Teasing, Gossip, and Local Names on Rapanui

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> To understand . . . social systems, we must study
> the practical action of [people's] daily lives as well as
> the metaphor in which [they] express it. (Murphy
> 1971:162)

I NFORMATION, ITS concealment, management, and control, is a central concern to any human society. People use information to form their existential understanding of their particular condition and their relationships to other persons, groups, or even gods. People talk about themselves and others, significant and insignificant.

In this paper I look at how people talk about one another through teasing, gossip, and local names. Although partite studies of naming, gossiping, and teasing have appeared, my purpose is to propose these as a process through which individuals and their actions are compared, controlled, and manipulated. Data from Rapanui, as the inhabitants of Easter Island refer to themselves, their island, and their language, illustrate the phases in that symbolic passage of person and behavior from simply corrective tease to the fixing of an event and its perpetrator in a community's collective and intimate history. In this paper, I am interested not just in the character of the information in a community, but also information about the characters who transact their daily lives in their social groups.

I am not claiming uniqueness for the Rapanui in the way that they handle information, but contend that the following analysis may be applied to any ethnographic context where people tease one another, talk about one another, and have a local descriptive naming system. Even in those societies where naming has become the prerogative of the state, which

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is the case on Rapanui, a localized, descriptive naming system survives as a system of personal epithets, each with a background story. If any social conditions seem to promote teasing, gossiping, and local naming, these processes are most prevalent in those societies where bounded group membership is ambiguous; where performance to demonstrate adhesion to individuals and cohesion as a group is most required, formal rules for association being nondiscrete and subject to argument and manipulation. Because most people live in such societies today, the view taken here has a wide applicability.

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TEASING, GOSSIP, AND LOCAL NAMING ON RAPANUI

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Rapanui lies about 3500 km from the Chilean coast, with lonely Pitcairn Island being the nearest (recently) inhabited neighbor. In 1973, 1343 persons lived in Hangaroa, the one village on the 117 km² island. The Rapanui are under the presumed but ineffectual care of about 500 Chileans, most of whom either are employed in national government jobs or are dependants of those so employed. The islanders retain many of their pre-Chilean colony practices, including clan patterns in land tenure, separate dwellings for each nuclear family, and belief in ghosts and curses. Rapanui know Spanish, but all speak their own Polynesian language amongst themselves.

Contact with outsiders began in 1722 and was a mixed blessing from the start. Eventually, after a period when Europeans only visited but did not live on the island, slave raids, forced migration, and disease devastated the local population in the 1860s. By 1877, there were only 110 persons alive on Rapanui. Annexation to Chile occurred in 1888, and for much of this century an English-Scottish company exploited the island as a sheep ranch (Porteous 1978).

The details of Rapanui history and contemporary social organization are available elsewhere (McCall 1979). What has emerged at the present time is that the islanders are cautious with outsiders, preferring to invest socially and financially in their own island rather than risk succumbing to the gestures of nonislanders for permanent association. Only 27 percent (484) of the total 1821 Rapanui alive in the world in 1973 resided off their island. Even these expatriates, for the most part, maintain frequent contact by prestations (Mauss 1969) in post or parcel.

A formal Chilean legal system, administered by a judge appointed from mainland Chile, has been in force since 1966, when Rapanui became a civil territory of Chile. This judge hears cases from a number of islanders on marital problems, some land disputes, and alleged theft. The local police post maintains a makeshift jail in a converted garage, where the occasional offender is restrained for sentences running from only a day or so up to a few years for more serious, usually criminal law, infractions.

For the most part, though, the Rapanui administer by word of mouth their sanctions on people and their behavior. Teasing, gossip, and naming are the three principal stages of a process in association through which one Rapanui seeks to control the person and performance of another.

Teasing may be based upon a structural relationship which two or more persons share. A parent may tease a child, an uncle his niece, a friend his or her friend. Teasing usually relates to some incorrect performance, and the standards for correct and incorrect vary widely throughout the population. No Rapanui has not been both perpetrator and victim of a tease several times throughout his or her lifetime. Teasing may be shouted across an open space, before a large audience, or murmured covertly by teaser to victim. A person

so rebuked may respond in kind, with a reminder of a past action or a present behavior. Some Rapanui, sensitive to teases, may disengage and remove themselves from the presence of a teaser.

Moving about the few square kilometers of Hangaroa, the principal settlement on Rapanui, one hears often the jerky, discordant tones of the teaser and the ripple of laughter from his or her listeners. Teasing is a frequently pursued activity and may occur whenever two or more persons meet and interact. Large public meetings are rare on Rapanui, but when they do occur, people who take the floor to speak may find themselves the object of one or more teasers, especially if they prolong their discourse, straying from the point at hand. Any person who corrects another, proposes a course of action, occupies a position of leadership, and so on may be the object of a tease. The primary proviso is that persons who tease others to their faces are always in an equal or superior age status to those whom they tease. Elders tease children or elder siblings or cousins tease their junior relations. Women and men who are married couples should not tease one another in public, for this would mean lack of respect *(mō'a)*. Close kin should have confidence *(pe'e)* with one another and should not tease in public, though teases in intimate surroundings between junior and senior do occur.

On one occasion, an uncle teased a foster boy for wishing to attend school in Chile, an aspiration otherwise encouraged but thought by the uncle not to be a likely prospect for that particular child. On another occasion, a woman teased a funeral mourner for singing an oration for someone to whom she (the mourner) was only distantly related. Distantly related relatives, the teaser believed, should only sing with permission of those having a closer relationship. Young men who try to inform an older person how to perform some task may be the objects of teasing. People who have left the island and who brag about their off-island experiences will be teased by their relatives. The day after some wild bout of drinking, people may tease those who easily become intoxicated in Hangaroa's two or three bars. Physical appearance may often provoke a tease if specific objectionable behavior is too complex to sum up in a short tease. Sexual exploits (and failures) become teases, as do words used redundantly and repeatedly by persons in their conversations. Persons who boast or brag are irresistible targets for a tease and, not surprisingly, expert teasers themselves feel the stings of others' comments about them. Finally, an individual may be teased because he or she is part of a kin category or interest group. Indirectly, then, people tease a number of individuals as a group on successive, though separate, occasions.

Teasing is to insult *(haka nuka-nuka)* someone, even if the offended party does not respond at the time of the tease. Some persons have a quick and ready wit; to attempt to tease them is a risk in itself, for the tease may backfire. A tease is an indirect criticism, a softened blow and, for the most part, a gentle rebuke in a culture where physical violence outside the immediate nuclear family is very rare and rarely visible. Teasing can be used to cause someone to remove himself or herself from the scene of action or it can cast someone into unfavorable light by causing him or her to react threateningly. To taunt someone through teasing so that he or she becomes annoyed enough to fight physically is *haka me'e-me'e*. But the crucial point in teasing is that it remains jocular, light hearted, seemingly unserious, and not a direct threat. The Rapanui would agree with Radcliffe-Brown (1977:186) when he remarked that ". . . teasing is always a compound of friendliness and antagonism."

Not long ago, teases were sometimes done in the form of satirical songs (R. Campbell 1964:314). These *'ei* were publicly performed by persons who were specialists in the song

form, and they accompanied their performances by dancing and gestures. Relatives would ask these specialists to perform ʻei for them if they had a particular individual they wished to shame publicly. The ʻei performers used props such as batons or costumes to add to their degradation ceremony, for ceremonial it was. These ʻei are likely to be of some antiquity and may have been less specialist in the past, for ʻei batons figure prominently in collections of Rapanui artifacts traded to outsiders in the 18th and 19th centuries that are now part of displays in European museums.

Teases, especially if people are unable to voice them fully at the time of the relevant incident, may be held back and related to others after the object of the tease departs. Juniors must do this often, especially if they wish to correct or chide a senior on whom they have some sort of dependence for obtaining land or favors.

Gossip carries on from teasing, for it always relates to an event which would have involved a tease or actually did produce one. Gossip may even relate to events where the speaker was not present.

Gossip is an act of collusion, the recounting of information about someone absent. Talking about events is different from talking about persons, with the latter being true gossip. Events are the stuff of rumor, people the concern of gossip, a point I elaborate upon later.

Asymmetrical power relations require that a tease be severely softened or foregone altogether. Teases silent in the face of superiors emerge when the gossip reveals the intimate information about the other. These stories may be initiated and form the entire content of a conversation. Gossip emerges in the course of conversation as well as comprising rhetoric to prove a point or dispute an argument. Gossip can be about fresh events or past alleged infractions. The gossip relates the event and the personnel present, often supplying supposedly verbatim dialogue between the characters, which serves to add veracity as well as vivacity to the reportage. If the gossip tells about someone not well known to the listener, he or she may supply additional material, such as personal history or other supporting detail, to fill in the account and its context. People can claim that they are merely supplying information or reporting another's behavior and not interpreting it. Gossip becomes, then, an objective, verbal document, so speaker and listener profess to believe at the time. Such a gossip situation itself can become a subject for further gossip.

People use gossip to seek to control the behavior of others, significant and insignificant. Rapanui on the whole do not regard gossip as accurate reportage and carefully scrutinize the source and circumstances of stories about people absent, however much they might feign absolute belief at the time of hearing gossip from friends and relations. Many Rapanui deprecate gossip and gossips, but most islanders like to relate a good story or hear one when it is being told by someone they trust. People presume that gossips have an interest in purveying the information that they do. People gossip to one another to bolster their own prestige as valuable informants or to reduce the standing of another, absent person. The two or more persons who participate in gossip demonstrate their peʻe (confidence or trust) in one another, the gossip by relating the story and the audience by listening.

Some Rapanui are fearful of listening to gossip and refuse to hear stories from anyone but their most intimate kin. Women may refuse to visit other women and do not invite others to their homes for fear of gossip. As each nuclear family has a separate dwelling or, at least, plans for the construction of one, this makes for effective separation between some individuals. Persons standing together in a group almost always are listening to or trading gossip, and people carefully judge the composition of a group before joining it.

Simply to hear gossip is to lend credence to it, and to repeat it to the person who is the object of the tale is often interpreted as an accusation. Sometimes persons who do not wish to show their *pe'e* with another will admonish a person who tries to gossip by saying, "*'e nono'i mai a koe ki te vananga* (Are you coming to me for words?)"

On the other hand, Rapanui are eager to share information with friends and kin about persons who are enemies or misbehaving relations. The beginning of a gossip session, wherein two or more persons exchange information about absent others, operates very much like the system of prestation and reciprocity described by Marcel Mauss (1969). There is an obligation to give, to receive, and to repay, though such a situation of prestation need not be an immediate one but part of an ongoing trust *(pe'e).*

Haka niva-niva (to speak malicious gossip) is the revelation of information of which one does not approve. Gossips themselves may speak of the *haka niva-niva* of others absent. A Rapanui is unlikely to refer to his or her own gossip as *haka niva-niva.* Information about incidents and their participants passed on to someone else for their benefit is known by another verb, *he ngaro'a.* One person's disapproved information *(haka niva-niva)* is often clearly another's helpful information *(he ngaro'a),* these evaluative terms being relative to the persons employing them. This is so especially when the information related concerns married couples.

Ngeu is a kind of joking, though sometimes serious, gossip accusing one or sometimes both partners in a marriage of being unfaithful. Gossip of this sort can and does break up marriages, though people are well aware that the information may be false. To accept or to reject such information about one's spouse or relative is to show confidence in the teller of the tale and to collude against the person featured in the story. Again, if someone were to confront one's spouse with *ngeu,* he or she might well interpret it as an accusation.

The circulation of information about another person in gossip is usually related to some scandalous act. Sometimes the incidents are not from the present but from the past, in which case the information is *raranga. Raranga* relates to conflicts of interest in a particular event and usually leads to a reply in the form of a counter accusation, which people sometimes call *tutuhi.* When information of which one does not approve is being spread in gossip, then the purveyors of such stories may be spoken of as doing *kati-kati,* inventing false events. Even if the information is accurate, one can still term a gossip who speaks badly of someone else as performing *ami* or, if doing it often, as *ami-ami.* The gossiping person, if someone alleges that the content of the message is false, may be termed *papaki.*

Groups may also be the subject of gossip. There is a group of individuals in the community, the subjects themselves of much demarcating gossip, who people say have "tongues that wave like tree branches in the wind" and should not be trusted. One nuclear family on the island carries the local name *'eo* (cinder), for to tell them anything is like casting a light cinder on the wind; it blows everywhere. *Amohingo* is a well-known term for some person or some group who cannot be trusted to keep a secret or to tell the truth, for they are always carrying words *(ma'u-ma'u vananga).* One of my informants who shunned gossip sessions and whose discretion (and isolation) is famous in the community referred to perpetual gossips as *eve erua* (double farters).

Most Rapanui, though often interested to hear about the behavior and opinions of others, are wary that talk about their intimate affairs might fall into the hands (and mouths) of persons with whom they do not share trust and confidence. As the numerous terms relating to gossip suggest, there is a general anxiety about finding oneself the subject of comment. *Anga-anga* is a special variation of that anxiety or unfounded suspicion

that others are speaking badly of one, a suspicion that originates in one's own bad conscience.

Of the mass of teasing events that transpire on any day among Rapanui, only a few of these will come to circulate as gossip. There is variability among the Rapanui as to gossiping and teasing, with some persons not indulging in these activities at all, while others practice them often and even with some success. The related tease-as-gossip follows wellworn paths of confidence within the community, though newly arrived Rapanui who have been absent from the island for a while may be offered intimate information upon their return by persons who wish to build *pe'e* with them. Sympathetic outsiders are also possible receivers of such prestations in information. Gossip depends upon *pe'e* for its cirulation, for if people do not carry the story, it ceases to have currency among more than a few trusting and trusted individuals.

Confidence and circulation are even more important when it comes to local names. While almost every Rapanui teases or is teased and obtains his or her knowledge about the community through gossip, less than half the adult male population and only a quarter of the female population over the age of 20 actually bear one of the 389 local names I collected during my fieldwork. Table 1 shows the figures and percentages involved.

Shortly after arriving on Rapanui, I became aware that I could not proceed effectively with my fieldwork unless I mastered both the formal names inscribed in church and civil registers and the terms of address and reference used in common conversation among the islanders. When compiling my genealogies or accumulating my own store of local knowledge, I needed to know both sets of names. Broadly speaking, islanders refer to local names as *ingoa rapanui* (Rapanui names), while they refer to their formal names as baptismal names *(ingoa papetito).* Especially with older people, knowledge of the local names was a necessity for any communication about events past and present to occur at all. In the course of my research, I spoke with Raul Chavez, who works in the local *juzgado* (courthouse), in the civil register section. As a Rapanui but also as a government official, he was conscious of the dual naming system and of the dominance of the local one over the formal, state-required one. He reckoned that there were three classes of local names:

1. Deformations of official names

2. Local names that are not necessarily insulting or embarrassing, though they may be so

3. Names relating to physical appearance, events, or behavior of the persons bearing the local names

The first category of names was the most numerous, and practically everyone had such a rendering or shortening of their official baptismal name. Some of these true nicknames (literally, 'short names') are:

David	Ravi	Luisa	Lū	Victoria	Vi
Ezequiel	Ese	Miguel	Miki	Florentino	Tino
Isabel	Isa	Elias	Eli	Nicolás	Niko
Carolina	Karo	Elena	Rēna	Policarpo	Poli

Equally in this category are names that are not precisely deformations of Christian saints'

TABLE 1. PERCENTAGE OF ISLAND RESIDENTS ON RAPANUI
AGED 20 YEARS-PLUS WITH LOCAL NAME IN 1973

	MALE	FEMALE
Total 20-plus population	288	234
Twenty-plus population with local names	139 (48%)	56 (24%)

names, as these are, but are rather renderings of them using Tahitian and Rapanui phonology. Access to Tahitian versions of saints' names is through the printed materials used in the local Catholic Church, to which all of the islanders nominally adhere. Since the last century, many Catholic publications have come from Tahiti. Some examples of these transformations are:

José	Ioteve	Moisés	Mōte	Gaspar	Katipare
Esteban	Tepano	Jorge	Tiote	Enrique	Henriketa
Manuel	Manuera	Pedro	Petero	Daniel	Daniera

These names have no special stories behind them. They are listed for convenience and their only significance is phonological (see, for example, Van Buren 1974 for a discussion of the phonology of English nicknames). I do not include these phonological alterations in my Table 1 accounting.

The second category in the Chavez scheme relates to names parents (usually) give to persons whom they regard as their children. The scope for parent *(matu'a)* in the "Hawaiian" system used by the Rapanui is very wide and means a genealogical senior, that is, collateral or senior to one's biological parents. Many of these names would be *aringa ora* or names given in memory of some past ancestor of the person so designated. Usually the contemporary carrying the ancestor's name resembles in appearance or behavior the commemorated individual. For example, a man baptized Casimiro after his ancestor's formal name has the *ingoa rapanui* of Haeretahi, which was the local name for that relation (all cited local names are pseudonyms). Another person, who does not bear her ancestor's personal name, but who does have her grandmother's bad temper, is known as Pua Mutiheo to emphasize the familial behavioral resemblance. Furthermore, persons who adopt or foster individuals often find their charge referred to by *their* names rather than those of the child's biological parents. The names associated with ancestors given to contemporary Rapanui usually have a story associated with them, so that the giving of *ingoa rapanui* can be drawn back to some particular event, usually involving a tease, wherein the named child acted or looked like the ancestor.

Raul Chavez's last category of local names was that one referring to physical appearance or events, and these always relate to a specific event or time when the name was given, usually by a senior or, occasionally, by a collateral.

In all, I collected 389 local names that relate to the significant (and signifying) second and third Chavez categories. Three hundred and four persons bore these names; the distribution in 1973, according to whether the bearer was alive or dead, male or female, is given in Table 2. In the "Alive" columns of Table 2, 8 of the males and 12 of the females are under the age of 20 years, where local names, except for deformations, are very rare. Adult status seems to be a requirement for the bestowal of a local name, especially a local

TABLE 2. NUMBER OF LOCAL NAMES PER PERSON, BY SEX,
AND WHETHER ALIVE OR DEAD IN 1973

	ALIVE MALE	ALIVE FEMALE	DEAD MALE	DEAD FEMALE	TOTAL PERSONS	TOTAL NAMES
1. Names	113	59	31	27	230	230
2. Names	32	9	17	5	63	126
3. Names	2	0	5	4	11	33
Totals	147	68	53	36	304	389

name with currency wider than simply one's nuclear family. Table 2 seems to suggest that multiple local names, again aside from shortenings and deformations, were more common in the past than they are at present. This is due most probably to the survival of the indigenous naming system into this century, when formal names were of little importance for community affairs and local names predominated. All older persons in the past and those still alive today have local names.

Those persons with multiple names seem to have acquired them over their lifetimes. The two alive today with three local names, both males, each have an *aringa ora* name of an ancestor, a name each for some physical characteristic they possess and, finally, a name referring to some phrase they frequently use. The four deceased females with multiple local names were all sisters, and their names referred either to an experience they had had or to some ancestor. The five deceased males' local names each had an ancestral name, with their other names relating to some aspect of their behavior. For the most part, multiple names indicate that one or more of these is unflattering, so the other or others are substitutes to avoid direct insult (see, e.g., Dorian 1970:305). It is also true, however, that a number of individuals with only singular local names recognize these as unflattering and are sensitive to their public usage.

I differ from Raul Chavez in that I categorize my list of 389 local names according to seven themes, which I display in Table 3.

Returning to Chavez's classification, omitting his class of deformations for the reasons mentioned earlier, I group under his second group my classes A and D, leaving my remaining classes under his third group. The relative percentages according to the Chavez view of local names are given in Table 4.

The largest number (67%) all have stories which began as teases and circulated, for a time, as gossip. The use of the local names reiterates the tease each time people use the name; on those occasions when someone must explain the name, the tease circulates as gossip, usually when the person bearing the local name is absent. Some names, because they particularly annoy the people bearing them, are never used in the bearer's presence, while others freely circulate.

People may attempt to change the meaning of their name if they cannot do away with the unflattering local name altogether. One man, known as "Meat," tries to say that his name is really a shortening of an honored ancestor's personal name, though his physical appearance belies this reinterpretation. Sometimes a local name itself undergoes a change or people use it differently, if they wish to change their evaluation of the tease or to obfuscate the source of the original tease and gossip. A young girl, called Tatane (Devil) as a child because she was born in the then-existing leper colony and brought to the village

TABLE 3.   Classification of Rapanui Local Names
Existing in 1973

CLASS AND SUBCLASSES		NAMES TOTAL	PERCENT OF TOTAL
A. Rapanui names		8	2
1. Preferred baptism names	4		
2. Rapanui names	4		
B. Referent unknown (to author)		38	10
1. "Just sounds"	31		
2. Could not identify	7		
C. Named for an outsider		27	7
1. Uncertain which outsider	2		
2. Relations with outsider	12		
3. Looks like outsider	5		
4. Godparent was outsider	5		
5. Covert descent from outsider	3		
D. *Aringa ora*—to remember an ancestor		84	21
1. Descent	60		
2. Kin group place name	12		
3. Adoptor or foster parent	12		
E. Physical appearance		98	25
1. Action or behavior	18		
2. Black or dark skin	12		
3. Beauty (female)	6		
4. Large size (males only)	6		
5. Overweight (3 males)	12		
6. Feet or leg unusual	6		
7. Male genitalia, size of	9		
8. General appearance	29		
F. Family condition		18	5
1. Illegitimate	6		
2. Name confusion, with kin	2		
3. Broken marriage	1		
4. Only child of a couple	4		
5. "Parent"	2		
6. Woman takes husband's name	2		
7. Male sterility	1		
G. Connected to incidents (no obvious classes)		116	30
Totals		389	100

TABLE 4.   Raul Chavez's Local Names Modified

CLASS	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Local names	92	23
Physical appearance, etc.	259	67
Referent unknown to author	38	10
Totals	389	100

nearly dead to be fostered by relatives, now goes by the name Tatiana or Tati. Tati is the alternative she most prefers to the name from her past that she finds so embarrassing.

The use of local names, as well as the giving of these personal epithets to people, implies an intimacy of contact and knowledge about the person bearing the name. Few local names are without their not always hidden tease and gossip. Equally, no tease or gossip is without its potential to be recalled as a local name. Both name and story are part of the intimate knowledge that persons share who have trust in one another.

COMPARATIVE REMARKS

Teasing, gossiping, and naming exist in the anthropological literature as separate ethnographica, while the thrust of my argument is that these activities are closely related aspects of the same signification of community concerns and the structuring of relationships among people who do the teasing, tell the gossip, and give and use the local names.

At the onset of my remarks, I must make it clear that not all teases nor all bits of gossip go on to become local names. My argument is that in most cases of a local name this process has occurred and that, as I show shortly, the process can be analyzed using the metaphor of van Gennep's rite of passage. As humor and jocularity characterize each step in this process, the view taken by Douglas (1968:372) that jokes are spontaneous rites, the beginning of a potential rite of passage and transformation, fits well with the view I am developing. Her serious affirmation that she sees the joker as a "minor mystic" places the person as well as his or her performance in the liminal, or marginal, state in which such practitioners traditionally exist. I return to this point later.

Others have taken a much less serious view of humor as it comes out in teases. Malinowski (1956:314–315) saw much of what I call here teasing and gossip as "phatic communion," whereby people use just words as an act of sociation; content, in such a view, holds little fascination. At a folk level, most cultures do denigrate teasing and gossip as empty and unimportant if they do not condemn it outright as pernicious and harmful. The contradiction that something regarded as harmless can at once be undesirable does not seem to have struck either analysts or the people in the societies they study. Ball (1965:192) sees humorous sarcasm as part of a rhetoric of interaction whereby community values and consensually held definitions can be reaffirmed by people. People do this not only as individuals but also in groups. Pitt-Rivers (1961:170) writes of the *vito* in a Spanish village, where groups of individuals gather under cover of night to ridicule offending individuals in the community. In some parts, such as the Spanish village studied by Gilmore (1978:93), people may come to think of their sung group teases as a unique art form, a cultural artifact worthy of local pride, as the '*ei* might have become for the Rapanui. In all these examples, and probably in others that could be dug out of specialist articles and general ethnography, the common feature is that people use jocular teasing and jokes in general as surrogates for violence and as vehicles "through which criticisms and conflicts could be expressed without ripening into open hostility" (Frankenberg 1957:21; see also Spradley and Mann 1975:91; Balikci 1968:198). So teasing at once demarcates some party (group or individual) as separate from those who join in the joke or, at least, do not oppose it when someone voices it. In this way, joking in general and teasing in particular serve to separate but also to promulgate cohesion among those affirming the criticism. The very ambiguity of humor, upon which the game seems so heavily to depend, permits cohesion and division without commitment to clearly defined codes. In most societies, people believe that the victim should not take the tease too seriously; each

in their turn ought to grin and to bear their personal "degradation ceremony" (Garfinkel 1956) as a part of community life. Ambiguity is resolved and proper umbrage taken when abrupt violence ensues and battle lines are drawn. The tease avoids such community calamities. As Burns (1953:657) thoughtfully puts it, ". . . the joke is the short cut to consensus." Particularly in those societies, such as the Tristan da Cunhans described by Loudon (1970), where people recognize no lines for battle or behavior, the tease not only diffuses potential conflict but prevents anyone in that tiny sociality from assuming leadership or dominance over any other person.

The Rapanui, however, do have firm rules as to who can appropriately tease whom. If a junior cannot safely voice a tease or taunt an elder, the subordinate can do so in gossip, where such strictures do not seem to apply.

In the course of Murphy's (1971:136) discussion of Georg Simmel, whose work on secrecy and information is fundamental to the understanding of any human society, he remarks:

> If Simmel were to have drawn up a social contract, it would have contained a principal clause that allows the right to question to be limited by the right to secrecy.

All people try to restrict and control information for a variety of purposes, the most important information being those data that could make them vulnerable in some way to the depredations of their compatriots. Such material is the stuff of teases, where the teaser exposes a person's naked inadequacy in some area, if only it lies in being competent to respond to teasing. Gossip is fundamentally an act of collusion, usually deprecating talk about some absent third party (see also Handelman 1973:213; Gilmore 1978:92; McFarlane 1977:95; Wilson 1974:99; Hannerz 1967:36).

I must digress momentarily to distinguish between rumor and gossip, at least for the purposes of my analysis. Rumor, while it may be a highly self-interested activity, differs essentially from gossip in the way that people and the behavior that they perform is treated. In Table 5, I summarize and add to the distinctions between rumor and gossip that Rosnow and Fine (1976:4–11) make. In rumor, useful information about events, forthcoming and past, concerns the speaker and the listener. Through rumor, people attempt to make sense out of their circumstances, with the carrier of the rumor attempting to offer an interpretation of past or future courses of action (see Firth 1967:157). Rumor is less concerned with specific persons than it is with particular events. But, as is the case with much gossip, rumor is "often treated as if it stemmed from a general source" (Firth 1967:143).

As in the case of Hopi gossip, the gossiper (or denouncer) of another's past actions "should identify himself as speaking in the name of the group and its values" (Cox

TABLE 5. GOSSIP AND RUMOR CONTRASTED

GOSSIP	RUMOR
May or may not be factual	Always unsubstantiated
About specific persons	About specific events, trends
Transaction, sociation	Information, attempt to clarify
Serves ego and status needs	Serves a desire for meaning

1970:92). Like the teaser, the gossip seeks consensus, agreement that the commented-upon person performed inappropriately. Gossip, as Gluckman (1963), Bell (1969:139–144, 147–158), and others show, does promote boundaries between factions in a community; people may also use gossip to tear down old fences and to erect new ones. The passing of the gossip, in the absence of the accused, allows a person to try out the opinion of others regarding a particular person's actions (Frankenberg 1955:20; Hannerz 1967:41).

Gossip is purposive behavior, as Paine (1967:278) suggests, and like a tease or a joke, if used with skill, it can be an extremely effective and destructive instrument. Henry (1963: 151) called gossip in an American high school "the interpersonal ballistic missile." The warhead of this aggressive, offensive act (gossip) is not always the information itself but the way that listeners receive or accept the proffered data. To paraphrase Austin (1962: 234), the purpose of gossip is "not to report facts, but to influence people." Information alone is not harmful, but what people do with those data they obtain may be. As with the Rapanui, teasing and gossip are prestations asking for confidence. People who listen to gossip about the absent other are colluding. As McFarlane (1977:99) observes, gossip "suggests that 'we the gossippers' are closer to each other than 'they' the gossippees, are to either of us" (see also Epstein 1969:126). Their listening to supposedly secret information about another is violation of the victim's personal integrity (Simmel 1950:318–324). A person who has confidence, *pe'e* for the Rapanui, should not listen to intimate information about that other. Simmel (1950:323) identified "the duty of discretion—to renounce the knowledge of all that the other does not voluntarily show us."

If the tease-become-gossip finds its mark and circulates on the lips and in the minds of a group of people, one way of fixing an actor and his or her behavior is to transform that information and encapsulate it as a local name. J. Campbell (1964:315), Pitt-Rivers (1961:168–169), and others show how local names, often called nicknames in the literature, can be drawn back to gossip. In some societies, such as on St. Vincent in the British West Indies, people refer to gossip locally as "to call a person's name" (Abrahams 1970:300). Gossip and the use of people's names as significant actions link intimately with Wilson's (1974) analysis of Makah gossip, which he refers to as "the filching of good names" (see also Ryan 1958:114, 116).

I prefer to speak of local names rather than nicknames, for it seems to me that in those societies where a local naming system still prevails, these lexical items too relate to intimacy and knowledge. Strathern (1970:73) observes that local names in a small community "present us a compact account of both history and system," for they represent inside knowledge. By speaking of local names rather than nicknames, the literature on naming in general can be brought into my discussion to show that this process, from tease to gossip to local name, is not simply because there are too few formal names for too many individuals, as some students suggest for local naming (e.g., Brandes 1975:146; Antoun 1968: 160; Collier and Bricker 1970; Dorian 1970:304). The act of naming and its connection with intimate knowledge extends from the smallest band of hunters and gatherers (e.g., Benjamin 1968:105) to large-scale urban societies (see, for example, Dunkling 1974:124).

POWER

To return to Rapanui, gossip is the transacted discourse about daily events of concern to particular members of a self-conscious social group. A tease, when people direct it toward some supposed infraction of rule or role behavior, commences this transaction in

discourse whereby an individual attempts to propagate his or her version of events to significant persons. A determining factor in the imparting of intimate knowledge about others absent (gossip) is *pe'e* or confidence. A person who has *pe'e* with someone will be careful about imparting intimate information about that person, particularly if there is a dependency relationship of junior to senior.

Rapanui seniors have goods and services which juniors either wish to have or must have, if they decide to remain on their island home. If a senior becomes disgruntled with the behavior of a junior, then he or she can use his influence to block the junior's plans. For example, a young Rapanui who wishes to acquire land on which to build a house must obtain permission to do so through the mediation of older persons. Even if seniors can be sidestepped to obtain land, building materials can only be accumulated through seniors, who are often central controllers in the distribution of such items on Rapanui. Even if land and building materials can be obtained without dependency on seniors, the Rapanui organize labor for construction along kin lines, with labor costs running high if a cash nexus intrudes.

Many modern Rapanui have more than one path to power open to them. Seniors can be avoided altogether if the Rapanui works for a Chilean government service. There are a number of houses, some in the center of Hangaroa, the main village, owned by the Chilean government, and Rapanui who eschew dependency upon seniors are often the occupiers of these dwellings. The dependency of the Rapanui on kin shifts to a dependency on Chilean contacts. In those cases where a Rapanui does not wish to have any dependency upon his senior or even collateral kin, he or she may make the extreme move and leave the island altogether, seeking to realize aspirations through contacts with outsiders. In 1973, 27 percent of the entire Rapanui population resided permanently off Rapanui, and many of them have histories of strong disagreement with kin. If they choose to return, one of the first signs made is to send a small gift or parcel by air freight on the weekly plane to some relation. Upon arrival, the prodigal kin is obvious with visits to relations, relatives, and others who he or she hopes will be of assistance.

Power, then, does play a role in the enunciation of teases, the propagation of gossip, and the giving of local names. The last stage in the process, naming, is frozen discourse, derived from the transacted discourse of gossip; local names are the final stage in a transformation of action to object, from actor to category. Teasing, gossiping, and local naming is the process of structuration and the manipulation (or attempted manipulation) of relationships. Ridicule in teasing, gossip, and local naming becomes particularly important in the context of the often unflattering epithets given to foreigners who have dominated the Rapanui over the years, either as sheep ranch managers or as Chilean officials. As with gossip, the use of uncomplimentary local names is an act of collusion among the Rapanui against outsiders, especially outsiders in power. Confidence *(pe'e)* among the Rapanui, commiseration for their collective subordinate status, is also a reciprocity of ridicule for their dependent status. Ridicule in teasing, gossip, and local naming, on Rapanui and elsewhere, is the power of the powerless (see Bloch 1975:24–25).

CONCLUSIONS

Teasing, gossip, and local naming are concrete processes of discourse, often polysemic in content. As a process of transformation, however, none of these alone is likely to be sufficient for the full understanding of a local community, given their ephemeral but long-term character, contrasted with the fieldworker's singular, short-term period of research.

John Haviland (1977) seems to suggest that gossip in Zinacantan can offer a complete portrait of life in that Mexican municipality. Certainly, the material he presents is convincing, but I wonder how much of it is common knowledge among his informants and how much of his ethnography's completeness is an artifact of Haviland's own excellent and comprehensive field research. Local names could serve as a key word index for local concerns, but it would be only a partial index, based upon partial knowledge.

One should not despair at partial knowledge, for that is the knowledge held by participants in most societies. Of necessity, the anthropologist, who attempts to learn a lifetime's expertise in a couple of years' fieldwork, must also be satisfied with partial knowledge. Perhaps the anthropologist's monolithic, univocal view on meaning and social structure, so criticized by Talal Asad (1979) in his Malinowski lecture, is more a response to the expectations of one's anthropological peers than it is an analysis of the lifeways of the group with whom the fieldworker became intimate.

Arnold van Gennep (1960:25) observed that the giving of a name to a person is an act of individuation and incorporation into society. Just as such an act confirms intimacy in one group or category, it must also preclude collusion and contact with another, at least at the ideal level. To be incorporated in one part of a society is to be excluded from another, and so it is with teasing, gossiping, and naming. The spontaneous rite that begins with the teaser, as Douglas (1968) notes, terminates with the local name. The van Gennep rite of passage process seems, then, to be an apt heuristic metaphor to demonstrate the unity of teasing, gossiping, and local naming in a society.

Table 6 shows that teasing demonstrates publicly, for those present, that an offender has entered into a separate status, which is that of inappropriate or extraordinary performer. Gossip takes over from teasing as a stronger form of verbal reprimand for behavior. When the gossip becomes fixed into a local name, the process is complete, and just as individuals may endure succeeding rites of passage throughout their life cycle, so too, as we saw for the Rapanui, can local names be discarded, altered, or renewed on successive occasions. In some societies with active local naming practices, individuals collect names related to their actions throughout their lifetimes (e.g., Warner 1958:88).

As rule-related behavior, local names are like sign posts, where individuals must choose to acquiesce or to argue. The names of a community are a constant reminder of someone's perceived misdeed, but they are also a reminder of the misdeed itself. As such, local names may serve as a partial index to rule behavior among a group of people using them. Names may be monosemic insofar as they derive from one incident or event, but they are polysemic in their usage. Fortes (1955:349) recognizes the multiple possibilities of the

TABLE 6. TEASING, GOSSIP, AND LOCAL NAMES
AS A RITE OF PASSAGE

STAGES	INFORMATION	FIELD	VOLUME	SIGNIFICANCE
Separation	teasing	intimate	much	status change possible
Transition, liminal	gossip	frequent associates	some	canvassing community opinion
Incorporation	local name	wider community	few	fixing new status, values statement

meanings of names when he writes: "It can be seen . . . that a name is a document epitomising personal experiences, historical happenings, attitudes to life, and cultural ideas and values." These cultural ideas and values relate to shared sets of ethical concepts in a moral community (J. Campbell 1964:314).

I wish to make clear that this paper is not so much about how people derive their norms or standard referents for action, nor how they conceive of them, but how people remember, argue about, transact, and keep alive rules of use and importance to them in a selective sea of associative action. I differ from the Durkheimian notion of norms as restrictions on action by viewing these standardizations exemplified in teasing, gossiping, and naming as guides for action; guides which people evoke, manipulate, assert, and test against the transactional and existential reality of their everyday lives. Such a view is necessary if we are to understand practical action. Practical action infuses, promulgates, and brings into being structured performances in any society. Were not the commonplace so potentially chaotic and socialization so imperfect, formalized rectifications and adjustments through court or council would not be necessary.

Teasing, gossiping, and local naming are universal phenomena, though their prevalence and importance clearly vary from community to community, as the literature attests. Gossip and teasing are likely to be more prevalent in those societies where bounded group membership is most ambiguous. Descriptive or multiple local naming systems are also more prevalent and important where groups tend to be unbounded, the possibility of association remaining negotiable using agreed-upon cultural symbols.

Quite apart from the importance of analyzing teasing, gossip, and naming as cultural artifacts and social behavior, most anthropologists should be aware that much of the material we record in our field notes is often derived from gossip, told to us by informants who wish to demonstrate their confidence and trust in us. We should be aware that an element of collusion may be part of any informant's confidence in us, which is largely the point, I think, of Wilson's (1974) attack on Gluckman's work.

Anthropologists' informants are often marginal persons in their own societies and it may be true, also, that persons who are particularly prone to tease and to gossip are themselves liminal. In some societies, such as the Mehinaku studied by Gregor (1977), gossiping takes the form of noise production, so that all in the society maintain maximum ambiguity in their relations with others. So, while teasing, gossiping, and naming are universally found in human society, their frequency and importance is modulated by social conditions of category and classification and localized conceptions of group integrity.

loy's interests in Easter Island is revealed in his library, a careful and complete collection of articles and books on the island amassed over the years and an excellent beginning, as he always intended it to be, to the library of the local Easter Island museum.

During a visit to Canberra, Professor Meyer Fortes suggested gossip as a form of collusion, and I acknowledge my discussions with him in 1974 as instrumental in the views I eventually come to hold in this paper.

Laurence Goldman, Department of Anthropology, University College, London, pointed out to me during a seminar presentation of a version of this paper in February 1979 that a number of the evaluative terms I present are reduplicative. He is working on a paper using Huli and Melpa (Highland New Guinea) data to show how reduplication is more prevalent in negative evaluation than it is in positive descriptions.

Finally, other studies of onomastics which make explicit the intimate nature of the knowledge contained in local names and which I do not incorporate into this paper include reports by Beattie (1957:100), Benjamin (1968:128), Crowley (1956), DeCamp (1967), Fox (1978:74–81), Goodenough (1965:270), Middleton (1961:35), Needham (1954, 1971:208), Nsimbi (1949–1950), Price and Price (1972:208), and Puckett (1937). A large portion of the seminal work of Lévi-Strauss (1962) is concerned with naming as a system of classification.

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