

On the Problem of the Namesake

Marcel LaFlamme
Rice University

Names and persons stand in an uncertain relation to one another. A person may use more than one name over the course of a life, and more than one person may be called by the same name. Take my own name, for instance: while it is uncommon in the United States, there is a mining engineer at Université Laval in Quebec who also bears it. When I am vain enough to Google my name, I find his (mine?) among the results: traces of his career at Natural Resources Canada, the research project he has launched with the aim of developing a new tool for on-site mineral analysis.

If the mining engineer and I lived among the Orokaiva of Papua New Guinea, it is likely that we would count each other as *saso* or namesake (see Iteanu 2009). As long as both of us were alive and on good terms, we would be considered *embo wakai*, the same person. As my elder, he would be consulted at every stage of my ritual life, and I would be expected to furnish him with firewood and other provisions as he grew old. If he died before resolving matters of inheritance, it would fall to me to settle them with his family. Our entanglement at the level of a name would thus knit our kin groups together in a network of mutual obligation. In the world of scholarly publishing, though, the fact that the mining engineer and I share a name is a liability: even though we are unlikely to be writing for the same journals, multidisciplinary databases will

display our publications side by side. Unless one of us has been scrupulous about publishing with a middle initial (and we can imagine a case in which these, too, would coincide), scholars searching for my work will have to sift through our respective publications and guess at who is who. The reputational politics of scholarly publishing thus encourage me to stabilize an authoritative version of my name early in my career and to distinguish it from anyone else's name. A namesake, in this context, is more bane than blessing.

Following a meeting held in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in November 2009, some twenty-three publishers, scholarly societies, and other organizations agreed to work together on a solution to what had become known as the name disambiguation problem. The result is the Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID; pronounced like "orchid"), a string of sixteen digits that scholars can use to uniquely identify themselves in publications and other research outputs. ORCID is administered by a member-based nonprofit organization that is committed to privacy and interoperability, and scholars can create ORCID identifiers free of charge. To date, more than 1.8 million researchers around the world have signed up, and publishers large and small are beginning to incorporate ORCID identifiers into their production processes. Starting with this issue, *Cultural Anthropology* will require authors with an article accepted for publication in the journal to provide us with their ORCID identifier and will display that identifier in all published versions of the article, including web, PDF, and print on demand.

As much as the editorial team believes that ORCID is an important innovation, our commitment to what Jason Baird Jackson and Ryan Anderson (2014, 236) have called "a critical anthropology of scholarly communication" means that we do not advocate approaching ORCID as a self-evident good. This editorial opens with the example of the Orokaiva name system to make the point that the so-called name disambiguation problem is not universally understood to

be a problem at all (see also Pina-Cabral 2012). Even as we have come to recognize it as a problem in scholarly publishing, we also want to honor and engage with feminist efforts to challenge norms of individual authorship that involve writing under the sign of pseudonyms and collectives (e.g., Gibson-Graham 2006, xli–xlii). We welcome such work at *Cultural Anthropology* and, indeed, we would love to see the journal serve as a catalyst for discussion within the ORCID community about the implicit theory of personhood at the heart of the project. Finally, we recognize the linkages between ORCID and audit culture: even as the benefits of a unique, persistent identifier have been framed in terms of seamlessness and convenience, there is no doubt that ORCID also renders research outputs more easily countable and, therefore, amenable to assessment. Our position is that contributors to the journal are likely to be subject to these proliferating regimes of assessment regardless of what we decide to do about ORCID, and that ORCID may make it easier for our contributors to document their productivity in administratively sanctioned ways. However, if ORCID ever starts to become a more active instrument of audit culture (for instance, serving as a mechanism for prescreening authors or grant applicants on the basis of research assessment metrics), we reserve the right to discontinue our participation.

Although the Society for Cultural Anthropology is not joining ORCID as an institutional member at this time, we have been given ORCID's blessing to incorporate author identifiers into *Cultural Anthropology*. In doing so, we stand to improve our website's search functionality and to strengthen our integration with key infrastructures for data sharing. Yet our aim is also to boost the visibility of ORCID within anthropology as a discipline. The American Anthropological Association's member database now includes an optional field for ORCID identifiers (Liebow 2014), and the unified manuscript submission system that is currently being

developed would be a logical point at which to implement ORCID associationwide. For now, though, keep an eye out for the green ORCID icon in the pages of *Cultural Anthropology*, and consider taking thirty seconds to register for an identifier yourself at <https://orcid.org/register>. The sooner that anthropologists adopt this emerging standard, the more say we are likely to have about where, when, and how it is used in the future.

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