberg 2006) and can erupt in domestic violence, particularly when the husband has been drinking. Other affinal relationships, particularly *hai ma* and *hai hinaona*, are characterised by formal respect. One does not address persons in those relationships by their *inoa haamaoni* ‘true names’, but gets their attention by such actions as clearing one’s throat or calling out, “Ai!”11 Neither should one utter the *ma* or *hinaona*’s traditional proper name, even in the person’s absence. However, invocation of a European name or “nickname” is acceptable.

**KINSHIP AS AN EXPRESSION OF ALOHA**

Over the past three decades, I have examined what I characterise as an extra-genealogical component in Anutan kinship. Anutan kin relationships, and the domain of kinship itself, are determined partially by genealogical connection, but they also are shaped by the ways in which people treat each other. Of particular importance is the notion of *aropa*, the Anutan version of a pan-Polynesian term denoting positive affect as expressed through giving,
sharing and mutual assistance, especially as pertains to food. Kin should express *aropa* in their mutual relations, and it is on the basis of *aropa* that I, as an immigrant, was incorporated into Anuta’s kinship system (see Feinberg 1981a, 1981b, 1996, 2004: 84-89). Elsewhere (Feinberg 1981c), I have tried to show that this pattern is commonly encountered throughout Polynesia, a point that also emerges from an important series of comparative volumes exploring the symbolic dimensions of Pacific kinship (Brady 1976, Carroll 1970, Marshall 1981).

The Nukumanu cognate of *aropa* is *aloha*, a word imbued with similar denotative meaning. Nukumanu often speak of *aloha* and sometimes invoke the word to explain their actions. Indeed, elements of *aloha*, as seen in sharing and cooperation that sometimes occurs among people without close genealogical connections, are evident in Nukumanu kinship and descent relations.

Although nuclear and slightly extended families operate, for many purposes, as economically independent groups, inter-household co-operation among bilateral kin is reasonably common. For example, Heniheni Temoana often borrowed canoes belonging to his father Temoa Atoi, or to Temoa’s “business partner” Atava, without being required to ask permission.

The partnership between Atava and Temoa was initially explained to me in terms of their kin relationship, but from a genealogical viewpoint, that relationship was fairly tenuous. More to the point, Atava owned an outboard motor and had contacts on Ontong Java in the Solomon Islands, where in 1984 trochus and *bêche-de-mer* were fetching a better price than in Papua New Guinea. Temoa, meanwhile, was among the most politically influential people on Nukumanu and owned one of the atoll’s four trade stores. Temoa and Atava, as well as their immediate families, trusted one another and worked well together. Thus, the partnership made sense and intensified their otherwise somewhat peripheral kin tie.

Similarly, the day after a successful fishing trip with my friend Ahuti, I asked if any fish were left from our substantial haul. He told me he had given all of them away to assorted relatives and they would have felt offended had he refused to share his good fortune. On another occasion, I accompanied a group of men and women to Nukumanu Islet, site of the atoll’s *Cyrtosperma* taro swamps, and discovered that a large group of women was planning to spend the day cultivating and harvesting taro together in an area that was described as collective property. I later was told that this description was not technically accurate. The area contained many small plots individually “owned” by different groups of kin in a variety of relationships to one another. However, under the circumstances, it was most practical to treat these plots as if they were collective property that groups of relatives might work communally and benefit from together. The women, who planned to share
their labour and its fruits, initially explained their co-operation in terms of their kin connections. However, many of them were quite remote from one another genealogically, while others who were genealogically closer did not participate in the collective effort.

Eliuda Temoana commented to me that when a woman harvests food, she typically brings it back to prepare it and feed her husband and children. However, her family may also give some of the food to the husband’s relatives or the woman’s married sons. Therefore, as a practical matter, he commented, he does not know the source of the food he eats at any particular meal.

The decision to override genealogical proprieties on the basis of social concerns is illustrated by the relationship between a young man named Ben and his taina’s son, Moio. Ben had spent many years away from home, attending school and later working for one of the businesses connected with the Bougainville mining operation at Panguna. Until Moio joined him, he was the only Nukumanu working there. Their genealogical relationship defined Ben as Moio’s tamana ‘father’. However, they were close in age and temperament, and the pressures of being the only Nukumanu, surrounded by thousands of non-Polynesians, brought them even closer. Moio, thus, objected to the hai tamana relationship, insisting that they should be hai taina ‘brothers’. Ben was at first reluctant, but he eventually agreed to Moio’s proposition.

Occasionally, Nukumanu incorporate outsiders into their kinship system and allow themselves to be incorporated by others, very much as Anutans do. Thus, Ben told of being taken into a Melanesian family while living in Lae, one of Papua New Guinea’s major urban centres. He described how he had taught his new family to ferment coconut toddy and dispensed it carefully to keep people from getting into trouble with it; how he had helped them out on occasion and, in return, how they provided him with food and lodging whenever he was in the area. And he described how they had all cried when he left to go back to work on Bougainville. From the way he spoke—his choice of words and the intensity of emotion in his voice and face—it appeared that he considered these people his “real” kin as much as he did his family on Nukumanu.

Similarly, my family and I were treated as kin by at least a few Nukumanu. While we were staying on Bougainville, awaiting transport to Nukumanu, I got to know Eliuda Temoana, then director of the North Solomons Cultural Centre, the provincial museum in Kieta. Eliuda accompanied us on our trip to Nukumanu, explained to his father (Temoa) and his brother (Heni) who we were and suggested that they welcome us as relatives. Indeed, they arranged for our house, refused payment of rent, sometimes provided us with food and occasionally included us on family outings. Although money was involved in
most transactions among distant relatives and non-kin, they refused financial compensation for their assistance. And although Temoa did not go out of his way to address me as his tama, Heni called me his taina.

ATOMISM IN NUKUMANU KINSHIP

Although the aloha ethic is apparent in Nukumanu kinship, it seems attenuated in comparison with Anuta. Nuclear families (hai maatua), sometimes augmented by adoptees or a few other close relatives, act as independent socio-economic units much of the time. Corporate descent groups have little force in contemporary Nukumanu life. And there seems to be no sense that the community at large constitutes a single, overarching kin group. Political, economic and (now) religious factions often cross family boundaries, but they do not follow neat genealogical lines. Genealogies are contested and there are fundamental disagreements about land tenure and descent group organisation. People differ about even such seemingly straightforward matters as the number of descent groups, how they are constituted, their names, whether or not they used to be led by “chiefs”, and the relative rank of different titles. Much of social life seems to operate on an ad hoc basis and relationships are being constantly renegotiated. In 2000, I did see more community cohesion than was apparent in 1984, but once I started probing for people’s understandings of their island’s social structure, the same areas of disagreement re-emerged.

DESCENT STRUCTURE

Hogbin (1930, 1961[1934]), in discussing Ontong Javanese social structure, characterised that atoll’s descent system as essentially patrilineal, although he acknowledged the importance of uterine links for certain purposes. The largest discrete social units were the two villages (Hogbin called these “tribes”), which occupied separate islets in different sections of the atoll’s large lagoon. Below the “tribe” was a unit that he termed the “joint family”, described as a group of people who traced their connection to a common ancestor about six generations back. In at least 90 percent of the cases, he wrote, the relationship was traced entirely through males, while in 10 percent or fewer some females were involved. Along with the “joint family” Hogbin identified the “cooperating family”: a group of brothers and their sons who shared ownership of canoes and co-operated for purposes of fishing. The patrilineal system, in Hogbin’s rendition, was compromised by a system of matrilocal residence; a household consisted of a number of nuclear families in which the women were close kin. And taro swamps were controlled by groups of sisters who passed the land on to their daughters.
Nukumanu and Ontong Java are neighbouring atolls whose people have intermarried for many generations and whose languages and cultures are very similar. During my visit to Nukumanu, many Ontong Javanese were living there and a large number of Nukumanu people had at least one Ontong Javanese parent. These people were unanimous in their view that social organisation on the two atolls was almost identical. Yet, the Nukumanu system is quite different from, and more complex than, what Hogbin’s description would suggest for Ontong Java.

Nukumanu’s smallest collective unit is the *hai maatua*. In its most restricted sense, this refers to one’s parents, to the parent-child relationship or to a parent-child set. Depending on context, it may also refer to a sibling set, a nuclear family or a household. It is the term Eliuda initially offered when I asked the word for ‘family’; then he revised his answer, saying that one would not refer to a family or sibling set as *te hai maatua e hokotahi* ‘one *hai maatua*’.14 If you meet someone for whose parents you are searching, Eliuda explained, you might ask, “Where are your *hai maatua*?” And two brothers might say, “We are not of the same *manava* (see below); we are *hai maatua*.” Finally, he said that when he hears the term *hai maatua*, he thinks of a head of a household (i.e., the father or parents) and the people who are directly attached to or dependent on him/them.

The unit about which Nukumanu speak most frequently is termed the *manava*, *hare* or *kaha*. Literally, *manava* means ‘belly’, ‘abdomen’ or ‘womb’, suggesting that a *manava* is a group of people with some kind of connection through birth. *Hare* literally means ‘house’. *Kaha* is also the term for ‘sennit cord’. I do not know if this last referent is relevant in relation to social-structural concerns, although a metaphorical connection between strings of coconut fibre and lines of descent immediately suggests itself.15 The three Nukumanu terms are applied to the same variety of referents; English- and Tok Pisin-speakers refer to a group designated by these terms as a ‘clan’. Numerous conversations and genealogical inquiries clearly depict the *manava* or *hare* as a non-unilinear (or cognatic) descent group.16 Beyond the non-unilinear character of the *manava*, however, there are few points of general agreement.

Temoa, in a conversation shortly after my arrival on Nukumanu, stated that he was unsure how many *manava* there were, whether they were still operational, and whether each *manava* had a chief. In general, he gave the impression that they had not counted for much for a long time. He did suggest that they, at one time, were exogamous and had an important role in regulating marriages, but he indicated that this is no longer the case.

A few days later, a young man named Stephen agreed that the word for ‘clan’ is *manava* but, like Temoa, he did not know how many *manava* there were on Nukumanu. He went on to observe, “Now this whole island is one *manava*.”
In another conversation, Eliuda seemed to suggest that the *manava* was either a bilateral kindred or a non-unilinear descent group. He indicated that it includes brothers, sisters, nephews and nieces on both sides: the father, paternal uncles and the paternal uncles’ children. He equivocated for a moment when asked if it included the mother, her brothers and sisters and their children. Eventually he decided that it did. In his analysis, *manava* sounds like a bilateral kindred. Eliuda, who speaks excellent English, suggested that ‘family’ in a broad sense might be an acceptable translation. Yet, in some instances he seemed to use the term as if it referred to a corporate descent group. For example, he spoke of the chieftainship as being attached to one *manava*, then being passed on to another, and so on.

In another sense, Eliuda seemed to characterise the *manava* as corporate, matrilineal, property-owning descent groups. Each *manava*, he said, may have a large number of gardens, distributed through several blocks of land. A given person may be connected to gardens in a number of different blocks, as illustrated in Figure 1. Yet he qualified this characterisation, saying that no one person really “owns” a garden. Gardens are worked and harvested for the benefit of a particular *manava* and normally a senior woman is the administrator. The administrator makes decisions about cultivation and harvesting and may be called upon to resolve disputes. When the administrator dies, her eldest daughter becomes the next administrator. If there are no daughters, as in Eliuda’s father’s family, where there were four brothers and no sisters, then administration of the land goes to a man. In this case, Eliuda’s father’s elder brother Teriko was administrator until his death, thereafter Eliuda’s father Temoa came to administer the land. At the time of this conversation, Temoa, his brothers and their sons and daughters shared a common set of gardens. When Eliuda’s children grow up, he said, his eldest daughter will become administrator of the land that his wife Veli was overseeing in 1984. Samuel, Eliuda’s son, will live off produce of his (future) wife’s land and his major role on his mother’s land will be to support his sister and serve as protector of her gardens. Eliuda further contended in direct contradiction to comments by several other Nukumanu that this system applies to coconut orchards as well as taro gardens.

Several days later, Temoa refined his analysis, telling me that Nukumanu has four *manava*: Te Hare Tonoo, Te Hare Manamanatua, Te Hare Teahana and Te Hare Haaloloa. These are paired so that Manamanatua identifies with Teahana, while Tonoo is identified with Haaloloa. This meant, among other things, that a member of Te Hare Manamanatua should not marry into Manamanatua or Teahana but may marry into either of the other groups. Similarly, members of Tonoo and Haaloloa should not marry one another but are expected to marry into either Manamanatua or Teahana. These rules, he acknowledged, have not
Figure 1. Relationship between blocks of land and individual gardens. Roman numerals indicate blocks of land; letters represent owners.

Figure 2. Pairing of *manava*, according to Temoa.
been rigorously followed for several generations and today are often honoured in the breach—a state of affairs that he considered regrettable.

While Temoa, on this occasion, presented a clear rendition of the atoll’s basic ‘clan’ structure, the picture he presented was decidedly cognatic. He declared that he considers himself a member of Te Hare Manamanatua, which was his mother’s manava, and his father Atoi was from Te Hare Teahana. Atoi’s father, also named Temoa, was—like Atoi—a member of Te Hare Teahana.

Temoa traced his genealogy to a man named Luo, whom he said emigrated to Nukumanu from an island called Moriai. He was not sure where Moriai is and speculated that it might be near Tahiti, probably having heard of Moorea. He stated that the entire atoll constituted a single hare aitu ‘spirit house’, and that this hare aitu was represented on a number of other atolls of the region as well. The four manava, he said, are the four rima ‘arms’ of Te Hare Aitu. Temoa’s genealogy, which indicates the interrelationships among the Manamanatua, Teahana and Tonoo ‘clans’, as recited by him on that occasion, appears in Figure 3.

In this genealogy a majority of members are affiliated with the manava of their fathers, although a substantial minority followed their mothers’ affiliation. Nahamono followed her mother Kaivare’s membership in Te Hare Manamanatua, while the first Atoi followed his father in affiliating with Teahana. Kaihatu is listed as a member of the Tonoo ‘clan’, whereas his father, the first Temoa, was Teahana, indicating that Kaihatu must have followed his mother. The second Temoa followed his (unidentified) mother as a member of Te Hare Teahana, and Temoa Atoi followed his mother in affiliating with Te Hare Manamanatua. It should be noted, however, that on other occasions both Temoa and others identified him as a member of Te Hare Teahana. In fact, as I recorded later in my fieldnotes: “Temoa is equivocal. It’s hard to get him to state definitively his ‘clan’ affiliation, or anyone else’s for that matter. And at one point, he even asserted that everyone has four ‘clans’—one from each of his grandparents.” If accurate, this state of affairs, of course, would have made impossible the clan exogamy Temoa longed for in the conversation described above. His bilateral genealogy, going back three generations, is represented in Figure 4.

Still, he stated with an air of certainty that the genealogy in Figure 3 shows the premier chiefly line and every man appearing in the diagram was an ariki. Temoa was reluctant to talk about the other chiefly lines, their ‘clan’ affiliations and their genealogies. Yet, he could not resist correcting what he perceived as an error in the genealogy that Tepuri (also known as Francis Teneke), eldest son of the then-paramount chief (te tuku), had given me a few weeks earlier when I met him in Toniva on Bougainville. Tepuri’s version of his genealogy is presented in Figure 5; Temoa’s “corrected” version is in Figure 6.
Figure 3. Genealogy of Temoa Atoi as presented in March 1984.
Figure 4. Temoa’s bilateral genealogy, to great-grandparental generation. Names of males are written in capitals; females are in lower case.

Figure 5. Genealogy of tuku line according to Francis Teneke.

Figure 6. Genealogy of tuku line according to Temoa Atoi.
Tepuri asserted that his ‘clan’ is Hare Ariki, one not mentioned by Temoa, and that it is descended from Apuri. Eliuda’s ‘clan’, he said, was Hare Manamanatua, which is descended from Kauna. He seemed uncertain about the early part of his genealogy, identifying Apuri’s son first as Teneke, then deciding that Teneke was the name of both Apuri’s brother’s son and Apuri’s grandson, while Apuri’s son was Viouri. Both of these versions differ from Temoa’s. Tepuri and Temoa did agree that Kauna and Apuri were brothers-in-law (see Figure 7).

Tepuri, at the time, also agreed with Temoa that Nukumanu has four manava, paired into two contrasting sets, but he gave different names for three of the four ‘clans’. According to Teneke, the Hare Manamanatua is paired with the Hare Aitu, while the opposing pair is Hare Ariki and Hare Mataihu. Temoa said flatly that Teneke was wrong about ‘clan’ names and affiliations but would not go beyond what he had already reported, as he felt it inappropriate to say much about another person’s understanding of the ‘clan’ system.

While Temoa’s account was often at odds with Teneke’s, he was not entirely consistent himself. For example, in May 1984, shortly before I left the atoll, he stated that Luo, the immigrant from Moriai, lived at about the time of Kauna et al., that he married on Nukumanu and that he became a founder of Temoa’s ancestral line. Kauna was among Temoa’s ancestors, but he was a true tinohenua—an indigenous Nukumanu landowner, going back to the beginning of the atoll’s history. This contrasts directly with Figure 3, which places Kauna as a cognatic descendant of Luo, who had lived nine generations earlier.

Yet another version of the manava came from an elderly woman named Kahere. Kahere was the mother of my friend Hatutahi, who was allied politically and genealogically with Kipano, Hakamara and Tepuri. At the same time, she and Temoa were hai lamotu, making her his ‘sister’s daughter’, and he respected her traditional knowledge. Although regarded as knowledgeable on matters of tradition, nonetheless she indicated that she did not know how many manava there were. She said there were five hare
ariki and actually listed six: Tonoo, Hare Aitu, Haaloloa, Teahana, Noopuka and Manamanatua. She did not seem overly concerned about these ‘houses’ since, by her reckoning, they had long since become inoperative. “Na hare ku seae ‘the houses have disappeared’.” Neither did she know how many chiefs there were at any one time in the old days.

Kahere said that women supervise the gardens. If there is a problem, the custodial woman may ask a man to come and protect a garden. In olden times, the chiefly title holders, the tuku and the ariki, would instruct people as to who should work in which garden, when to go to the gardens and what kind of work to do. As punishment for non-compliance, chiefs could confiscate garden land.

Kahere went on to say that gardens are passed through the mother. A man may work in the gardens of his father, mother or wife. The father’s gardens are different from the mother’s. When a man dies, his gardens pass on to his sister and sister’s children, not his own children; when a woman dies, her children hold (tau) her gardens, but her brother’s children can take food from those gardens whenever they want.

On a later occasion, when I asked Kahere which ‘house’ she belonged to, she responded: “Do you want to know the house of my mother or my father? My mother was from Manamanatua.” Temoa introduced me to Kahere and wanted me to interview her. He facilitated the interview, clarifying my questions for her and her answers for me, sometimes in Nukumanu and sometimes in Tok Pisin. He also prompted me at various points, telling me what questions to ask. The last point was one about which I had neglected to inquire and he made a special point of ensuring that the issue not be left unexplored. After the interview, Temoa confided that Kahere had made mistakes in her rendition of the hare ariki; Noopuka, he said, was not the name of a hare or manava and Hare Aitu was not a chiefly line but a temple where people performed worship ceremonies.

Yet another perspective on the manava was provided during an outing on which I accompanied several other people to Nukumanu Islet. The men in the group went to husk brown coconuts (kamotuu), while the women went to work the Cyrtosperma taro gardens. The men included Heni, Atava, Viouri (a young, unmarried man from Peelau, Ontong Java) and a half-Peelauan man named Willie. The women were Hainata (Heni’s wife) and Hainata’s matrilateral cross-cousin. I was told that these people were all te manava hokotahi and the relationship between the two women was cited as evidence. The connections of Heni and Atava to the two Peelauan boys were all left rather vague; the sense was that they were working together and sharing the fruits of their labour, therefore they must be the same manava. Manava, in
this case, meant a co-operating group which can include cross- as well as parallel cousins and people who are only tangentially related genealogically, making it a bilateral kindred, similar to Anuta’s *kano a paito* (see Feinberg 1981a, 2004: 124-25).

In 2000, Tepuri was consistent in his rendition of the ‘clan’ system through at least a half dozen lengthy conversations over a period of two months. But his 2000 depiction differed significantly from that given in 1984. This time, he insisted that there are just three ‘clans’. He tended to use the English term, “clan” or the Nukumanu term *kaha* (see above), and he identified the three as the Hare Manamanatua, the Hare Tonoo and the Hare Haaloloa. But this time he identified himself as representing the Hare Manamanatua and said that Temoa (who had died in the mid-1990s) had no ‘clan’ affiliation! Kauna was Temoa’s ancestor and was a member of the Hare Tonoo, but after Kauna’s defeat in a battle with Apuri (see below; also Teneke, Areni and Feinberg n.d.), he and his entire ‘clan’ were wiped out.

Also in 2000, Navari (Tuahare), one of the few middle-aged men to take an interest in traditional Nukumanu history, initially agreed that there are “three main clans”; but he changed that to four after some discussion. They are the Hare Looloa, Hare Aitu, Hare Tonoo and Hare Manamanatua. Manamanatua is the one he added towards the end of our discussion. In addition to the four “main” ones, he said there are many “small branches”. He was unsure how many but guessed that there are “maybe seven or ten”. They include the Hare Tiare, Hare Teahan and several others. The “small branches” are somehow connected with the “main clans” but he could not explain precisely how.

In a subsequent conversation, after consulting with Tepuri, Navari reverted to his initial view that there are three ‘clans’. He agreed with Tepuri (and Temoa) that there had been one *hare aitu* for the entire island, and that the *hare aitu* was not a ‘clan’. Rather, it was a physical structure, a kind of temple, in which initiates underwent major rites of passage. The terms that Navari translated as ‘clan’ were *hare akina* and *manava*.

Navari’s description of ‘clan’ membership was classic non-unilinear descent. Sometime during childhood, parents inform the child of his/her future ‘clan’ membership. Alternatively, in some cases one selects one’s own ‘clan’ membership. One’s siblings may or may not be members of the same ‘clan’ as oneself. Decisions about ‘clan’ membership may be a matter of purely personal preference or of economic considerations.

Tepuri and Navari agreed that ‘clans’ are important in a variety of ways, but their opinion is not shared universally. Mamahi, a middle-aged man who had spent most of his adult life in Port Moresby, was sitting with Navari and me, participating in one of our early conversations. At one point, he turned to Navari and queried, “What clan am I?” Obviously it was not an issue
he had spent much time worrying about. Likewise, Jerry Potau and Pahia Puteuha, both men in their late 20s or early 30s, when asked about their ‘clan’ affiliations, responded in English, “I have no idea!”

Several members of the Nukumanu community in Buka went still further, asserting that Nukumanu no longer has clans at all and that this absence has had important political implications. According to the governmental structure in place in Papua New Guinea in 2000, the community should be administered by a Council of Elders, and such a council should be made up of representatives from all the clans. Since Nukumanu has no clans, my Buka consultants explained, representatives are selected by each of the three men’s houses or soa (see Feinberg 1986, 1995).17

In short, the Nukumanu terms manava, hare and kaha are more or less interchangeable and translated into English as ‘clan’. Traditionally, the manava, at least in one sense, appear to have been corporate non-unilinear descent groups. Nowadays, most people—especially the younger people—do not know or care a great deal about the manava and, when they use the term, it seems to designate a bilateral kindred of indeterminate extent. (This may have been one appropriate usage in olden days as well.) The collapse of the non-unilinear descent groups as corporate units is seen in the younger people’s lack of knowledge about them. They do not know the units’ names, how many there are or to which one(s) they belong. Some of the older people contend that the manava used to be exogamous units. This may have been the case at one time. Under present circumstances, to maintain even a semblance of ‘clan’ exogamy would be impossible and, indeed, it has not been done for many decades—if ever.

It would appear that the primary focus of the manava in olden times was the chieftainship.18 As Temoa explained in 1984: “All ‘clans’ have a claim on the chieftainship,” and there seems to have been considerable rivalry among them for acquisition of the prize. For that reason, ‘clan’ genealogies were often kept as carefully guarded secrets. Today, with chieftainship attenuated, the major reason to keep genealogies secret is that they may be weapons in court cases involving land claims.

CHIEFTAINSHIP

Anthropologists have long used the term “chief” to refer to traditional Polynesian leaders. Chiefs may exercise either temporal or priestly powers, or they may combine those roles in one, and they most often bear such titles as ariki (aliki, ali‘i, etc.) or tui.19 Chieftainship is typically characterised as following lines of genealogical seniority and titles are often lodged within particular descent groups (see Sahlins 1958 and Goldman 1970). On Anuta, the senior chief is normally the senior male in the leading ‘clan’, the Kainanga
i Mua, and the junior chief is the senior male in the second-ranking Kainanga i Tepuko (Feinberg 1978, 1981a, 1996, 2004). Tonga had three paramount lines, headed by the Tu‘i Tonga, Tu‘i Ha‘a Takalaua, and Tu‘i Kanokupolu, respectively (Gifford 1929). And in Samoa, matai titles are the property of non-unilinear descent groups known as ‘āiga (see O‘Meara 1990, Shore 1982).

Chieftainship can be a contentious issue just about anywhere, since it has to do with power, respect, honour, prestige, the distribution of economic resources and fundamental values relating to notions of a proper life. On Nukumanu, these considerations are compounded by historical factors that, for over a century, have relegated chieftainship to a largely inactive but emotionally loaded emblem of the past, and by the contested nature of the descent groups and genealogies within which chieftainship is embedded.

Nukumanu recognise three titles that might, in some sense, be glossed as ‘chief’: tuku, ariki and maatua. Hogbin (1961[1934]: 166-68) gave ali‘i and maakua as the Ontong Javanese cognates of the latter two Nukumanu terms and seemed to suggest that they are synonyms, meaning ‘priest’. Salmond (1975), in her Luangiua (Ontong Java) lexicon, gives ‘grown up’, ‘senior’ and ‘chief’ as English glosses of makua (p. 42) and ‘captain of ship’ or ‘chief’ for ali‘i (p. 4). In one conversation with several Nukumanu (Atava, Henry Natori, Heniheni and Tehakani), I was told that te ariki is the same as te maatua. Yet, other Nukumanu disagree as to whether maatua and ariki are synonyms; some contend that the maatua constitute a kind of pool from which the ariki were drawn. Some suggested that each manava had at least one maatua and a number of statements indicated that this was also the case for ariki. Yet other consultants argued that only the most important manava (whichever those might be) had ariki, while still others claimed that Nukumanu had just one ariki at a time.

While Nukumanu differ as to the number, identity and role of the ariki, there was relatively little disagreement about the tuku. The tuku is a temporal or administrative leader—a position that first emerged during the time of Kauna and Apuri (see Figures 3-5), five or six generations ago, during a period of civil unrest. The Ontong Javanese equivalent is known by the cognate term, ku‘u; according to Hogbin (1961[1934]: 224), the first Luangiua ku‘u assumed power about eight generations prior to his writing and the most powerful ku‘u reigned during the late 19th century. Some of the conflicting statements I was given about these three important titles, maatua, ariki and tuku, were as follows.

Eliuda told me when we first met in Kieta that Francis Kipano was the traditional paramount chief, te tuku; his second son, David Hakamara, was chairman of the Nukumanu community government; and Eliuda’s own father, Temoa, was “Number Two” in the community government.20 He
added that Temoa was also the current representative of the *ariki* line, a fact which explained his position in the official governing body. Others agreed that David was government chairman, that Kipano was *te tuku* and a community government member and that Temoa was “The Second” or “Number Two”. (This English expression, rather than more lofty titles such as “vice chairman”, was routinely used by Nukumanu with whom I spoke.) There was, however, fundamental disagreement over whether or not Temoa had any claim to *ariki* status.

Initially, Temoa himself denied that he was an *ariki*. Later, he explained that the *ariki* title, because of its religious functions, was outlawed by the German plantation overseers towards the end of the 19th century. He then stated that if there were still *ariki* he would have a claim on the title and asserted that the position of *ariki* was as important as that of *tuku*.

When I mentioned to Eliuda that his father had denied being an *ariki* and claimed that there had been no *ariki* on Nukumanu since the German days, he seemed surprised and tried to figure out why Temoa would have said such a thing. He insisted that he had heard all his life that Kipano was the *ariki* of Nukumanu and that Temoa was “Number Two Chief”. About Kipano, he was unequivocal; his is the traditional chiefly line. The Number Two Chief until the German period, he said, was from “a different ‘clan’”. When that chief, who had no brothers or sons on Nukumanu, sailed to Ontong Java, the chieftainship was handed over to Temoa’s ‘clan’ in the person of Eliuda’s paternal grandfather Atoi. In the next generation, Temoa’s elder brother Teriko (see Figure 4) declined their father’s position, so it passed on to Temoa.

Eliuda went on to observe that perhaps the Germans deprecated the position of chief and for that reason some people may be unaware of their chiefs. But, he said, they do look to Kipano and Temoa for leadership. This, of course, can be seen in the election of these two people and Kipano’s son to be leaders of the community government. Eliuda added that the words *tuku* and *ariki* mean approximately the same thing, but *ariki* is a more general term. Just as the man who looks after a ship is *te ariki*, one who looks after anything else, including an island, should be an *ariki*.

Later, Temoa “corrected” Eliuda’s account, saying that there is one *ariki* and one *tuku*. Temoa is *te ariki*. These two chiefs are from different *manava*: *te manava tuku* and *te manava ariki*. The jobs of the *ariki* and *tuku*, he said, are a little different, but neither is above the other. If anything, perhaps the *ariki* is “in front”. The *ariki*’s job is to look after the island’s well-being. If crops do not grow, or a long period passes without rain, people talk to *te ariki*, and it is his responsibility to produce food or fish or rain. If someone becomes a *pikhet* (*Tok Pisin* for ‘big-head’, i.e., arrogant or a trouble maker), the *ariki* and *tuku* discuss an appropriate punishment and oversee its
execution. In general, he gave the impression that the tuku is more concerned
with punishment, administration, appointing officers and dealing with the
government. Interestingly, on another occasion, Tepuri (Kipano’s son) agreed
with Temoa’s suggestion that his line was actually that of the traditional
paramount chief and was, thus, superior to Kipano’s—a position that he
emphatically rejected in 2000.

Sometime later, Temoa gave me yet another rendition of the chieftainship.
He described the ariki lahi ‘paramount chief’ as a man from the Hare Aitu and
suggested that there was a rotating system. A man from one ‘clan’, perhaps
Te Hare Tonoo, would be paramount chief until he died. He then would be
replaced by the chief of the next house (perhaps Haaloloa). After each of the
four ‘clans’ had a chief, they would go back to the beginning.

The following week, I revisited the issue of ‘clans’ and chiefs with
Kahere and Temoa. At that point, they agreed that Kipano was from the Hare
Manamanatua and Temoa was from the Hare Teahana. However, they were
not sure whether the ariki was from Teahana and the tuku from Manamanatua
in earlier days, or if that is just how things have worked out in the recent
past. Yet Kahere, staying with her view that there were five ‘clans’, said each
‘clan’ had a chief, so there were five chiefs at a time. Further she said that,
although the tuku is from the Hare Manamanatua, that house also had an
ariki, who was a different person and from a different line within the ‘clan’.
Traditionally, she said, neither the ariki nor the tuku was above the other:
“E sau ‘they are equivalent’.” The reason that Kipano is Number One and
Temoa Number Two, she explained, is that European law had banned the
ariki, making the tuku Number One by default. Much later, towards the end
of my 1984 stay on Nukumanu, Temoa asserted that in ancient times, before
there was a tuku, each of the four major hare was headed by an ariki and the
ariki of the Hare Teahana was also the paramount chief of the atoll. Thus, the
senior chieftainship belonged to the original Temoa and his descendants.21

Kipano, not surprisingly, had a different view of the relationship between
the tuku and ariki. In diametrical opposition to Temoa, he said that the tuku is
unequivocally higher, that the contest is not even close! “The tuku is the king
of this island. The island belongs to te tuku.” On another occasion, he made
sure I got the point by referring to himself in English as the “boss-king”. He
described the ariki as not very important, being nothing more than “doctors”.
When someone was sick, an ariki would pray for the patient’s recovery; other
than that, they had no power. The tuku tells people what to do, while the ariki
just intercede with the deities when things are not right on the atoll in order
to repair the problem. As a substantive matter, Kipano agreed with Temoa
that the tuku is essentially an administrative chief and the ariki a spiritual
chief or priest. Their major disagreement was over the evaluation of which
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was the superior role. Kipano further scoffed at the suggestion that Temoa had any claim to ariki ancestry, asking disdainfully, “Did he tell you that?!?” He recognised Temoa as his “second” but denied that he was in any sense a chief, saying instead: “He is just a man who helps me and goes around making sure that people obey my commands.” Kipano also differed from both Temoa and Kahere in saying that during the pre-German period there were three ariki and one tuku.

In early May, 1984, Tepuri provided yet another account of Nukumanu chieftainship and descent. He said that many houses have ceased to operate but he was aware of at least eight having existed. These were the Hare Aitu (his own hare), Hare Tipua (Temoa’s), Hare Manamanatua, Hare Teahana, Hare Rooroa (~Haaloloa), Hare Tonoo, Hare i Roto and Hare Mataihu. Four of these houses, he said, were headed by ariki and, of these, the Hare Aitu was Number One. He was unsure about which of the remaining houses were ariki-led and he listed them in order of increasing tentativeness: Aitu, Manamanatua, Rooroa and Tonoo. In addition, he mentioned a ‘house’ known as Hare Hakaora, which he described as a house where a sick person would go to be cured by the aitu ‘ghosts or spirits’ and the “custom doctor”. (In 2000, he said that each “family” has a hare hakaora, or hare hora, which is the “main house” of the social group and is used for spiritual—particularly curing—purposes.)

An even more expansive version of Nukumanu ‘houses’ was provided by Kipano and Hatutahi in May 1984. According to this pair, the ‘houses’ included the Hare Manamanatua, Hare Tonoo, Hare Aitu, Hare Rooroa, Hare Aitu, Hare Teahana, Hare Tiare, Hare Hanohanoia, Hare Noopuka, Hare Tehuata, Hare Kai, Hare Mataihu, Hare Muriakau, Hare Kanapa and Hare Tipua. They stated that this was not a complete list, that it only included those that they could think of at the moment. Of these, Tonoo, Rooroa and Aitu were the major houses. (On another occasion, they listed the major houses as Manamanatua, Tonoo and Rooroa.) Manamanatua was Kipano’s house; Hatutahi’s was that of his father, the Hare Tiare; and Te Hare Aitu was the main house of the whole atoll (te hare te kanohenua katoa). They said that each house, even the minor ones, had an ariki, but the houses had long since ceased to exist. They asserted that the tuku looked after all the houses and all the ariki and the ariki of the Hare Tonoo was the high chief.

Most of the disagreement centred on the office of ariki and the relationship between the ariki and tuku. However, there was also some controversy about the tuku himself. According to Temoa, the first tuku was his ancestor, Kauna. Kauna was a warrior with no chiefly title, but he gained dominance because of his martial skill. Twice he fought his brother-in-law Apuri. Both times he emerged victorious. Then Apuri went to Ontong Java to study the art of spear
fighting. Upon his return to Nukumanu, he and Kauna fought again. This time, Kauna was handicapped with an ailing leg; he lost the fight and died, and Apuri became the next tuku. By Temoa’s account, Kauna had a brother who was also named Temoa. That Temoa held the title of ariki in the Hare Teahana and he interceded to stop the fighting. The ariki in the Hare Haaloloa was a man named Atiki and Pipitau was ariki in Apuri’s ‘house’, the Hare Manamanatua. Kipano and Hatutahi differed from Temoa, designating Apuri the first tuku and denying that the first Temoa was either Kauna’s brother, an ariki or the tuku’s “second”. Hatutahi claimed that the most recent Temoa had become the atoll’s “second” during the time of the Australian administration because he was fairly knowledgeable about custom and the people wanted him as tultul, a position created by colonial authorities that typically made one second-in-command behind the local chief or headman. Temoa’s father Atoi had been “second” before him, as had Atoi’s father Lepuhi and his father Atoi. Atoi had initially been made Number Two because he was the only one at the time who was truly expert on matters of custom. Hatutahi’s rendition of Temoa’s genealogy (see Figure 8) is quite different from that given by Temoa (Figure 3).

Something close to Hatutahi’s version of the relationship between Kipano and Temoa was generally accepted by most people I consulted in 2000. The consensus was that Kipano was the “chief” and Temoa had been “Number Two”, but they objected to Temoa’s claim that he was “Number Two Chief”. Those in my arguably-biased sample attributed most of the island’s problems to Temoa’s attempt to grab land that did not belong to him and to usurp chiefly power.

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  TEMOA
    |  
    ATOI  
    (made Number Two because of expertise in “custom”)
      |  
      LEPUHI  
        |  
        ATOI  
          |  
          TEMOA
```

Figure 8. Hatutahi’s rendition of Temoa’s genealogy.
DISCUSSION

The foregoing account, with its concern for kinship terminology, the way in which descent groups are constituted, and the roles assigned to such groups, looks rather traditional—perhaps, even “old-fashioned”. In certain key respects, however, it is very different from the functional and structural approaches that predominated through most of the 20th century. Even Schneider (1968, 1971, 1984), who challenged the Eurocentric assumptions behind older analyses, took it as axiomatic that kinship, to the extent that it exists at all, is neatly integrated around core symbols and is uniformly accepted by all of a community’s members. More recently, anthropologists have come to recognise that kinship—like other cultural systems—is heterogeneous, that it can be fraught with contradiction, tension, contestation, oppression and resistance. Kin-related conflicts commonly arise in connection with gender, class and systems of imperial domination. Nukumanu is by no means the most strife-ridden of communities, but it is divided along lines of gender, rank and power as well as access to land and other material resources. Such differences are commonly expressed in disparate genealogies as well as fundamental disagreements over the most basic elements of Nukumanu social organisation.

Some apparent disagreements may reflect the fact that terms are often polysemic and an intended referent is identified contextually. To some extent, the disagreements may be attributed to the fact that important elements of chieftainship and functions of the traditional descent groups have been inoperative since the commercial plantation period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As they have come to be historical curiosities with few practical implications, Nukumanu have not given a much attention to maintaining a precise recollection of how these groupings once were structured or how they worked. By this interpretation, when I arrived and started asking questions, people tried to accommodate me by dredging up archaic recollections about a no-longer-extant way of life. This would correspond with a progression in my fieldnotes in which increasing detail on the ancient system appears as time goes by. As informants searched their memories and discussed customary leadership and kinship systems among themselves, long-forgotten details re-emerged. In this case, many of the inconsistencies and contradictions might be seen as an artefact of my ignorance and inability to ask questions that were meaningful to Nukumanu of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Yet in another sense, the inconsistencies appear, paradoxically, to stem not from a lack of importance that Nukumanu attach to kin-based groups, but to their importance and centrality in atoll life. This is particularly associated with the significance of kinship and descent for political rivalries and land
disputes. As one consultant pointed out, during the pre-plantation period, when the atoll’s economy was wholly subsistence based, there was a limit to what people could consume and each “family” (whatever that may mean) had adequate resources. Once Nukumanu became immersed in the market economy and copra came to be a saleable commodity, the limits on potential economic accumulation no longer applied. Thus, land disputes became pervasive and intractable. Most of the disputes revolved around two factions, led by Kipano and Temoa.25

Under those circumstances, genealogical and related information becomes a valuable resource to be carefully guarded, and a potential issue of contention which poses the risk of acrimonious controversy if discussed lightly in a public setting. For both of these reasons, Nukumanu refrain from discussing such issues among any but their closest kin, thereby effectively removing the opportunity to achieve consensus on an “official” history of the atoll.

Yet, there are problems with a straightforward economic analysis of Nukumanu status rivalry. Most products of the earth are currently taken from communal atoll lands. Most boundary disputes have been over Cyrtosperma gardens, which are still squarely located in the subsistence sector. And with the incorporation of wheat flour and rice as Nukumanu diet staples over the past century, Nukumanu spend remarkably little time cultivating their gardens. Considering the lack of material dependence on these gardens, it is surprising how much emotional energy Nukumanu have put into land disputes. Family and community resources have been squandered taking cases to court and those costs pale next to the emotional toll of political cleavage, personal antagonism and secrecy surrounding anything even peripherally related to land.

Finally, let me turn back to the contrast between Nukumanu and Anuta, and the communities’ relative willingness to incorporate outsiders into their kinship systems. Both systems build on common Polynesian symbols and shared values. People on both islands cite aloha (Anutan aropa) as the cornerstone of kinship and notions of “shared substance” are often downplayed in relation to “diffuse, enduring solidarity” (to use Schneider’s felicitous expression). On Nukumanu, subordination of genealogical precision to emotional attachment and patterns of co-operation may seen in the composition of agricultural working groups and business partnerships, such as that between Temoa and his genealogically distant kinsman Atava. Still, the two communities’ divergent emphases in applying shared understandings to the vicissitudes of social practice are striking.

These differences, in part, may be a function of the length of time that the communities have been immersed in the world market and the international social order. Money makes accumulation and hoarding of wealth possible in a
way that it is not in a subsistence economy and may discourage incorporation of newcomers who might claim a share of the kin group’s limited resources. At the same time, Western notions of relatedness may complicate any inclination to incorporate outsiders. Studies since the middle 1960s portray Pacific peoples as unlike Schneider’s middle-class Chicagoans in their construction of “personhood”, cultural identity and understandings of “shared substance” (see Brady 1976, Carroll 1970, Linnekin and Poyer 1990, Marshall 1981). Still, diffusion of Western notions of kinship, reproduction and relatedness, to some degree, has been inevitable.

Anutans have experienced less contact with the outside world than have the Nukumanu and what contact they have had has been far less disruptive and traumatic. Even in the 21st century, Anuta is a seemingly-traditional Polynesian chiefdom with orderly succession patterns. The most recent civil war dates back over two centuries and the few foreign invasions depicted in oral traditions have been beaten back with minimal distress to the local population. Other visitors have been successfully integrated into the community and have contributed in important ways to the contemporary social order. Establishment of Christianity was relatively quick and painless; the agents of change were from Tikopia, the closely-related neighbouring island (see Feinberg 1998: 249-50). Over the ensuing century, the Anglican Church never faced a serious threat of denominational competition.

In all of these respects, Nukumanu could hardly be more different. The 19th century saw a devastating civil war that brought to power the first tuku, a military ruler, who largely eclipsed the priests or sacred chiefs (na ariki). That was followed a few years later by a cataclysmic invasion from “Tokelau”, after which the atoll’s population, according to Tepuri, fell to around 20 people (Teneke et al., n.d.). A generation or two after the Tokelau invasion, the Forsayth copra company established a private plantation on the atoll. The Nukumanu were expelled from their most productive garden land, forced to work for wages for the plantation and became dependent on the market economy. The planters introduced the Roman Catholic Church, which disintegrated with the Germans’ departure after the First World War. For decades, beginning with the Second World War, the atoll had no officially-recognised religion, but by the 1980s, three churches were operating informally, in defiance of a community government edict. By the 1990s, the ban on proselytising had been lifted and two churches, the Anglicans and Jehovah’s Witnesses, were openly competing for adherents.

Nukumanu’s historical susceptibility to negative external forces is compounded by a precarious natural environment. The challenge is one of making ends meet on an atoll of modest size and meagre terrestrial resources,
which are vulnerable to storms, tsunamis, drought and other natural disasters. Anuta, by contrast, enjoys an unusually benign environment with fertile soil, plenty of rain, a clean, reliable water source, productive gardens and extensive reefs (see Feinberg 2004). At the same time, Anuta’s small size, geographical isolation and paucity of commercially-exploitable resources have made it unattractive to colonial governments and foreign commercial interests. As a result, the island has been brought into the world economy only gradually and largely on its own terms. Nonetheless, Anuta has in recent decades become increasingly immersed in the broad web of economic and political relations. As more Anutans go to school, pursue wage work and strive for Western-style social mobility, their community is starting to take on some of the features that seem well entrenched on Nukumanu. That, however, is another story for another time.

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NOTES

1. I have discussed my integration into Anuta’s kinship system and how to interpret it in several publications over the past three decades (see Feinberg 2004).
2. My son Joseph Grim Feinberg accompanied me on the second trip, serving as my research assistant at the same time that he carried out his own project for Grinnell College. Joe and I were welcomed as old friends by people who had known us earlier. There was a great deal of interest in our work, and people were wonderfully supportive. We were given Nukumanu names and treated as part of the community. But it is difficult to think of occasions on which any Nukumanu addressed either of us as kin.
3. These atolls include: Nukumanu, Takuu and Nukuria in Papua New Guinea, Ontong Java and Sikaiana in the Solomon Islands, and Nukuoro and Kapingamarangi in the Federated States of Micronesia. They are all remarkably
similar in many aspects of language and culture, and they contrast markedly with other Polynesian outliers, most of which are either makatea-type formations (Rennell, Bellona, Aniwa) or volcanic in origin (Anuta, Tikopia, Taumako, West Futuna). For a comparative discussion of Polynesian outlier kinship and social organisation, see Feinberg and Donner n.d.

4. For example, I was struck by reports from the Nukumanu settlement on Buka of several thousand kina being raised to pay medical bills for the seriously ill child of one community member. And in August 2007, I was told that a co-operative seafood business, which was just getting started at the time of my visit seven years earlier, had been so successful that the co-op was able to make a down-payment on its own ship (Andreas Christensen, pers. comm.).

5. In both 1984 and 2000, work in the taro swamps was limited to one day a week and the only truly reliable crops were coconut and pandanus. The diet for most of the past century has focused on imported foods such as wheat flour and rice. The marine environment is productive, but that has largely been given over to bêche-de-mer and trochus collection, rather than subsistence products. See, however, Bayliss-Smith (1990) for a more sanguine view of Ontong Java, Nukumanu’s nearest neighbour.

6. Nukumanu voyagers’ most common destination is Ontong Java, approximately 30 miles to the south. The two atolls are culturally and linguistically similar and almost all Nukumanu have Ontong Javanese relatives. During my 1984 study, two or three canoes left every week for Ontong Java. All returned safely and without incident (see Feinberg 1995 for an extended discussion of Nukumanu voyaging).

7. Tok Pisin is the variety of Melanesian Pidgin English spoken in Papua New Guinea. Related languages include Bislama in Vanuatu and Pijin in the Solomon Islands. Many Nukumanu, whose atoll lies just a few miles north of the Solomon Islands/Papua New Guinea border, are fluent speakers of both Pijin and Tok Pisin.

8. An exception is Taumako and the Outer Reef Islands in the eastern Solomons, where a younger sibling or cousin of same sex is sometimes called teina and distinguished from tokana, which refers to any same-sex sibling.

9. Hai preceding a kin term calls attention to the relationship: hai taina is a set of same-sex ‘siblings’, hai kave are two or more ‘siblings’ of opposite sex, hai lamotu refers to a man and his ‘sister’s child’, etc. Proper translation of the expression hai maatua is somewhat more complex and is discussed below.

10. One friend confided that he had hit his wife in the stomach while she was pregnant, causing her to lose the baby and possibly inflicting permanent injury. This man is commonly regarded as one of the community’s most responsible people and the couple generally appear quite close. He regrets what happened and reproaches himself for having given in to his anger, but he also asserts somewhat philosophically that such behaviour is simply in his nature. I have discussed Nukumanu gender complementarity and antagonism in several places (see particularly Feinberg 1986).

11. The causative prefix appearing as faka, fa’a, or haka in most other Polynesian languages is typically rendered as ha or haa in Nukumanu. Hence the term for ‘real’ or ‘close’ is haamaoni.
12. Temoa’s paternal grandfather and one of Atava’s great-grandparents were full siblings; from a genealogical point of view, Atava and Temoa’s son, Heni, are third cousins.

13. Coconut toddy (kareve) is collected and fermented regularly by Nukumanu men and drunk as their primary intoxicant.

14. Hokotahi means ‘just one’ or ‘only one’, particularly when applied to people or groups of people. Some cognates with a similar meaning are sokotasi (Tikopian), tau tati (Anutan) and ko tahi or ko rahi (Taumako).

15. One anonymous reviewer of this manuscript observed that “on another Polynesian outlier, [kaha] were the strings from roofs of ritual houses that bound together the roof pieces but also represented different descent groups and were sung about as the house was being built”. I have no information about such strings in Nukumanu ritual houses, or any associated music, but the association makes sense and may well have formerly existed on the atoll.

16. See Goodenough (1955), Firth (1957) and Davenport (1959) for classic statements on the notion of non-unilinear (also called cognatic or “optative”) descent groups. Hogbin’s descriptions of Ontong Java were written at a time when our understanding of such groups had not yet been developed.

17. Soa is a common Polynesian word meaning ‘friend’. Nukumanu can use it in this sense as well. Most commonly, however, the term refers to a place where male friends socialise—to one of the atoll’s elevated un-walled sheds where groups of men congregate, usually in the evening, to drink fermented coconut toddy, sing songs and enjoy each other’s company.

18. Navari contended that the ‘clans’ were also important in the selection of purepure, the chief’s ‘executive officials’, and for claims to certain portions of garden land.

19. On Anuta, for example, chiefs and leaders generally are termed ariki, while the titles for the two traditional sacred chiefs are Tui Anuta and Tui Kainanga. Cognates of these terms are found throughout Polynesia.

20. Nukumanu’s community government, as it operated in the early to mid-1980s, consisted of a chairman, vice-chairman, and five additional members, one of whom was a woman elected to represent women’s interests. I did not have the opportunity to observe elections or government deliberations, but I was told that elections were by hand vote at public meetings. The candidates, I was assured, had been selected informally before the elections so that most ran unopposed and no one was placed in the awkward position of having to run against an opponent. Ian Davey, a district officer I met in Arawa after my return from Nukumanu, opined that the community government system of the time was seriously flawed and had not been designed for the smaller, more remote islands. The local government system was completely revamped a few years later.

21. According to the genealogy in Figure 3, the Hare Teahana goes back at least a generation further, to the first Temoa’s father Atoi.

22. As in other Polynesian languages, ora in Nukumanu refers to ‘life’, ‘soul’ or ‘life force’. Hakaora, then, means something on the order of ‘life-giving’ and hare hakaora to a house where worship activities intended to preserve or maintain community members’ lives are performed. The term may well designate the same structures that are sometimes termed hare aitu ‘spirit houses’.
23. Schneider, like his contemporaries, was preoccupied with finding the underlying logic that would elucidate a culture’s systemic integration. Since then, post-modernist and critical approaches have exploded the notion that culture is an integrated whole, and we have become acutely conscious of the extent to which people occupying different positions in a community may hold conflicting views of reality (see Clifford 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Feinberg 1994; Keesing 1989, 1991). Such insights have been applied directly to the realm of kinship studies by Carsten (2000), Collier and Yanagisako (1987), Peletz (1988, 1995) and others.

24. In relation to historical change, Sarfert and Damm (1929: 254-55) also point to the effects of copra production. They suggest that the commercial value of Ontong Java’s coconut orchards led to an increase in the importance of patrilineal principles for determining rights to coconut land. My assessment is that coconut orchards were likely controlled by males and passed from father to son before the plantation period, but that immersion in the market economy has elevated the importance of male-controlled coconut orchards and diminished the value of female-controlled taro gardens (see Feinberg 1986).

25. As Tepuri put the matter in 1984, in the old days there were more coconuts than people could use and there was little reason to quarrel over land—especially coconut orchards. With the introduction of copra production, all land is potentially in use all the time and land is readily converted into cash. The result is constant feuding over land. My examination of both local and provincial court records confirms Tepuri’s point. In August and September 1976, the local Nukumanu court found for Kipano against Temoa in two separate land cases. In July 1981, Temoa won a case against another family for stealing crops from his gardens. From 1981 through early 1984, there were several cases in which a man was fined for chopping down someone else’s trees without permission. In the North Solomons provincial court, four out of five cases recorded for the year 1980 involved Nukumanu. In one, Temoa won a land dispute with Aleni Tunehu. In two, Temoa’s elder brother Teriko lost land disputes with Koupu Poti. In the last, Tareo Pahia was judged to be the traditional owner of still other contested lands.

REFERENCES


