BORROWED MOIETIES, BORROWED NAMES:
SOCIOLINGUISTIC CONTACT BETWEEN TANNA AND
FUTUNA-ANIWA, VANUATU

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There is a history of considerable contact between the people of Tanna,
Futuna, and Aniwa, three islands in the Tafea (Southern) District of
Vanuatu. This essay addresses one aspect of that contact, which involves
elements of social organization: Tanna societies appear to have bor-
rowed a moiety system from Futuna or Aniwa, but Futuna and Aniwa
have borrowed the Tannese names for these moieties.¹

The people of Futuna and Aniwa speak two fairly closely related dia-
lects of a Polynesian Outlier language. The languages of Tanna are also
Oceanic, but not Polynesian, and have undergone considerable change
in the phonological structure of words. Borrowings in either direction,
therefore, are relatively easy to identify, which makes the nature of the
contact easier to reconstruct than in some other parts of the Pacific,
where the languages in contact are relatively similar phonologically and
borrowings are consequently more difficult to identify.

Only one area of borrowing has been documented in detail to date.
This concerns maritime vocabulary: The Tanna languages have bor-
rowed very heavily indeed from Futuna-Aniwa in a range of semantic
fields such as fish names, names of winds, names of parts of the canoe,
fishing technology, and so on (Lynch nd.). Considerable borrowing
(probably more by the Tanna languages from Futuna-Aniwa than in the
reverse direction) is apparent in other areas of material culture,
although these have not been fully documented as yet.

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Origins of the Tanna Moiety System

Five languages are spoken on Tanna, and different sources of information come from different language-areas. Lindstrom's dictionary of Kwamera defines both Koiameta (also Kaviameta) and Numrukwen as "one of two traditional social moieties which today have no marital or residential significance" (1986:63, 102). The corresponding Lenakel terms are Koiameta and Numrukwen (Lynch 1977).

The moieties are referred to as inteta (sometimes niteta) in Kwamera and as niko in Lenakel, terms that also apply to ships or canoes. The moieties are supposed to have been introduced to Tanna at the end of a period called Niproou (Lenakel) or Nipróu (Kwamera), referring to a mythological time of peace before the onset of warfare, group land ownership, marriage exchange, and so forth, all of which are associated with the two canoes or moieties. Guiart's version of the origin story is as follows:

Deux hommes, s’appelant respectivement Numrukwen et Koyometa, arrivent en pirogue près de Yakutère (Yatukwey, Port-Resolution); leur pirogue coule; ils prennent tout ce qu’il y avait dans la pirogue et se retrouvent à terre, dans un abri sous roche d’accès difficile, sous forme de deux pierres, l’une rouge (Koyometa) l’autre blanche (Numrukwen). (Guiart 1956:93)

Part of the origin story told to one of us goes like this:

The people came to Tanna in two ships, Kapilau and Niproou, and landed at Lenimtehin. They lived like we do, and they spread around Tanna, and life was good; there was no anger, only friendship in the beginning. But then they began to fight each other. . . . They went on fighting, and one hit another with a sling. And he was hurt and said to his brother, “My friend, I want you to avenge me”. . . . And he threw a stone and hit one of them on the forehead and killed him. This was the first death, and they looked on death there and grew angry. Then they took up the bow and arrow and war-clubs and began fighting.

The fighting was still going on when the white man came to Tanna. The people asked for guns, and he gave them some, and in exchange they sold the foreigner a small amount of land. They began shooting each other, and some tried hard to steal.
guns from others, and the stealing of guns which the white man
had exchanged for land kept going on. They bought a lot of
guns, and the war went on apace with the island divided into
two niko, Numrukwén and Koiameta.

Bonnemaison (1987) has a slightly different version again. The two
moieties are closely linked with the two stones mentioned by Guiart,
Numrukwén and Kaviameta, and with two canoes. In the beginning,
everyone was together in the “canoe” Nipróu, and the island was at
peace. But then there were two “canoes,” said to have been commanded
by Karapanenmus and Mwatikík (i.e., Mauitikikí); and the “loi des
deux pirogues” made warfare possible. Traditions vary as to whether
fighting started in the Whitesands area as a result of a dispute over an
exchange that was unequal, or in Middle Bush after a war “game” saw
someone accidentally killed. In either case, the peace of Nipróu was
broken by the arrival of the two canoes and the division into two
moieties, Numrukwén and Kaviameta.

There is obviously some confusion in these origin stories. But the con-
fusion is really on matters of detail: All accounts agree that there was a
period without a system of dual organization and that a moiety system
was introduced to Tanna.

The Tanna Moiety System

Although Humphreys (1926) argues that these moieties were geographi-
cally based, this does not seem to have been strictly the case, at least tra-
ditionally. Guiart (1956:90) notes that it is certainly true that, while the
east and southeast coasts, the Lenakel area in the central west, and the
Green Hill area in the north are heavily Numrukwén, and the south-
wst and much of the northwest are heavily Kaviameta,

la plus grande partie des agglomérations du reste de l’île appa-
raissent divisées entre les deux groupes. Les yimwayim se récla-
dent de l’une ou l’autre dénomination; il arrive même souvent
que les dignitaires se partager entre Numrukwèn et Koyometa,
à l’intérieur du même yimwayim, sans que les informateurs
considèrent ces cas comme aberrants. (Guiart 1956:90)4

He also notes that the preponderance of a certain moiety in a particular
region of the island is due mostly to the relatively recent out-migration
of one group from what was once a more mixed area (Guiart 1956:91).
Lindstrom agrees with Guiart that the distinction between the two moieties does not appear to have great practical significance today.

Moieties once set the bounds of warring factions on the island. Major wars . . . occurred across rather than within moieties. . . . Although people usually know their moiety affiliation, they today rarely act on this. No major body of binary oppositions symbolizes membership in a moiety although one man explained that . . . Numrukwén arrived first, is “on the bottom,” or female and has greater power, if less ability and knowledge with food than does Koyometa. Koyometa arrived second, is male, and controls the power to produce impressive foodstuffs. . . . Moiety affiliation, in addition, plays no part in people’s marriage affiliations. Given a two-section kinship system with moieties, one might expect these groups to be exogamous—exchanging women between themselves. People assert, however, that moieties were historically endogamous. Men, according to their reasoning, were afraid to marry a woman of the opposite moiety lest she betray them to her brothers. (Lindstrom 1981: 72-73)

With the cessation of warfare, the importance of these two moieties has declined (although moiety divisions have spilled over into national politics, such that support of a particular political party often corresponds with moiety affiliation). Nevertheless, the moieties are still important in relation to land disputes and in dance-exchanges (Kwamera nakwiari, Lenakel nikoviaar), at which each moiety has its symbols: Kaviameta people are said to be red, are accused of having several languages, and their symbol is a red-breasted bird, the cardinal honey-eater (Myzomela cardinalis; Kwamera kaviamtameta, Lenakel kaviamtameta); Numrukwén people are said to be black (according to Guiart) or white (according to Bonnemaison), and their symbol is a domestic fowl with ruffled plumage. Particular species of yam, taro, and Cordyline are also associated with each moiety (see Bonnemaison 1987:291; Guiart 1956:91-92).

We shall note shortly that stones representing the moieties are important in Futuna. Apart from the original stones mentioned by Guiart, moiety-stones do not figure prominently in Tanna today. However, Monty Lindstrom informs us that Chief Rigiau unburied two such stones (named Kaviameta and Numrukwén) with much ceremony at Ianamwakel village on the east coast of Tanna in the mid-1980s.
In addition to the two moieties, there is a third, intermediary group. Lindstrom (1986) defines the term Kout kisua as:

1. Traditional social identity usually possessed by one or two men in a locality (i.e., in an imwarim group). These men mediated disputes between two traditional, non-residential, non-marital social moieties, numrukuen [sic] and koiameta by ‘going between the canoes’. 2. A mediator between disputing local groups. 3. Spy, someone who informs the enemies of a group of its plans (1986:63-64)

The corresponding Lenakel term is Kouatkasua.

Lindstrom elaborates on the role of the Kout kisua (1981:73). He is “an intermediary who is able to talk safely with men of both moieties, one who ‘goes between the canoes’. . . . [He] retains primary affiliation with either Numrukwen or Koyometa. Unlike his fellow moiety members, however, he historically approached the men of the opposite moiety to arrange the peace or deliver a message” (Lindstrom 1981:73). This is, therefore, a traditional social identity usually possessed by one or two men in a locality, who act as mediators (and sometimes as spies).

In summary, then, Tanna societies have a tradition that speaks of a period when there was no division within the society and says that the current system of dual organization was introduced to the island. The moiety division was once important militarily, but this is no longer the case; however, moiety membership is still important in traditional ceremonies (and also to some extent in modern politics), and there is also a group of intermediaries that mediate between the two moieties.

Published Accounts of the Futuna-Aniwa Moiety System

West Futuna-Aniwa is a Polynesian Outlier language spoken in two dialects, one on Futuna and the other on the neighboring island of Aniwa. There are basically two major published sources of information on Futuna-Aniwa language and society, in the works of Capell and Dougherty.

Capell’s 1984 dictionary gives Namruke as the name of “one of the two moieties in Futunese society” but does not list the name of the other. He does, however, list Surama and Yefotuma as the names of the two Aniwan moieties. In his anthropological study, Capell noted that
there seems little doubt that in pre-Christian days both Futuna and Aniwa societies were based on dual organization. This does not appear in [Gunn’s] *Gospel in Futuna*, nor in any of Dr. Paton’s writings on Aniwa, but the names Iefotuma and Sura-ma are given as the two geographical divisions of Aniwa, and Dr. Gunn, in conversation with the present writer (to whom study of the kinship system had already suggested the likelihood of a moiety system) was able to recall that after the writing of his book he had learnt from some of the old men that two divisions had previously existed on Futuna. The name of one was Namruke, the other was not recorded. These, however, were not territorial divisions, and they have been allowed to lapse. Very little detail of their function is likely to be obtained now. They would both be found in the same hamlet, membership in them was inherited through the mother and carried certain obligations (such as taking turns in giving feasts), and each had its own marae or public square with sacred banyan in each hamlet. (Capell 1960: 2)

Dougherty gives the names of the two moieties in Futuna as Namruke and Kavimeta (1983:636-638); the gloss for each, contra Capell’s assertion that these are matrilineal moieties, is “one of two major patrilineal descent groups of Futuna” [emphasis added]. Dougherty also mentions a third descent group, Fana, defined as a “descent group which functions as a mediator between two moieties based on descent, Kavimeta and Numruke [sic]. Members of Fana were born into one of the major groups and raised by a member of the other descent group, usually a mother’s brother” (Dougherty 1983:636). There is a clear parallel here between Futuna Fana and Tanna Kout kisua.6

The Futuna Moiety System

Research by one of us has shown that the two vaka or moieties (vaka, “canoe”), which are known as Namruke and Kaviameta, were definitely in existence in pre-Christian times: Unlike in Tanna, there is no tradition in Futuna of a period before the existence of a dual-organization system, nor is there any tradition of the moieties’ having been introduced to Futuna (from Tanna or elsewhere). Traditionally, cross-moieties marriage was prohibited, and thus one was born, married into, and remained Namruke or Kaviameta.

The main activities or preoccupations of the two moieties in the past
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seem to have been feasting, which involved the exchange of pigs, yams, taro, and sugarcane, and the resulting "wars" that broke out (presumably as the result of disputes about these exchanges). Namruke are characterized as being quiet but evasive and calculating, thriving on the accumulation of wealth. Kawiameta, on the other hand, are supposed to be outspoken, direct, and straightforward.

Both vaka are found in each village, and each village has a Namruke and a Kawiameta marae. Stone images relating to both moieties are found in each village. The Namruke image, known as Fatu, is largely hidden below ground (as befits the Namruke character); the Kawiameta image (Sura), on the other hand, is much taller, with very little of it below ground (again befitting the more "obvious" character of Kawiameta people).

Whatever the situation might have been in the past--see Capell's comment that membership was matrilineally inherited--these moieties today are clearly patrilineal descent groups, with land, chiefly titles, and magical instruments passing from father to (usually) oldest son. If a man has only daughters, these rights pass through the (oldest) daughter to her (oldest) son.

Over time, cross-moiety marriage took place, giving rise to a third vaka, the Fana. A Fana person is supposed to have personality traits of both Namruke and Kawiameta, and they act as intermediaries between the two other vaka in cases of disputes and the like. The Fana have no marae, and there are no stone images associated with them. Fana people associate, or are associated, with Namruke or Kawiameta on the basis of their personality traits rather than on the basis of the vaka to which their father (or mother) belongs.

The Aniwa Situation

The situation on Aniwa is similar to that on Futuna, and we will mention here only points of difference. There is a tradition that the island was originally divided into two moieties: Sura, which occupied the north of the island, and Yefatu, which occupied the south. These divisions, however, have now lapsed: The two patrilineal moieties still on Aniwa are not geographically discrete; they are now known as Kawiameta and Namrukwen, and there is a tradition of their having been borrowed from Tanna.

There are also a number of submoieties, including Tarua, Nafuci, Fakagiagi, and Ipake. Of these, Tarua is classified as Kawiameta, and people from this group claim to be the original inhabitants of Aniwa;
the other groups are classified as Namrukwen, and are said to be “outsiders,” originally from Tanna. There is apparently no group on Aniwa corresponding to Futuna’s Fana.

Who Borrowed What from Whom?

Moiety systems are of some antiquity among Oceanic-speaking peoples (see, for example, Blust 1980, 1981), and one might expect that both Tannese and Futunese-Aniwan societies would have had their own moiety systems and their own names for those moieties. Thus what is initially most striking in this comparison of Futuna-Aniwa and Tanna moiety systems is the similarity in the names of the moieties of the three islands:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Futuna</th>
<th>Namrule</th>
<th>Kawiameta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aniwa</td>
<td>Namruke</td>
<td>Kawiameta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanna: Kwamera</td>
<td>Numrukwen</td>
<td>Koiameta, Kaviameta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenakel</td>
<td>Numrukwen</td>
<td>Koiameta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitesands</td>
<td>Numrukenk</td>
<td>Koiamera</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, there has been contact between the islands; but the contact has been two-way in nature.

Borrowed Moiety Names

Looking at this initially as a purely linguistic problem, it would appear that the Futuna-Aniwa names should be treated as having been borrowed from a Tanna language. While consonant clusters and word-final consonants are rare in Futuna-Aniwa, they are common features of Tanna phonologies. Given this, the Futuna form Namruke with its medial consonant cluster looks “foreign,” and the Aniwa form Namrukwen with the final consonant looks more foreign. So the linguistic evidence would suggest that the moiety names are Tannese and have been borrowed into Futuna-Aniwa, and this accords with the Aniwa tradition of borrowing these groupings from Tanna.

The most likely source of these loans is Kwamera. On the east coast of Tanna, which faces Futuna and Aniwa, three languages are spoken: North Tanna, Whitesands, and Kwamera. Whitesands has undergone a regular \(*t > r\) sound change, and one of its moiety names is Koiamera, an unlikely source for the Futuna-Aniwa form Kaviameta. (North Tanna has undergone a similar change.) Kwamera has two alternate names for this moiety, Koiameta and Kaviameta, the latter being the
closest of all Tanna moiety names to the Futuna-Aniwa form. We can therefore refine the hypothesis and propose that the Futuna-Aniwa moiety names were borrowed from Kwamera.

**A Borrowed Moiety System**

However, Futuna has no tradition of these moieties’ having been introduced from outside: Capell’s statement quoted above makes no mention of this, and though incomplete information was made available to him (or Gunn), it seems clear that the moiety system in Futuna has always “been there.” While Aniwa does have a tradition of borrowing the current system from Tanna, there is also knowledge of a precontact moiety system there.

We should also point to the cognition between the Aniwa moiety names Sura and Yefatu and the Futuna names for the stone images Sura and Fatu. We therefore hypothesize that Futuna, like Aniwa, always had a system of dual organization, and that Sura and Fatu are the original names of the moieties in both Futuna and Aniwa.

However, there is a tradition in Tanna of the moieties’ having been introduced from outside. Bonnemaison in particular provides us with some valuable information on this matter. In the time of Nipróu, there was no dual organization. But then came the two niko, the two canoes, one of which was commanded by Mwatiktík—the Polynesian culture-hero Mauitikitiki. It is clear from various traditions that a dual organization was introduced to Tanna: Bonnemaison’s version would suggest that this introduction had a Polynesian origin, and Futuna or Aniwa are the logical sources.

So we have reached the following conclusions:

1. Futuna-Aniwa “always” had moieties, which were known as Sura and Fatu.
2. Tanna did not always have moieties. There is distinct evidence of a moiety system having been introduced and fairly strong evidence that it came from a Polynesian source.
3. Nevertheless, the current Futuna and Aniwa names for the two moieties are borrowings from the Kwamera language of Tanna.

We thus appear to have a situation where Futunese and/or Aniwans introduced a moiety system to Tanna, and both then later borrowed the Tannese names for those moieties! This clearly requires some explanation. First, we need to look at the names of the moieties in Tanna languages, since these are not of Futuna-Aniwa origin. The Kaviameta
moiety has as its symbol the cardinal honey-eater Myzomela cardinalis, known as kaviametameta in Kwamera,\(^8\) koiametameta in Lenakel. There is clearly a connection between the name of the bird and the name of the moiety, and it is possible that the moiety name is derived from the name of the bird that symbolizes it.

Monty Lindstrom (pers. com., 1993) has suggested that the name Numrukwén derives from Kwamera rukwé-ni, “his wife”—that is, the wife of the cardinal honey-eater. The prefix nam- is occasionally used to nominalize verbs and other word classes in Tanna languages, and there may have been assimilation in Kwamera and other Tanna languages from an earlier form Namrukwén (\(<\text{nam-rukwé-ni})--\)from which the Futuna-Ainiwa form would have derived—to Numrukwén, because of the u in the following syllable. Lindstrom also informs us that, although there is some reference in Tannese tradition to Numrukwén as the “older brother” and Kaviameta as the “younger brother,” there are also traditions about fights between brothers in which the younger brother ends up on top, and the older brother becomes his wife.

Granted then that the Tannese attached names of their own to the borrowed moieties, why, though, did the Futunese and the Ainiwans borrow Tannese names for moieties that they already had, and had names for? Let us go back to an earlier quote from Capell. He says that the missionary Gunn, “after the writing of his book . . . had learnt from some of the old men that two divisions had previously existed on Futuna. The name of one was Namruke, the other was not recorded. These . . . have been allowed to lapse” (Capell 1960:2).\(^9\) It may be, then, that the moiety system lapsed in Futuna, with the names Sura and Fatu simply being used to refer to the stones in each marae; it is also clear that the original Sura/Yefatu division in Ainiwa was allowed to lapse. Subsequently, a moiety system was reactivated on both of these islands, possibly for internal reasons or possibly because of contact with Tanna. In either case, it was this contact that led to the adoption of the Kwamera names for the two moieties.

Finally, as far as the “intermediate” moiety is concerned, there does appear to be considerable similarity in the role of the Fana in Futuna and the Kout kisua in Tanna. However, there is no linguistic evidence of borrowing here, in either direction.

**Conclusion**

It is clear that there were far-reaching sociolinguistic contacts between Tanna and Futuna-Ainiwa societies. We have shown that Tanna societies
borrowed a moiety system, probably from Futuna-ANIWA, and that Futuna-ANIWA subsequently borrowed the moiety names from the Kwamera language of Tanna. We have speculated that the original Futuna-ANIWA dual-organization system may have collapsed to a considerable extent, possibly because of the presence of Christian missionaries on the island, but that it then later regenerated, partly due to influence from Tanna.

NOTES

1. We are grateful to Monty Lindstrom and two anonymous reviewers for valuable comments on an earlier draft of this article, and to Ture Kailo for information on the Aniwan moieties.

2. The orthography generally follows the published sources on the various languages: $i$ represents a mid (sometimes high) central vowel, equivalent in at least some phonetic environments to the a in English ago or the i in New Zealand English this, while the acute accent marks irregular (i.e., non-penultimate) stress. Spellings tend to vary with author: for example, Lindstrom and Lynch both write Koiameta for the name of one of the moieties, but Lindstrom gives Kaviameta as an alternate, while Guiart and Bonnemaison (and also Lindstrom in one publication) write this name as Koyometa. Generally, we use the Kwamera terms for the moieties and related concepts in the text but retain other spellings in direct quotations.

3. Translation: “Two men, named Numrukwen and Koyometa, arrive in a canoe near Yatukeris (Yatukwei, Port Resolution); their canoe sinks; they take everything in the canoe and find themselves on the shore, in a rock shelter difficult of access, in the shape of two rocks, one red (Koyometa), the other white (Numrukwen).”

4. Translation: “The large majority of settlements in the rest of the island appear to be divided between the two groups. The yimwayim make use of the name of one or other denomination; it even often happens that leaders are divided between Numrukwen and Koyometa, within the same yimwayim, with informants not considering these cases aberrant.” What Guiart writes as yimwayim is Lenakel iimwaiim, Kwamera imwarim. This corresponds to Bislama nakamal and refers to a ritually important circular clearing in the forest where men prepare and drink kava, hold important decision-making meetings, prepare and carry out exchanges and feasts defined to be traditional in character, and stage traditional dances.

5. Note that Kwamera isua and Lenakel asua mean “sail, travel by sea”; hence the image of the intermediaries sailing between the two canoes.

6. Capell appears to make no mention of Fana in either of his studies. Both dictionaries give as meanings for fana “to shoot, a bow; a mainmast,” but it appears that these meanings are not related to the name of this descent group.

7. The terms given by Capell—Surama and Yefotuma—are actually Sura and Yefatu (not Yefotu) with the suffix -ma, “and”; thus Sura-ma means something like “the Sura people.” While Futuna-ANIWA fatu means “stone” (and also “star”), we know of no meaning for sura other than as the name of the moiety or moiety-stone.
8. Kwamera kaviamtameta derives from an unidentified root, kavia, plus imtameta, “pink, reddish.”

9. The book in question may have been either The Gospel in Futuna or Heralds of the Dawn.

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