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CHRISTIANITY, AUTHORITY, AND PERSONHOOD: SERMONIC DISCOURSE ON NUKULAEALAE ATOLL

Niko Besnier
Yale University

In the last few decades, anthropology in the Pacific has witnessed the emergence of a vibrant tradition of inquiry into the role that Christianity plays in the societies and cultures of the region (cf. Barker (ed.) 1990, Boutilier, Hughes, and Tiffany (eds) 1978, Miller (ed.) 1985, and others). Recognising that, for many contemporary Pacific peoples, Christianity and “tradition” are so embroiled with one another that they have become the same in certain areas (e.g. much of Polynesia), scholars working on these questions have demonstrated that Christian ideology, under its many guises, has penetrated many aspects of social life in Pacific societies, at the same time that it has come to be defined as a specifically “Pacific” mode of thought. As a result, many social formations and cultural processes in the Pacific cannot be successfully understood without reference to the Christian context in which they are embedded, and, in turn, Christianity in the region can only be studied in tandem with society and culture.

To date, however, only a handful of anthropological works on Pacific Christianities have focused on religion as an everyday social practice (e.g. Errington and Gewertz 1994, Kulick 1992, Thune 1990, Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1991, White 1991). Barker (1992) demonstrates that most anthropologists writing about Western Melanesia present Christianity as somehow “unauthentic,” and thus distance it from the practice of everyday life; the scope of this observation could easily be extended to works on Pacific societies in general. When the ethnographic gaze does scrutinise religious life, it tends to focus exclusively on its more “exotic” manifestations, such as millenarian movements (Barker 1992:746-7).¹ As a result of this neglect, little is known about such topics as how church services are performed in village settings throughout the region, how religious instruction is conducted in the intimacy of family life, and how religious institutions affect the day-to-day running of society. In particular, interactional aspects of religious life in Pacific settings are very poorly documented. For example, what do religious ceremonies communicate to those who attend them about such questions as the role of the person in society, and how does this take place? This dearth of research is unfortunate, given that interaction, and in particular *verbal* interaction, is a consistently central aspect of religious rituals and ideologies in the region. As a result, in

anthropological work on Pacific Christianities, as in much of social anthropology, verbal discourse is "effectively invisible" (Urban 1991:7).

This paper, as an initial attempt to remedy this invisibility, focuses on one type of religious communicative practice, the sermon. The cultural context of this study is Nukulaelae Atoll, whose Polynesian inhabitants subscribe to a congregationalist brand of Protestantism. (Although the term "congregationalist" is an over-simplification, as Goldsmith 1989 demonstrates, it will serve the immediate purposes of this paper.) In typical Protestant tradition, Nukulaelae sermons occupy a central position in the conduct of religious rituals. This cultural elaboration makes the sermon an ideal setting for an investigation of how religious ideology articulates with other aspects of social life. I shall show that, in the contexts of sermons, social relations are characterised in a strikingly distinctive fashion in this society (distinctive compared with other social situations on the atoll, not necessarily in contrast with sermons in other societies). Implicit in Nukulaelae sermon performances is a strong claim to a God-given truth, a claim which members of this society do not generally make in other contexts. Intimately associated with this claim is the fact that the preacher appropriates for him- or herself a great deal of authority over the congregation, and does so in a dramatic fashion. Sermons represent personhood as a highly individualised entity, which contrasts with definitions of the person extant in other social situations. However, I shall also show that the distinctiveness of sermons is not arbitrary or devoid of cultural meaning. Rather, it is related, albeit in a complex manner, to the social norms and cultural constructs of secular life on Nukulaelae.

The microscopic analysis of fine-grained transcripts of sermonic performances plays a pivotal role in the development of my arguments. I shall also use information, culled from interviews and other sources, about how sermons are received by their audiences, and about the general ideological background of sermon performances. The theoretical view that I bring to this enterprise recognises that communicative practices and the sociocultural processes with which they are associated are constitutive of one another, i.e., one is an integral part of the definition of the other (cf. Briggs 1988, Duranti and Goodwin (eds) 1992, Errington 1988, Goodwin 1990, Hanks 1990, Kuipers 1990, Sherzer 1983, Urban 1991, and many others). Thus, an investigation of interaction in Nukulaelae religious settings cannot be divorced from an analysis of the meaning of Christianity in the context of Nukulaelae social life; in turn, an understanding of the latter can only be achieved through a careful investigation of communicative practices in religious settings.

NUKULAEAE ATOLL

Nukulaelae is a small, relatively isolated atoll of the Tuvalu group (formerly the Ellice Islands) in the Central Pacific, inhabited by approximately 350 speakers of Tuvaluan, a Polynesian language. Its contemporary social structure is one of the least stratified of the Polynesian cultural area (Brady 1970, Besnier 1991a). Nukulaelae Islanders first came into contact with Westerners in 1821, but had few opportunities to interact with the rest of the world until the end of the 19th century. The missionisation of Nukulaelae began in the 1860s, and was formalised by Samoan religious teachers trained by the congregationalist London Missionary Society (LMS), under the supervision of British missionaries who would make very brief annual visits to the atoll (Goldsmith 1989, Goldsmith and Munro 1992, Munro 1982).² The first Samoan teacher reached the atoll in 1865, at a time of great social upheaval, two years after a Peruvian slaving ship had made off with 70 to 80% of Nukulaelae's population (Maude 1981), and as the traditional authority structure was crumbling. The arrival of the first Samoan missionaries to Nukulaelae and the other southern atolls of the group was quickly followed by the abolition of the precontact political structure and social order. According to modern Nukulaelae representations of the past, the Samoan teacher was given the authority of a chief upon his arrival (cf. Brady 1975, Munro 1978). While there is much historical evidence of Samoan pastors' desire to control life on the atoll with an iron fist, the extent to which the Islanders allowed them to do so is open to question (Goldsmith 1989). Today, social prestige and political authority rest in the hands of various bodies: a watered-down reconstituted chiefly system; an Island Council headed by the Island President, an institution established by British colonial authorities in the 1960s; and the pastor, nowadays a Tuvaluan, but always from a different atoll of the group (see Goldsmith 1989 for a discussion of the significance of this detail), whose political role will be described further here. Depending on the personalities involved and on the social dynamics between them, the distribution of power fluctuates over time. In many aspects of political, social, and economic life, Nukulaelae Islanders foreground an ideology of consensus and equality, which probably has roots in the precontact social order and which often clashes with the hierarchical principles that are also present in their society (see Besnier 1991a for further discussion).

Missionisation and contacts with the outside world fundamentally altered not only the political order, but also every aspect of the social life and culture of the atoll. Contemporary daily life is organised, in significant ways, around the church and associated institutions. Churchgoing is an integral part of the weekly

round of activities, and much attention is paid to who is or is not a member of Nukulaelae's *Eekaaleesia* 'Congregation', from which individuals can be temporarily excluded as punishment for moral transgressions.³ Protestant Christianity, its ethics, and its rituals are strongly *naturalised* in Nukulaelae society and culture, i.e., they are understood as the only "correct" and "natural" way of organising and understanding life.

Samoan, the native language of the early pastors, remained the language of religious activities well into the mid-20th century, as well as the language of many literacy activities and interactions with the outside world. It ceased to be the official language of the local government in the Ellice Islands in 1931, and that of the church in 1958. Even though most Nukulaelae adults understand Samoan, its active use has ceased almost completely. The disappearance of the language from the community's linguistic repertoire was pushed along by the Church of Tuvalu's gradual emancipation from overseas control, and the island group's move towards political autonomy and independence (the latter was achieved in 1978). The linguistic *coup-de-grâce* for Samoan can be dated to 1987, when the Church of Tuvalu published a Tuvaluan translation of the Bible to replace the Samoan version that had been in use for more than a century. The dialect used in church services today is usually the dialect of Funafuti, the capital-atoll of Tuvalu. It is the *de facto* official dialect for the entire country, and differs from the Nukulaelae dialect only very slightly.

NUKULAEELAE SERMONS

Three church services a week, which everyone is expected to attend,⁴ are usually held on Nukulaelae: one on Sunday morning, one on Sunday afternoon, and a third in the early morning on Wednesday. The Sunday morning service is normally conducted by the pastor, while the other services are conducted by a deacon (*tiaakono*) or a lay preacher (*fai laauga*) designated by the pastor at the conclusion of the previous Sunday afternoon service. The *pièce-de-résistance* of all Nukulaelae church services is the sermon, or *laauga* (a term borrowed from Samoan), to which approximately half of the 50- to 60-minute service is devoted.⁵

For adult men on the atoll, becoming a deacon or lay preacher, and hence taking on the responsibility of delivering sermons when called upon by the pastor, is part of one's role as a responsible member of society. Young men are entitled and expected to give sermons before they are perceived to be "ready" to engage in other forms of oratory. Delivering religious sermons appears to serve as an apprenticeship for secular oratory: the two types of discourse share many formal properties, and the mastery of one essentially implies that of the other. Women are heavily under-represented among the

ranks of deacons and lay preachers; however, they do preach on special occasions, particularly when the occasion is seen as being of particular relevance to them, such as yearly celebrations of Women's Day or Children's Day.⁶ Some lay preachers and deacons are thought to do a better job of conducting a church service than others, and some individuals have identifiably personal styles of sermon delivery. This diversity is locally recognised and talked about in the same terms as diverse proficiencies in other activities (e.g. delivering political speeches, leading a fish drive, building a canoe): some people are more *maasani* 'adept' than others in certain skills, aptitude being viewed as the direct result of practice (the word *maasani*, a borrowing from Samoan, also means 'familiar with, used to').

An important characteristic of sermons as communicative events is that they are written out ahead of their oral delivery, usually (but not always) by the same person who delivers them. Written sermons are commonly saved in a notebook, called *api* (another borrowing from Samoan). The same written sermon can be recycled over a period of years and provide the basis for another sermon delivery. More importantly, an *api* can be loaned to a more novice preacher, usually a close younger relative in search of a model. The novice sometimes copies out the entire notebook; alternatively, he or she may select a specific written sermon and use it as the basis for his or her oral performance, either copying out the text verbatim or modifying it to suit the occasion. In short, written sermons are treated as commodities, the transmission of which is carefully controlled by their owners. (Briggs 1988:331-6 describes fascinatingly similar patterns for rural Hispanic communities of Northern New Mexico, whose *cuadernos* 'notebooks' contain hymns and prayers.) While these sermons do not form a rigid and sanctified canon in the same way that old-school Hutterite sermons do (cf. Hartse 1993, Stephenson 1990), sermon notebooks nevertheless constitute an important corpus of exegetic texts, whose significance and centrality to Nukulaelae religious practices cannot be neglected. I have analysed elsewhere the role that literacy plays in sermons (Besnier 1988, 1991b) and shall summarise this analysis later here. In this paper, I shall draw illustrations from both written and oral forms of sermons.

The participation of the audience in the construction of the sermon on Nukulaelae is more passive than in many other ethnographic contexts. Here, audiences contribute no back-channel cues, no exclamatory encouragements, no verbal tokens of approval to the sermon's performance. The preacher and the audience do not engage in the call-and-response interactions characteristic of many ethnographic settings (e.g. Callender and Cameron 1990, Davis 1985, Holt 1972, McGinnis 1986, Smitherman 1977, Spencer 1987). Rather, audience members sit and listen, in apparent awe at the power of the text and its delivery; their silence is broken only by the ruffling of fans, as they bravely attempt to cope

with the oppressive combination of heavy Sunday clothing and the lack of ventilation in the church building.

Nevertheless, audience members do play a role in the construction of sermon events, although their contribution is delayed. It takes place after the service, when the relative merit, efficacy, and appropriateness of the performance are discussed either in the intimacy of small groups of kinsfolk and friends, or, in a more public way, in the context of speeches given at feasts when held shortly after the service. Following is an example of these post-hoc evaluations:⁷

- (1) *A ko ia koo hee fano ttonu i luga i tena matua teelaa ne fai. [...] Te faiga o tena laauga, naa laa muamua paa me e tai logo llei eeloo te vauuga, nee? Kae fakamuli peelaa koo ttele fakaaattee loo ana- ana manatu mo tena matua, peelaa koo faaopoopo ua ki luga i mea kolaa i tena maafaufau.*

[interviews:Si 1991:1:A:029-042]

But he [i.e. the preacher] did not proceed directly according to the reading he started out with. [...] When he gave his sermon, first it sounded pretty good, see? But then later on it's like his thoughts were running away from the reading, it's like he was just ad-libbing on the basis of what was on his mind.

While the audience is not entitled to make an audible contribution during the sermonic performance, it reserves the right to provide a post-hoc critical evaluation.

Sermons are typologised into three categories, each identified by a different argumentative structure: *laauga vaevae* 'sermon in sections', *laauga fakaoomelia* 'sermon in the homiletic style', and *laauga sikisiki* 'sermon with a progressive structure'. This typology was probably inherited from Samoan sources, although I have no knowledge of comparative work on Samoan sermons which could illuminate this question. In all cases, sermons are based on one or two Scripture readings. A major goal of the sermon, according to Nukulaelae respondents, is to contextualise these readings and relate them to contemporary everyday life (contrast Hutterite sermons, in which the relevance of the Scriptures to the present is of no concern whatsoever – Hartse 1993:94). All sermons share certain components: a core (*matua*), in which the readings are announced; a main theme (*manatu maaluga* or *manatu silisili*), which the preacher extracts from the core; any number of expansions (*magaapu*); and a lesson (*akoakoga*). In writing, boundaries between these components are usually marked by headings which, in older notebooks, are sometimes in English (in oral delivery, however, no English is used):

- (2) 28/10/79

Reading: Luka 14:7-14; faitau 1-14.

Text ("Matua"): Luke 14:11; "Soo se tino e loto fia sili kaa fakamaalalogina. Ka ko ia teelaa e loto maalalo, kaa fakamaalugagina."

Manatu maaluga: Te llei o te loto maalalo.

[sermons:F 1985:427:1]

28/10/79

Reading: Luke 14:7-14; read 1-14.

Text ("Core"): Luke 14:11; "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Main thought: The value of humility.

The rhetorical organisation of sermons, which is clearly driven by a concern for order and systematicity, has direct links to the most important purpose of sermons in the eyes of Nukulaelae Islanders, the inductive search for truth. What this means must, of course, be contextualised in terms of how the truth is constructed in Nukulaelae culture, a question to which I turn in the next section.

This paper is based principally on data gathered during Sunday afternoon services, which, as explained earlier, are conducted by members of the community with no formal pastoral training. A focus on a more diversified event than the services conducted by the pastor avoids the danger of overgeneralising from a single individual's discursive production, namely the pastor's. While sermons delivered by pastors are not discernibly different from sermons delivered by lay preachers and deacons from a textual standpoint, the two types of events are distinct in that the relationship between participants in each case involves different dynamics. Goldsmith (1989:226-276) has described in great detail the complexities of the pastor's relationship with his congregation; how this relationship affects the communicative aspects of church services is a question I will not tackle here, however important it may be. I am particularly concerned here with the way in which religious authority is articulated in sermons authored by members of the community and addressed to other members of the community.

SERMONS AND THE TRUTH

Nukulaelae Islanders spend much time and effort talking about the truth (*te tonu*). Like members of many societies, they tacitly recognise, through their social actions and norms of interpretation (but not necessarily in their explanations to ethnographers), that the nature of truth may differ from one social context to the other. For example, concerns for the truth are considerably more opaque in certain interactions, such as gossip, where other factors like the creation and maintenance of conviviality are more important than concerns for the truth

(Besnier 1995). In addition, the truth “value” of linguistic actions depends crucially on authority and legitimacy, the latter being determined by complex norms which vary with the nature of discourse and its context. Thus, what counts as true is intimately bound to authority, hierarchy, and interpersonal and interfactional politics.

Within this symbolic market, the church service occupies an extreme position: here, the truth is the most central concern, standards for evaluating the truth of utterances are most stringent, and words and actions are primarily focused on uncovering the truth. This centralisation of the truth in church services is bound to Nukulaelae’s fundamentalist religious ideology, according to which the Scriptures are the ultimate arbiter of the truth. If they abide by the authority of God and the Bible, humans can gain access to an unambiguous truth that is otherwise unavailable to them (compare converted Ilongots’ epistemological ideology as described in Rosaldo 1973). Ideally, social action should always refer to the Bible for evaluation and legitimisation. However, the explanatory linkage between the Bible and the here-and-now is not always clear; crucially, it is the role of the sermon to clarify this linkage.

The view that sermons are exercises in the search for the truth leaves many imprints on sermons as both text and performance. First, it is evidenced by the high frequency in sermonic discourse of the term *tonu* ‘true, truth’:

- (3) *Ko tala i loto i te viu ko tala o te vavau, kolaa e filifili ei se mea tonu moo te talitonuga tonu ki te fakatuanakiga.*
[sermons:T 1991:1:A:390-392]

The stories in this foundational text are stories of ancient times, which is where [I] have chosen the **truth** about the **true** belief in faith.

- (4) [...] *ona koo tonu te koga e moe ei a Iaakopo, ona koo tonu te fatu teelaa e aluga ei a Iaakopo, koo matea ei nee ia te fakaasiga tafasili a te Atua. Moi moe faatea, moi aluga faatea, e see matea nee Iaakopo a fakaasiga tafasili a te Atua. Ala ake Iaakopo, ana muna, “E tonu eiloo a te Atua e nofo i konei!”*
[sermons:Se 1991:1:B:264-270]

[...] because where Jacob rested is the **truth**, because the stone upon which Jacob lay his head is the **truth**, through which he saw God’s sublime revelation. Had he slept elsewhere, had he rested his head elsewhere, he would not have seen God’s sublime revelation. Jacob woke up and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place!”

[lit.: "It is indeed **true** that the Lord dwells here!"]

Second, the truth is often intimately associated with the notion of completeness and wholeness in Nukulaelae ideology (Besnier 1995). Not surprisingly, sermons contain many references to *kaatoatoa* 'complete(ly), completeness':

- (5) *Te alofa fakatautaaaina. [...] Se alofa teelaa e tonu kaatoatoa, se alofa foki teelaa e kaatoatoa i ona feituu katoa. Se alofa teelaa e fakamaaonia i ei me e isi se fakamoemoega ola i ei.*

[sermons:Ka 1991:1:B:090-097]

Brotherly love. [...] [It is] a [type of] love which is **wholly true**, a [type of] love which is **complete in all its aspects**. [It is] a [type of] love in which [one] can trust that there is living hope.

Third, much time is spent on defining, qualifying, characterising, and analogising in sermons, rhetorical activities associated with truth searching. Abstract concepts like "love" and "fear," as well as more concrete symbols like "the cross" and "resurrection," are invoked, contrasted, morally evaluated, and associated with other notions and symbols:⁸

- (6) *Manatu silisili: Te taimi o te fakaolataga.*

Fesili: Se aa te taimi o te fakaolataga?

[sermons:F 1985:406:1]

Main theme: The time of resurrection.

Question: What is the time of resurrection?

The importance of conceptual manipulations in sermons is also evidenced by the high frequency of rhetorical questions, which frequently occur serially; questions posed during the delivery of a sermon are always rhetorical since the audience cannot respond:

- (7) *A ko koe, ne aa mea e manavasee ei koe e fia maua nee koe? Ko meakkai, ko tupe, mo niisi koloa aka e uke?*

[sermons:Ke 1991:9]

As for you, what do you worry about not getting? Food, money, goods in great quantities?

Contrasts also play a major role. In the following excerpt, the preacher draws a contrast between different types of worries (echoing Matthew 6:31-33), such as worrying for one's own welfare, worrying for the welfare of one's loved ones, and worrying about one's not finding God:

- (8) *Ne aa mea koo fai moo mea e manavassee ei taatou io ttou olaga –ko mea e tausi ei? Muna a Ieesuu, "Saa manavassee!" Ko mea e iinu ei? Epei ei? Muna a Ieesuu, "Saa manavassee!" Ko ttou masaki ia taatou maa mmate? "Saa manavassee!" Ko te tino e*

ita mai? “Saa manavassee ki ei!” Ko tuupulaga o faanau i te fui fai? Kae maise ko te nofo maavaevae o maatua mo faanau? Muna a leesu, “Saa manavassee!” Ko lau manafa mo koloa e uke o te olaga nei? “Saa manavassee!” [...] Kae kee muamua taatou o manavassee o ssala te Atua, ki tena maaloo mo tena aamio tonu.
[sermons:Ke 1991:18]

What are we focusing our worries on in our lives? The things that support [our lives]? Jesus says, “Do not worry!” What we drink? [What] we wear? Jesus says, “Do not worry!” The illnesses from which we might die? “Do not worry!” [The fact that] someone is angry at us? “Do not worry!” Children who do not obey us? “Do not worry!” The abundance of land and goods? “Do not worry!” [...] Rather, let us first worry about seeking God, his kingdom and his righteousness.

In written sermons, these contrasts often take the form of lists:

- (9) *I te Feagaiga Muamua, a te muna “alofa” se pati koo leva ne fakaaogaa ki vaega e uke i tona uiga:*
 (i) *te alofa ki taugaasoa*
 (ii) *te alofa ki maatua*
 (iii) *te alofa ki tamataene ki tamaafine*
 (iv) *te alofa e faipati e te poto ko Solomona.*
 [...]

I loto i te Feagaiga Foou, a te muna teenei, “alofa,” e fakaasi i konei tona kaatoatoa mai i te Feagaiga Muamua kee oko mai ki te Feagaiga Foou, koo kaatoatoa i ei te muna “alofa.”
 [sermons:F 1985:405:1]

In the Old Testament, the word “love” is a word that had been used for a long time for many types of meaning:

- (i) love for one’s friends
 (ii) love for one’s parents
 (iii) love of a young man for a young woman
 (iv) the kind of love that the wise Solomon talks about.
 [...]

In the New Testament, this word, “love,” is used with its full meaning, from that used in the Old Testament to that used in the New Testament, its meaning is complete.

The structure of contrasts has a built-in moral message: items in contrastive

sets are arranged from least to most truthful, holy, and legitimate:

- (10) *E seeai se alofa fakataugaasoa, seeai se alofa fakatautaina, kae se alofa teelaa e isi se fakamoemoega ola i ei, ma kaa toe fakaolagina taaua i te ola e see gata mai.*

[sermons:Ka 1991:1:B:152-155]

It is not love between friends, it is not love between siblings, but a [type of] love in which [one] can trust that there is living hope that we will again be reborn for ever and ever.

To summarise, many textual characteristics of sermons are indexical of the primary function of sermons, namely to seek out the truth as locally defined.

Centrally relevant to this concern for the truth is the importance that literacy plays in religious ceremonies. Nukulaelae Islanders explicitly articulate the notion that the written word, as epitomised particularly in the Bible and Church-sanctioned religious writings, has the potential of being maximally truthful, much more so than the spoken word. Not only is the Bible authored by God, an entity with indisputable universal legitimacy, but it is also the yardstick with which all actions should be evaluated. The privileged position of literacy with respect to the truth is evident even when religious texts are not involved. For example, in discussions of oral history, a topic of great interest on the atoll, the potential truthfulness of literacy is frequently invoked. Islanders recognise that there are many coexisting but conflicting oral accounts of the past, each more or less subtly associated with particular interests and points of view. In practice, there is a general tolerance of these variations: competing historical accounts can be told in public without overt censorship. (Indeed, organised multivocality permeates many aspects of social life on the atoll.) Yet, at the same time, Nukulaelae thinkers often lament the resulting cacophony:

- (11) *Naa laa, [...] vau a tinoo, fakamatala, "E fai peelaa." Oti, kae vau ssuaa tino, fakamatala e tai kkese tena faipatiiga, peelaa mo koo tai kkese mo te- mo te fakamatalaaga a ssuaa tino. Ia, teelaa ko te tukumaiiga laa teenaa, koo mmai ei ki- ki taimi nei, nee? Koo maua ei a pepa konaa, teenaa laa koo tuku ki loto i pepa, kae faitau laa taatou, ai!, koo tai kkese maalie te tala a tiino teelaa! Ao, ko te mea ne- ne mmai taatou i taimi kolaa see iloa o tusi. [...] Teelaa laa, hee mafai o tonu. A moi ne mea, moi ne taimi ne paatusi eiloo ki loto!*

[interviews:Ma 1990:3:B:356-387]

So [...] one person comes along, gives an account, "It happened this way." Once that's over, another person comes along, gives

an account and what he says is slightly different, like it's slightly different from the first person's account. So that's how it would happen until today, see? [Now] we have paper, and we put [these stories] down on paper, and we read it, and, oh no!, that other person's account is slightly different! Yes, because it was handed down at a time when literacy was unknown. [...] That's why it can never be true. If only it had-, if only it had been written down right there and then!

As this quote illustrates, Nukulaelae Islanders blame this cacophony on their forebears' inability to write or, alternatively, on the fact that paper and writing implements were difficult to get in bygone days. Had history been "committed" (*fakamau*, literally, 'made steadfast') to writing while it was "going on" by someone entitled to do so, the resulting written text would have been maximally true and authoritative.

It is important to add that literacy for Nukulaelae Islanders is not always *inherently* truthful. To have a privileged relationship with the truth, the authorship of a written text must meet certain criteria of legitimacy, which have little or nothing to do with literacy *per se* (e.g., it must be sanctioned by Church officialdom, and hence by God). However, a strong *claim* of truthfulness is embedded in the written word. When this claim is substantiated by evidence of authorial legitimacy, literacy fulfils its social functions and is intrinsically more truthful than oral communication. However, when members of the Nukulaelae Congregation come across religious writings issued by the Baha'is or the Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, they see these writings as *ppelo* 'lies' that usurp literacy's claim to truth and legitimacy, and their reaction can be ferociously critical and disparaging. No oral claim to legitimacy and truth ever meets the disapproval that such writings encounter, even in gossip. The extreme nature of these reactions bears witness to the privileged relationship between the truth and the written word.⁹

The association of literacy with the truth becomes particularly important in understanding the cultural meaning of written sermons. For seasoned preachers at least, having access to a written text during the sermon performance answers no clear cognitive need: many preachers are adept orators, and they hardly need the crutch of a written text to conduct their sermons. The meaning of the written text must be sought elsewhere. It resides in the privileged position that written texts occupy with respect to the truth. Observe how a Nukulaelae preacher explains the use of written sermons:

- (12) *Me e maattaku a tino i au pati maa ssee. Teelaa laa, au mea koo oti katoa laa ne aa?, ne kkopi nee koe mai tua ki loto i te pepa. [...]*

Me i te mea teelaa e fanatu mai iaa koe, ko pati a te Atua. A ko tino laa kolaa e fakalogollogo mai, te sui o te Atua teelaa koo faipati mai, ko au pati kee ttonu eiloo, ma kaafai e ffuli ssee nee koe te pati, a ko tino kaa tausi nee laatou te mea ssee, see fakasala tino kae fakasala te- te tagata teelaa ne aumai te leo o te Atua.
[interviews:Ma 1990:3:A:548-565]

Because people [i.e. preachers] are afraid that they might say wrong things. So what you're going to say has been all-whatchamacallit?, all written out beforehand on a piece of paper. [...] Because what come from you are God's words. And there are people who listen to you, as God's representative in the process of speaking, so what you say had better be true, because if you twist words around, people [i.e. the congregation] are going to come away with wrong things, [and] people are not to blame, the- the person who's to blame is the one who brought God's voice.

Having a written sermon is thus one way to ensure that what the preacher says is true, and not *ffuli ssee* 'twisted around, inside out'. The sermon being intimately associated with God's word (as discussed further presently), it is essential that every measure be taken to ensure that everything in it is true, and one way of doing so is to give prominence to samples of literacy in the sermon performance. In other words, the presence of literacy lends authority and truthfulness to the oral performance and acts as a mediating agent in the indexical relationship between sermon discourse and the truth.

SERMONS AND AUTHORITY

Whenever questions of truth arise, issues of authority, legitimacy, and ideology also lurk in the background, as many authors have shown (e.g. Bailey 1991, Bok 1979, Foucault 1981, Lindstrom 1992, Pedersen 1993, Simmel 1950). I now turn to these questions in the context of Nukulaelae sermons. I shall first show that sermons centralise aspects of Nukulaelae identity, such as the individualism of the person, that are under-elaborated in other social contexts. I shall then show that, on the surface at least, sermon performances are imbued with extraordinary authority. In this analysis, I espouse a micro-analytic approach, seeking evidence for my claims in the linguistic and rhetorical structures of sermon texts. I analyse in turn pronoun use, patterns of reported speech, and the prosodic structure of sermons.

Pronouns and Personhood

A remarkable feature of sermonic texts is the highly individualised depiction of the social person that they invoke. In sermons, the basic unit of analysis is presented as the individual: the sermon is authored by an individual (even though in reality multiple authorship may have been involved), and it is addressed to each individual member of the congregation. The principal linguistic symptoms of this characteristic are patterns of pronoun use, which distinguish sermonic discourse from all other Nukulaelae communicative styles. That pronouns should be thus revealing of shifts in identity is not surprising: in all speech communities, the meaning of pronouns is very complex, particularly since pronominal forms are shifters *par excellence*, whose meaning is highly context-bound, multifarious, and prone to subtle manipulations by language users (cf. Jakobson 1957; also Errington 1988, Friedrich 1972, Goffman 1979, Hanks 1990, Kuipers 1990, Silverstein 1976, Urban 1989).

To begin, first- and second-person singular pronouns (*au* 'I', *koe* 'you', and the 16 corresponding possessive forms) are considerably more frequent in sermonic texts than in other genres of public discourse. Observe the salience of these pronouns in the following representative extracts:

- (13) *Kaafai koo ttogi nee **koe** te mea tonu, tona uiga, ko **tou** see aava mo **tou** see alofa kiaa **koe** eeloa. Kaafai e ttogi atu nee **koe** te mea tonu, tona uiga, koo fakatau atu **tou** maalosia mo **tou** loto fuatua ifo, koo fakatau **tou** llei mo **tou** mmalu.*

[sermons:F 1985 (08/73)]

If **you** sell away what is true, that means that **you** have no respect and no love for **yourself**. If **you** sell away what is true, that means that **you** are selling **your** strength and **your** faith, **you** are selling **your** goodness and **your** dignity.

- (14) *A **koe** se tino o te Eekaaleesia, **au** se fai laauga. A **koe** se tiaakono. Masaua **tau** feagaiga koo oti ne saina **tou** lima kee tusi ei **taaa** igoa.*

[sermons:Ka 1991:1:B:168-170]

You are a member of the Congregation, **I** am a lay preacher. **You** are a deacon. Bear in mind the contract that **you** have signed with **your** hand in which [you] wrote down **both of our** names.

Contrasts between first- and second-person referents, as illustrated in (14) and in other excerpts to be discussed presently, indicate that these pronouns indeed refer to first- and second-person entities, and are not nonspecific indefinite pronouns with "generalised" referents comparable to 'one' and certain uses of

'you' in English. Also frequent is the first-person inclusive dual pronoun *taaua* 'you and I' and its possessive forms, as illustrated in (14) and the following:

- (15) *E aa taaua, taugaasoa fakalogologo i te afiafi teenei? E aa te alofa fakataugaasoa peenei o taaua?*

[sermons:Ka 1991:1:B:071-073]

How about **the two of us**, my friends who are listening [to me] this afternoon? How about the friendship between **the two of us**?

- (16) *Seki lava te ola o taaua i te Atua? Aa! Taina Kelisiano i ttaeao nei, kaafai e manako taaua ki niisi talitonuga, taalofa!, i te tala llei a Ieesuu Keliso kaa fano o mate, ka see ola.*

[sermons:Se 1991:1:B:335-338]

Isn't life in God enough for **us both**? Ah! Christian brother this morning, if **we both** look for other religions, Heaven forbid!, Jesus Christ's good news will die away, and will not live.

In all other communicative contexts, plural pronouns are used whenever possible.¹⁰ For example, in everyday conversation, care is always taken to choose pronouns that refer to the most inclusive and encompassing range of referents. If an individual performs a task in the presence of others, the activity is always described as having been performed by everyone present, even when the witnessing parties play no active role. Thus, if three people go angling in a canoe with fishing gear for only one person, an appropriate description of the activity is *Maatou ne maattau i tua* 'We [three] angled outside the reef'. A fuller description of the expedition might detail the division of labour, but the overall activity will be considered, in the choice of pronoun forms and otherwise, to have been performed by every adult present, including "inactive" parties. In Nukulaelae ideology, the act of *taapuaki* 'ratified witnessing [a social situation]' is as important as the actual performance of the activity around which the social situation is centred. Similar patterns are found in the expression of possession and part-whole relationships: Nukulaelae speakers refer to the kin group of which they are a member as *temotou kaaiga* 'our [plural] kin group', rather than *toku kaaiga* 'my kin group'.¹¹ Thus, sermons are distinct from other social contexts with respect to pronoun use.

Patterns of pronoun use in sermons have two additional characteristics that set them apart and further highlight their personal and individualistic orientation. In all other communicative contexts, coordinate constructions that involve pronouns (e.g. 'you and I', 'John and me') are most idiomatically structured so that a pronoun with widest referential scope appears in first position. For example, 'John and me' is most naturally expressed as *maaua mo Ioane*, literally, 'we [dual, exclusive] and John' (rather than *Ioane mo au*, literally, 'John and

me'). This is not the case in sermons; rather, the patterns found there resemble the English pattern, in which the referents of coordinated nouns and pronouns are disjoint:

- (17) *Ko te alofa o koe ki te Atua kee tuumau, ona ko tena fakatusa ne fai nee ia koe mo au kee oola taatou i ei.*
[sermons:Te 1991:1:A:528-529]
Let your love for God be constant, for he created **you and me** to his image to enable us to live.

Closely related to these patterns is the preponderance of parallelisms in which a verb with a pronominal subject appears twice, once with a second-person singular subject, and once with a first-person singular subject:

- (18) *Masaua nee koe, masaua nee au ttaa pati fakataugaasoa ne fai?*
[sermons:Ka 1991:1:B:087-088]
Don't you remember, don't I remember the promise of friendship that we made?
- (19) *E iloa peefea nee koe, e iloa peefea nee au koo tonute koga teenei ne moe ei a laakopo?*
[sermons:Se 1991:1:B:242-244]

How do you know, how do I know that where Jacob slept was the right place?

In all other contexts, the referents of the two singular pronouns would be combined and expressed with the first-person inclusive dual pronoun *taaua* 'we [two]', and the need to repeat the verb would be avoided. This type of parallelism is so intimately associated with sermonic discourse that it is an unmistakable stylistic index. In contrast with all other genres, sermonic discourse appears to highlight the individuation of the person as an autonomous social unit. Whereas great emphasis is placed on the sociocentric nature of personhood in other social contexts, sermons centralise the separate individuality of both the preacher and each audience member.

This emphasis on individuation also permeates other aspects of Nukulaelae religious ideology. For example, ideological discourse on religious life foregrounds individualised activities and intrapersonal affective experiences which, in other social contexts, are negatively valued and rarely talked about. Introspection is one such process. In most contexts, introspective contemplation is negatively sanctioned, being viewed as evidence of such emotions as shame (*maa*), sadness (*faanoanoa*), or anger (*kaitaua*), or of a person's refusal or inability to orient and accommodate to the social context (*kaugataa* 'disobedient of societal directives', *solopuu* 'acting as a loner, clinging to a single familiar person, poorly socialised'). In contrast, introspective contemplation is given a

positive moral evaluation in religious contexts, as the following sermon excerpt illustrates:

- (20) *Te fenua o te Atua i te taeao teenei! Teenei foki te fekau moo taatou i te taeao teenei, **kee taki sukesuke ifo te tagata kiaa ia eiloo**, me peefea mai te fakattusa o te Atua ne faaite ei taaua.*
[sermons:Te 1991:1:A:543-546]

God's island this morning! Here is what we've come to say this morning, **that each man should investigate himself**, [to see] how God's image from which we [two] were made [looks].

Similarly, sermons frequently describe the person as having a personal answer to existentialist questions:

- (21) *Se aa te mea kaa maua moo taaua i te ola see gata mai? Ko tau tali e iaa koe loa mo koe. [...] Nukulaelae i te taeao teenei- i te afiafi teenei! Se aa te filifiliga a te Atua moo koe? **E tofu taatou mo te tali.***
[sermons:P 1991:1:B:460-465]

What are the two of us going to get from eternal life? Your answer is to be found within you alone. [...] Nukulaelae in this morning- this afternoon! What has God chosen for you? **Each one of us has a different answer [to this question].**

Religious discourse also places much value on an inquiring and individually motivated search for the truth. Observe the importance given to these themes in the following extract from an interview on religious ideology:

- (22) *E peenaa eiloo te lalolagi teenei, e seeai se tino ne- ne tupu mai, faanau mai, te mea eiloo koo iloa. Kai, peenaa mo koe. Koe ne tupu mai, seei ei se mea e tasi e iloa, a koo taumafai katoa, fakaako i se koga, fakaako i se koga, koo ne fakaakoako, a koo maua ei te poto. A kaafai laa e fiifiileemuu koe, sagasaga, seeai laa se mea e maua nee koe. Seeai eiloo. Sagasaga fua peelaa mo te vaaivai mo te fakapalapala io mo te logo tonu o te- te moe. [...] E fai mai te Tusi Tapu, a te poto e ppau peelaa mo te aulo. Te mea e maua, a te aulo, te foitino o te aulo e maua i te koga tafasili i te ppoko, ppoko i loto i te laukele. Ia, te poto e ppau peelaa mo te peenina. A te peenina e maua i te moana i te koga ppoko ppoko. Tena uiga e keli, e keli te aulo i loto i te- i te laukele, kae uku a te peenina i loto i ttai.*
[interviews:Ma 1990:3:B:112-133]

This is how the world is, no one came- came about, was born knowing. See, like you. [When] you were born, you knew nothing, but you kept trying, [you] learned here, [you] learned there, and once you'd learned, you became smart. But if you just sit there peacefully, you'll get nowhere. Nowhere. [You]'ll just sit there with all your weakness and just rot there, sleeping will feel so good [to you]. [...] The Bible tells us, knowledge is like gold. What one gets- gold, gold itself is obtained in the deepest of locations, deep inside the earth. Knowledge is also like a pearl. A pearl is obtained in the ocean in the deepest of places. Which means that [one has to] dig, dig for gold in the- in the ground, and dive for pearls in the sea.

In secular contexts, *fiilemuu* 'peacefulness', the very trait that my respondent depicts in a negative light here, is talked about as a desirable personal quality, and the kind of inquisitive searching that the interviewee describes in glowing terms is at best viewed with suspicion. Thus, the individuated definition of the person in sermonic discourse contrasts sharply with the positive valuation of sociocentrism, at the expense of individualism, extant in other contexts.

Reported Speech and Scriptural Authority

I turn next to the use of reported speech, an area of investigation frequently associated with questions of pronominal deixis (e.g. Goffman 1974, Goodwin 1990, Hanks 1990). Reported speech in sermons is particularly interesting, in that virtually all quotes are from the Scriptures, the ultimate moral reference for all social action. Quotes in sermons are thus potentially charged with moral authority. In most Nukulaelae communicative contexts, directly reported speech (i.e. quotation purported to reproduce the exact wording of another utterance) is almost always preceded by a speech-act verb or expression (e.g. *aku muna* 'my words [were]', *koo fai mai* '[he] says to me'), or sometimes even two (Besnier 1992a). Reported-speech introducers are also found in sermonic discourse, where they take a variety of forms: *efai peenei* '[it] is said thus', *muna a Ieesuu* 'Jesus' words [are]', or *muna mai te apositolo ko Paulo* 'Paul the apostle tells us'. However, in many instances, quotes from the Scriptures are left unmarked. In the following excerpt, the highlighted quote, which follows a comment by the preacher clarifying the first quote, is not introduced by a speech-act verb or expression (this excerpt is from the same sermon as excerpt (8) above, which also includes several quotes without speech-act introducers):

- (23) *Muna a Ieesuu, "Iuutaia, ne aa mea konaa e manavassee ei koutou? Au ko te falaoa mai te lagi, a te tino e fakaaogaa nee ia,*

kae inu ki te toto, kaa toka a ia i te ola e see gata mai. Me i toku tino ko te meakkai tonu, toku toto ko te mea inu tonu." A Ieesuu koo faipati ki feituu e lua, te foitino mo te agaaga. **"Ko au e toka ei koutou i mea e manavassee ei koutou i outou olaga faka-te-foitino. Ko au foki e toka ei koutou i ootou ola faka-te-agaaga."**
[sermons:Ke 1991:10]

Jesus says, "Jews, what are you worrying about? I am the bread from heaven. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink." Jesus speaks about both aspects, that of the body and that of the soul. **"I am where you find solace from your worldly fears. I am also where you find solace from your spiritual fears."**

Because written sermons for the most part lack punctuation, it is sometimes difficult for an outside observer to separate quoted and nonquoted discourse. In oral performance, intonation does not necessarily distinguish biblical quotes from the preacher's comments and elaborations. In principle, because Nukulaelae Islanders have a vast knowledge of the Bible at their disposal (this knowledge is a defining characteristic of social maturity), most congregation members can pick out scriptural quotes from the rest of the discourse. However, despite the ultimate retrievability of who speaks when, the absence of otherwise obligatory speech-act introducers creates a particular effect comparable to that of free indirect style of modern literary genres in the West, in which the quoted and quoting voices merge, thus enabling the quoting voice to claim for itself the authority and power associated with the quoted voice (Voloshinov 1978). The voice of the preacher and the voice of divine authority are essentially blurred.

Also prevalent in sermons are parallelisms between biblical quotes and nonquoted discourse. Preachers frequently pattern moral commentaries and explanations of the Scriptures so as to echo the structure and wording of biblical quotes. In the following excerpt, the preacher first provides the scriptural reading on which her sermon is based, and extracts from it a core idea:

- (24) *Muna a te matua, "Saa mataku, faipati e iloa, saa fakavaaivai, i au e fakatasi mo koe." Te manatu maaluga, ko te fakaasiga faka-nui-manava.*

[sermons:Si 1991:2:A:176-179]

The reading says, **"Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent, for I am with you."** The main idea [of my sermons] is the **forbearing revelation.**

Further on in her sermon, she parallels both the theme and the structure of the reading and core idea in a question and an exhortation addressed to the congregation:

- (25) *E aa taatou mo te fakaasiga faka-nui-manava teenei? Saa matakū, saa loto vaaivai ki mea fai a te vasega, i tau gaaluega ko te fakalauefaaga o te gaaluega a te Atua i luga o Tuvalu teenei.*

[sermons:Si 1991:2:A:210-215]

So what do we do with this **forbearing revelation**? **Do not be afraid, do not be silent** in the organisation's work, for what you are working on is the expansion of God's work in Tuvalu.

The parallelism between biblical discourse and the preacher's moral message is particularly attractive in this case, since it provides an iconic link between the biblical text and the statement of its relevance to contemporary life. Other comparable strategies are expansions from biblical quotes which do not involve parallelism. In the following, the preacher ingeniously intersperses scriptural quotes with questions:

- (26) *Fai mai te muna, "Koo filifili nee au koe." Nukulaelae, moo aa? "Moo tuku ei toku finagalo, ko te mea kee fanatu ei toku maainaaga, taalai atu ki feituu e faa o te lalolagi." Moo aa? "Ko te mea kee aumai a faanau a te Atua ki te Atua, kae see aumai a faanau a te Atua ki auala o te poouliga."*

[sermons:P 1991:1:B:473-477]

The Word says, "I have chosen you." **Nukulaelae, what for?**

"So that My will be done, so that enlightenment can go forth, [and] be preached to the four corners of the world." **What for?**

"So that God's children be brought to God, and so that God's children not be brought along the path of darkness."

In this dialogic simulation, the question *moo aa?* 'what for?' is a prepositional phrase, rather than a full sentence, and must thus be understood as a syntactic expansion of the previous utterance, i.e. of the biblical quote. This strategy creates a contrapuntal effect in which the boundary between the scriptural voice and the preacher's voice dissolves, while meaning is created through the joint "animation" (Goffman 1979) of both voices.

The blurring of voices is, in fact, part and parcel of Nukulaelae Islanders' religious ideology, and finds clear echoes in their prescriptive statements. In interview excerpt (12) above, my respondent characterises the preacher as *te tagata teelaa ne aumai te leo o te Atua* 'the person who brought God's voice'.

Comparable metaphors are frequent: the preacher is often characterised as *te sui o te Atua* 'God's representative', and sermons as *pati a te Atua* 'God's words'. As with fundamentalist Baptist Americans, for whom "preachers speak the word of God[, who] speaks through them" (Harding 1987:174), the preacher's voice and biblical voice merge (cf. also Rosenberg 1970a and Davis 1985 on African American evangelical sermons, and Hostetler and Huntington 1980:33-36 on Hutterite sermons).¹²

Antiphonal Alternations

The powerful claim to authority made through quoting practices is echoed in another very striking characteristic of oral sermon performances, namely their prosodic structure. Preachers' voices frequently become extremely loud during sermons, so much so that the effort sometimes leaves the preacher hoarse after the service. Individuals who, in other arenas of social life, have an unassuming and meek comportment, can take on a vociferous and overwhelming demeanour at the pulpit. Typically, strings of words uttered very loudly alternate with strings spoken in normal voice, thus giving the performance a peculiar antiphonal structure only attested in sermons. In the following extract, loudness is indicated with capitalisation:

- (27) *TAAVINI KI TE ALIKI, KEE OKO KI TE FAKAOTIGA, kee maua ei nee koe (mo au) a te ola e see gata mai. IESUU KELISO, TE ATUA MO TENA FILIFILIGA, ne aumai nee ia a tena fua tasi KEE MATE KEE OLA KOE I TE TAEAO TEENEI, kee ola te lalolagi KEE OKO ATU EITAATOU ki te ola e see gata mai, maafai taatou e taavini ttonu ki te Atua. TE ALIKI TEELAA E MAUA EI NEE KOE A TE OLA i te ola e see gata mai.*

[sermons:Me 1991:2:A:073-079]

SERVE GOD UNTIL THE END, so that you (and I) can live for ever and ever. JESUS CHRIST, GOD AND HIS CHOICE, who brought [us] his only child TO DIE IN ORDER FOR YOU TO LIVE THIS MORNING, in order for the world to live SO THAT WE ALL LIVE for ever and ever, as long as we serve God as we should. [This is] THE LORD THROUGH WHICH WE CAN LIVE for ever and ever.

Alternations in voice quality occur at junctures between major syntactic constituents, e.g. between superordinate and subordinate clauses, or between topics and comments. However, there is no clear relationship between voice quality and syntactic or informational structure; in the above extract, one finds subjunctive subordinate clauses uttered in either normal voice (e.g. *kee maua ei*

nee koe (mo au) a te ola e see gata mai 'so that you (and I) can live for ever and ever') or loud voice (e.g. *kee mate kee ola koe i te taeao teenei* 'to die in order for you to live this morning'), and clauses in loud voice are neither more nor less informationally prominent than other clauses. So the meaning of antiphonal alternations is not to be sought in the linguistic structures upon which it is superposed, but rather in its overall effect.

Antiphonal alternations occur neither randomly nor consistently during the performance. Rather, they tend to take place once the preacher has "warmed up," generally half-way through the sermon or later (compare the crescendo of intensity in Southern revivalist sermons discussed by Rosenberg 1970b:5). Nukulaelae Islanders describe antiphonal patterns as symptomatic of an intense trance-like state of excitement known as *matagi*, which literally means 'wind, windy'. Outside of sermons, this state is typically witnessed during performances of *faatele*, a song-and-dance style which probably originated in the late 19th century (Christensen and Koch 1964), and in which the tension and tempo of the choreography and the volume and tempo of the singing and percussion accompaniment gradually increase, to come finally to an abrupt end (the word *faatele* is a borrowing from Samoan meaning 'to increase, to multiply'). During a *faatele*, dancers, spectators, and singers can be "hit" (*poko*) by a *matagi* episode, which may vary in length and form: for example, a dancer may "break frame" (Goffman 1974) from the normally tersely controlled choreography by executing a brief twirl with arms extended while whooping and smiling rapturously; a member of the chorus may get up and lead the chorus with conductor-like body movements; or an audience or chorus member may join in the dancing. All these scenarios are taken to be manifestations of *matagi*. An entire *faatele* performance can also be judged to be *matagi* if the singing is particularly loud and coordinated, and if the dancers apply themselves to enlivening their performance with brief frame-breaking twirls and other embellishments. *Matagi* is the sign of a successful performance.

To understand the role that antiphonal voice alternations play in sermons, one must consider the range of expressive displays appropriate to church contexts on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the affective norms governing sermon performances. First, the kinetic repertoire that a preacher can draw upon is rather limited. One finds here none of the dramaturgic expressiveness associated with religious performances in other ethnographic context, none of the walking about and dramatic gesturing comparable to that which take place during certain African-American revivalist sermons (e.g. Holt 1972). The preacher stands behind the elevated pulpit and does not leave that station (in fact, the structural configuration of the church does not afford much movement). Neither do Nukulaelae preachers generally cry during their sermons, in contrast with the

pastors of certain denominations in Tonga, for example. However, this is not to imply that Nukulaelae preachers remain immobile: they often point fingers at their audiences and engage in dramatic hand gesturing, which typically co-occur with antiphonal voice alternations. At the same time, Nukulaelae preachers are expected to offer some evidence that they are moved and inspired by the sermon, because it is only when this takes place that their audience will pay attention to their message, according to my respondents. Thus, the voice becomes a prime index of affect in the relative absence of nonverbal channels.

Indeed, antiphonal alternations make for an impressive and powerful performance, particularly in conjunction with finger-pointing and the exhortatory message of the sermon. By commanding the audience's attention, antiphonal performances are acts of raw communicative coercion. It is difficult to think of a blunter appropriation of a speaker's authority over his or her audience than the thunder of a Nukulaelae preacher's voice in the midst of a *matagi* episode.

The Preacher's Authority

To recapitulate, I have attempted to demonstrate in this section that Nukulaelae sermons position the preacher and the audience in a highly specific manner. Through a fine-grained analysis of the linguistic and discursive characteristics of sermons, I have shown that sermons foreground aspects of the participants' identity which are otherwise not emphasised in Nukulaelae social life, namely the individualistic, autonomous, and introspective qualities of the person. Furthermore, many communicative aspects of sermonic performances place the preacher in a position of great personal authority. As the conduit of God's word, the preacher speaks directly and authoritatively to each and every member of the audience individually. While the above arguments are based on an analysis of sermons, i.e. of the most central event in the church service, they can probably be extended to the church service as a whole.

For a brief half-hour, the preacher claims for him- or herself God's voice and assumes a position of immense assertiveness at the pulpit, in which asymmetries in power, knowledge, and morality with members of the congregation are emphasised. Because God's word is non-negotiable, sermonic discourse leaves no room for audience participation in the construction of meaning, and the congregation can only sit in stony silence, at least within the boundaries of performance. If any dialogism takes place, it can only involve God's and the preacher's voices. The preacher's assumption of unconditional authority, further highlighted by the thunder of antiphonal voice alternations, allows him or her to violate many of the rules of circumspection at play in other Nukulaelae public encounters, which dictate that participants strive to maintain a non-directive, nonconfrontational stance with each other. In other words, the

preacher takes on a different identity in this context, and defines the identity of the audience in an equally marked fashion. This transformation has clear historical antecedents: the identity of the preacher is strongly reminiscent of the extreme personal, marginally divine authority of the Samoan pastor in the early days of missionisation (Brady 1975, Munro 1978, 1982), which still colours the relationship between the contemporary pastor and the Congregation, at least on the surface (Goldsmith 1989). As they occupy the seat left vacant by the Samoan pastor, sermon performers are in a position from which they can harangue, impose their points of view, and accuse in ways that would be perceived as disruptive and threatening in other contexts.

THE LIMITS OF SERMONIC AUTHORITY

However, the preacher's authority is at the same time fragile, fleeting, and temporary, and in these respects resembles other forms of authority on Nukulaelae. It is precisely because it is so elusive and metaphorical that the preacher's authority can be exerted so forcefully in a society whose members are generally so distrustful of overt manifestations of authority. In this section, I describe the context-bound nature of the preacher's authority, and analyse its relationship to secular authority in political contexts.

First of all, the physical context in which the preacher's authority is so forcefully displayed is meticulously bracketed in several ways. This bracketing has historical roots: church services in general and sermons in particular were introduced from the outside by outsiders. While they are now an integral part of what Nukulaelae Islanders view as "tradition," the social practices that accompany church services still retain a definite "foreign" flavour. For example, the church building on Nukulaelae is a tall and massive coral-stone building which towers in the centre of the village, dwarfing the thatched or corrugated-iron homes huddling around it. The church service is the only social context in which men have to wear a shirt, and sometimes a tie and Western-style trousers, and women a long *muumuu*; where the two gender groups sit in a segregated fashion; where respect is displayed by standing up rather than sitting down; and where one sits on benches rather than mats. It is also the one Nukulaelae context of social life where everyone carries books, namely a Bible and a hymnal. The church service is thus circumscribed by clear symbolic boundaries that isolate it from ordinary life.

The preacher's authority is bracketed in an even more specific manner. Despite its overwhelming appearance, it is wedded to the immediate context of the church service, and does not give rise to the cross-contextual exertion of power and the imposition of dominance. Indeed, preachers rotate at the pulpit, and every adult man (and, increasingly, many adult women) is eventually

entitled to get up and claim for him- or herself God's voice, harangue the rest of the community, and point an accusatory finger at each member of the congregation. This sequentiality has a powerful levelling effect: after the performance, the preacher reverts to being an ordinary member of society, and submits to the exhortations of the next preacher in line. Thus, the possibility is ruled out that any one member of the community will claim privileged access to the truth and exert moral authority over others in a systematic and sustained manner.

The only person entitled to assume divinely inspired authority with any regularity is the pastor. However, as an outsider to the community, the pastor cuts a liminal figure, despite the enormous amount of prestige with which his social status is associated. Because of this liminality, his authority is ultimately controllable. When confined to religious contexts, the pastor's authority is heeded and even revered. However, when a pastor attempts to exert any kind of political influence in secular contexts, his authority is viewed with very different eyes. On occasion, his opinion may be solicited on particular matters such as interpersonal or interfactional conflicts, but a wise pastor knows that any statement he makes must be confined to the moral implications of political issues. Ultimately, he is not entitled to a voice in the internal politics of the community, and this exclusion is conveniently justified by the fact that he is not native to the atoll. Many incidents of the atoll's history bear witness to the threatening nature of leakages between secular and religious authority (see Munro 1982 and Goldsmith 1989:252-264 for a discussion of historical aspects of this issue).¹³

Finally, the preacher's authority is topically bracketed, in that sermons should be thematically confined to doctrinal matters over which everyone, as a good Protestant, is in agreement: that we are all sinners who need to be reminded of our wayward ways and castigated for them. This is not to say that sermons are entirely apolitical, quite the contrary. Skilful preachers know how to direct their sermons to "timely" issues, i.e. doctrinal topics of relevance to current circumstances, such as disputes, political rifts, and other socially disruptive happenings. They base their sermons on scriptural passages that are relevant to ongoing events, and show in their exhortations how social problems can be solved through a close reading of the Bible. At the same time, sermons must appear to be removed from the immediate secular context. Their messages must be opaque, metaphorical, and hidden:

- (28) *Peelaa mo taku pati, ma kaafai hoki te faifeau e fai tena laauga, peelaa a ia e ttau fua o fakamatea maalie mai ua nee ia, nee?, nee ia ki tino, nee? Kae moo aa maa matea atu kaatoatoa te ata o tena faipatiiga, nee? [...] Me i tino laa fai maafaufau, e olo, koo leva loo ne olotou iloaga te kkano tonu o te faipatiiga teelaa, nee? A*

te mea paa koo too- koo too faipati, kae paa koo logo sala ki loto o tino, nee?

[interviews:Si 1991:1:A:103-109]

Like I said, when a pastor delivers a sermon, he sort of should just make people see [what he's getting at], right? He shouldn't reveal the entire picture of what he is [trying to] say, right? [...] Because people who have a good mind, as they go along, they'll certainly get the substance of what's being said, you see? But when there's too much said, it doesn't feel right in people's hearts, you see?

At first glance, the ideological makeup of sermons appears to present a fundamental contradiction. On the one hand, sermon performances must display boundless authority, while, on the other hand, this authority cannot be too transparently related to secular events. One possible account for this state of affairs would posit that a fundamental division between the religious and the secular is operative in Nukulaelae social life, according to which religious authority and secular authority would be two distinct categories. However, this account is unsatisfactory in a number of respects: it is contradicted by evidence of many leakages between the secular and the religious in the life of the community, and fails to capture the intricate manner in which Christianity permeates tradition in contemporary Nukulaelae society.

When viewed against the background of Nukulaelae attitudes towards political authority, a striking similarity emerges between the normative ambivalence underlying sermon performances and patterns found in Nukulaelae political ideology. Briefly, two broad strands can be discerned in the Nukulaelae prescriptive schema for political action. On the one hand, one finds a yearning for an iron-fisted leadership which, when it operates legitimately, brings prosperity and peace to the community. At the same time, Nukulaelae Islanders also articulate a fierce spirit of egalitarianism, according to which everyone in the community is on the same footing and no one is entitled to exert authority over others (see Besnier 1991a, 1993 for further discussion). As a result, all positions of political authority on the atoll are fragile, temporary, and limited in scope. The same tension between two different ideologies is evident in sermons. Despite their marked characteristics, sermons and their contexts are subjected to the same pressures and contradictions as social action in secular contexts.

Needless to say, finding a balance between these opposing forces, in sermon performances and elsewhere, requires acute social skills, with which not everyone is endowed. On occasion, a preacher misjudges his or her moves, triggering a negative reaction from the rest of the community. In another paper (Besnier 1993), I analyse in detail the case of a Nukulaelae leader whose immoderate ostentation and abuses of power led him to be accused of being a sorcerer. Shortly after his subsequent

disgrace, he was asked by the pastor to lead the Sunday afternoon service.¹⁴ During this service, he delivered an impassioned sermon on the topic of sorcery. Abandoning his written sermon half-way through his performance, dropping his Bible to the floor in the process (which a member of the congregation had to get up and retrieve), he became more and more pointed and precise in his allusions. Sobbing, he forcefully urged the congregation to abandon the ways of the *poouliga* 'times of darkness', among which sorcery figures prominently:

- (29) *NUKULAE LAE I TTAEO TEENEI! NUKULAE LAE E PELE I MANATU, NUKULAE LAE E TAGI KI EI TE LOTO, I TE AFIAFITEENEI! [...] I TE AFIAFITEENEI, E FAKAPILIPILI ATU, NUKULAE LAE, NE AA LEO KONEI E TTAGI I LUGA I TE FENUA? [...] {voice breaking} TE FILIFILIGA A TE ATUA, KOO TONU MOO KOE, Nukulaelae! E fakapilipili atu i te afiafi teenei, kee SEE TOE AUMAI NE MANATU SSEE, E FAKASSEEGINA EI TAATOU MO TTOU FAANAU! Koa oti tausaga o te poouliga. Koa oti tausaga o {voice breaking} te ifo ki tupua! Koo oti tausaga o te talittonu ki luga i- i fatu mo aa!* [Sermons:P 1991:1:B:477-490]

NUKULAE LAE THIS AFTERNOON! NUKULAE LAE BE-LOVED IN ONE'S THOUGHTS, NUKULAE LAE FOR WHICH THE HEART CRIES, THIS AFTERNOON! [...] THIS AFTERNOON, [GOD] IS REACHING OUT, WHAT ARE THOSE VOICES CRYING ON THE ATOLL? [...] {voice breaking} GOD'S CHOOSING IS RIGHT FOR YOU, Nukulaelae! [God] is reaching out to you this afternoon, DO NOT BRING UP ERRONEOUS THOUGHTS AGAIN, WHICH MAKE US AND OUR CHILDREN ERR! The years of darkness are over. The years of {voice breaking} the adoration of heathen gods are over! The years of beliefs in stone icons and whatever else are over!

However, the congregation saw in this overflow of emotionality nothing more than reproachable self-pity. Shuffling their feet and staring at the floor, congregation members audibly murmured their disapproval. Later, one respondent described her reaction to the sermon as follows:

- (30) *Peelaa, hee fiafia au ki tena tagi i tena laauga! Paa me-ko tuulaga-, paa i tena faipatiiga, paa, fakamuli taa koo logo sala ei a tino, a ko ia koo vau foki mo tena tagi, nee? Peelaa aati koo fakauiga eeloo ana pati moo mea kolaa ne ttupu kiaa ia, koo tagi*

*ifo oki eeloo, mo koo tagi o te ita, mo ko ttagi o te aa?, taa e fai
nee ia i te afiafi, nee?*

[interviews:Si 1991:1:A:129-134]

Like, I was not happy with the way he cried during his sermon! It was as if- it rested-, like, as he was speaking, like, later [in his sermon, he was saying things that] were offensive to people, and he was [aggravating it by] crying on top of it, see? It was like he was talking about what happened to him, and crying at the same time, were these tears tears of anger, or tears of what that he shed this afternoon, see?

The scorn and disapproval he brought upon himself through this sermon is a dramatic illustration of what can take place when the sermon performer violates the bracketed nature of sermonic authority.

CONCLUSION

At first glance, sermons on Nukulaelae emerge as very unusual social events, in which many Nukulaelae behavioural norms seem to be violated. In an attempt to understand the apparent exceptionality of sermons, I have shown here that sermons and the religious performances of which they are the central feature are indeed bracketed events. Some of this bracketing can be explained historically: as elsewhere in the Pacific, Christianity on the atoll still retains the imprint of its alien origins, despite the fact that, today, tradition and religion are inseparable. Christianity on Nukulaelae probably maintained its foreign associations longer than it did in other Polynesian societies, where religious life was localised much sooner. Indeed, religious authority remained in the hands of Samoan "guest" pastors for almost a century, the last Samoan pastor having left Nukulaelae only in 1958. Sermons today are suffused with these associations, which are clearly identifiable in their structural characteristics.

However, religious life and secular life are not strictly compartmentalised in this society. There are indeed many similarities between sermons and secular events: the very characteristics that appeared so unusual in a context-free analysis of the sermon can be shown to echo patterns of interaction in other contexts. For example, Nukulaelae Islanders subject each other's sermon performances to the same critical scrutiny as, say, political speeches and gossip interactions. Similarly, the authority of the preacher, which appears so boundless and overwhelming when observed *in vitro*, is, in fact, topically circumscribed, bounded to the immediate context of the church service, diluted by the sequential nature of authorship, and subjected to the same ideological constraints as secular authority.

In my attempt to understand the context-bound meaning of Nukulaelae sermons, I followed recent theoretical developments in folklore studies (Bauman 1975, 1977, 1986, Bauman and Briggs 1990, Hymes 1975), moving from a text-centred approach to the materials to a performance-centred approach. The latter stance, which recognises performance as behaviour situated in particular institutional contexts, offers a considerably richer framework for understanding the social and communicative dynamics at play in Nukulaelae sermons than an exclusively text-centred approach does. A performance-centred approach enables us to make sense of the unusual emphasis on the individualistic nature of the person, the strong claims to the truth, and the overpowering displays of authoritarianism associated with sermons.

While the sermons' seemingly unusual characteristics are really bounded to a specific context, sermons should not be shrugged off as inconsequential "make-believe" behaviour that Nukulaelae Islanders engage in three times a week. Dismissing them as little more than performed fiction would trivialise the social importance that sermons have for the life of the community and the seriousness with which Nukulaelae Islanders approach religious rituals. What takes place in the sermon, and the particular way in which preachers and members of the congregation align themselves *vis-à-vis* such processes as access to the truth, authority, and personhood, are highly consequential for those involved.

The marked characteristics of sermons could conceivably be construed as images of the way that social life should not be organised outside of the church building. Such an analysis would maintain that sermons show how personhood should not be defined in secular contexts, i.e. as an individual entity devoid of sociocentric attributes. In a similar vein, the dramatic authoritarianism displayed during sermon performances would demonstrate to those present how authority should not be performed elsewhere. Such instantiations of "what not to be" for negatively prescriptive purposes are common cross-culturally, as demonstrated by studies of symbolic reversals in performative events (e.g. Bakhtin 1984 on carnivals), social roles (e.g. Babcock-Abrahams 1974, Pelton 1980, and Spinks 1991 on tricksters), or rituals (e.g. Babcock (ed.) 1978, Scott 1990:156-182, and Turner 1969:166-203). However, this analysis is ill-fitted to the context at hand for several reasons. First, sermons are indeed bracketed social events, but not in the same fashion as, say, carnivals are. There is too much leakage between sermons and the rest of social life, as evidenced, for example, by similarities between the limits placed on the preacher's authority and the limits placed on political authority. Second, tricksters, rituals of reversals, and carnival-like festivals normally involve a suspension of social order: tricksters go out of their ways to violate behavioral norms, and carnivals are disorderly events during which, at first glance at least, "anything goes". In contrast, the Nukulaelae

sermon is a highly codified and rigidly structured event, hardly comparable to instances of anti-order. Finally, trickster roles, carnivals, and reversal rituals are always initiated by subordinated elements of society against dominant elements. While domination is present in the Nukulaelae sermon at some level, the sermon is also a choice display of high culture and hegemonic order. Clearly, the sermon cannot be analysed as a ritual of reversal.

I have already explained the meaning of authority displays in sermons in terms of the historical antecedents of Nukulaelae Christianity and in terms of the contemporary meaning of political authority. The question that remains unresolved is, what role does the individualistic definition of the person embodied in sermons play in Nukulaelae culture? I propose that, in religious rituals, Nukulaelae Islanders undergo a transformation, or at least a reorientation, in social identity, and that the sermon is pivotal in bringing about this transformation. I liken this transformation to processes of identity transformation that have been described for many religious institutions and rituals. An obvious example is the conversion experience familiar from Western (Harding 1987, Hartse 1993, Stromberg 1990) and non-Western settings (cf. Rosaldo 1973 and Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1991 on Pacific contexts). As Stromberg (1990) demonstrates, the conversion experience is enacted whenever the experiencer tells the narrative of his or her conversion. Identity transformations triggered by religious experiences are thus not just once-in-a-lifetime happenings, but rather emerge as recurring events. While Nukulaelae differs considerably from the middle-class American setting that Stromberg describes, the identity transformations that members of both groups experience bear interesting similarities.

The individualistic identity that Nukulaelae Islanders foreground in religious contexts should not be seen as an anomaly or a deviation from the sociocentric identity foregrounded in other contexts. Rather, it is simply an illustration of the essentially context-dependent nature of Nukulaelae personhood. Communities like Nukulaelae are often characterised in anthropology (and, increasingly, in some subfields of psychology) as having an understanding of the person as sociocentric and interactionally constructed (e.g. Geertz 1984, Heelas 1986, Markus and Kitayama 1991, Shweder and Bourne 1984). This understanding is commonly contrasted with views attributed to Western societies, where the person is conceptualised as situated in the individual.¹⁵ The problem with this orthodoxy is that members of societies which at first glance have "sociocentric" orientations are perfectly capable of articulating individualistic versions of their ethnopsychological understanding of personhood (cf. Hollan 1992, Howard 1985, Poole 1991, Spiro 1993). The alleged contrast between "individualistic" (read "Western") and "sociocentric" (read "non-Western") views of the person thus results from anthropologists' failure to attend to the importance of context in the societies they study, and hence to capture the subtleties and complexities

intrinsically associated with the sense of person in all societies and cultures. The individualism that Nukulaelae Islanders elaborate in religious discourse, although undoubtedly distinct from Western middle-class individualism, is part and parcel of “the Nukulaelae sense of person”.

In this study, I have taken an ethnographic approach to analyse materials of a religious nature. This research stance obviously does not constitute the only possible approach. For example, an observer bringing to these materials a theological background would have asked different questions and would have couched answers differently from what I have done. For example, the emphasis on individualisation in Nukulaelae sermons could be explained as an instantiation of Protestant doctrine, which Nukulaelae’s brand of Christianity would share with comparable Protestant denominations: indeed, according to Protestant precepts familiar to Westerners, the individual is ultimately responsible for the fate of the soul, and must thus accept Christ as a personal saviour. However, religious events, religious discourse, and belief systems are not the simple consequence of culture-free religious doctrines. Rather, events, language, and beliefs must articulate with sociocultural processes at play in secular contexts, and these processes certainly determine the nature of doctrine. While commonalities are probably apparent between Nukulaelae religious events and, say, congregationalist or fundamentalist services in Western middle-class suburbs, these events do not occupy the same position in their respective socio-cultural contexts, either from a sociological standpoint or from the point of view of individual experience. My goal here was to understand how religious events are embedded in a greater social and cultural context.

In particular, I have attempted to demonstrate that language constructs and reflects this embedding process, and therefore that a wealth of information can be gleaned from a microscopic analysis of religious textual practices. All too often, ethnographers have attempted to unravel the complexities of the relationship between religious life and political life in particular societies, but they rarely turn to the most obvious source of insights into these complexities, namely what is said or written in religious performances (notable exceptions include Titon 1988 and Kuipers 1990). Yet, in many societies, speaking, writing, and reading occupy a place of great prominence in religious experience and its articulation with secular life. Textual practices can provide useful tools for the ethnographic exploration of religious life. Analyses of sermonic discourse in other Polynesian societies (and across denominations within multi-denominational societies of the region) could open the door to extremely valuable comparisons.

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NOTES

1. Even works on millenarianism tend to neglect the social practice of these movements, as Fabian (1979) points out.
2. European LMS missionaries did not deem Samoans fit to be ordained as pastors, but reluctantly agreed to ordain them after 1875 for political reasons. Until that date, the term "teacher" was applied to Samoans who had received pastoral training (Goldsmith 1993).
3. Beginning in the early 1980s, some Nukulaelae Islanders have left the Congregation and joined other religious groups, particularly the Baha'i Faith and Jehovah's Witnesses. Such a move is extremely stigmatised, as membership in the Congregation is seen as constitutive of membership in Nukulaelae society. In this paper, the term "Congregation" refers to members of the Nukulaelae church, while "congregation" refers to the audience of particular church services. This distinction corresponds roughly to the local contrast between *eeakaaleesia*, i.e. "initiated" communicants, and *kau lotu*, i.e. everyone who attends church services (see Goldsmith 1989).
4. During the service, a patrol of two or three members of the Congregation make a round of the village, stopping at the home of everyone who is not attending the service for a brief prayer. A list of the morning's absentees is read out at the end of the Sunday afternoon service, along with their alibi, and is listened to with great interest by the congregation. From an orthodox standpoint, this practice reinforces community cohesion and communicates to the individual that his or her presence is missed in church. From a heterodox perspective, however, the practice is highly intrusive and coercive.

5. The same word also denotes a genre of political and recreational oratory associated with secular settings, to which sermons bear many similarities, but which are not identical to sermons. It should be noted that the oratorical genre referred to as *lāuga* in Samoa, as described by Duranti (1984) and others, appears to differ significantly from Nukulaelae sermons and speeches.
6. Women's involvement in conducting religious services is changing rapidly, more so than their involvement in the political arena. During my last field sojourn, there were considerably more women preachers than during any of my previous field work.
7. Excerpts of transcripts and written materials quoted in this paper follow a phonemic orthography, in which double graphemes indicate geminated segments; geminated oral stops are heavily aspirated, and other geminated phonemes are articulated for a longer period of time than their ungeminated equivalents. The letter *g* represents a velar nasal stop, *l* is a central flap, and all other letters have their approximate IPA value. Transcripts of spoken discourse represent an unedited rendition of what is audible on tapes, including false starts, repairs, etc.; however, volume, tempo, and voice quality are not indicated. The orthography and punctuation of written discourse have been standardised to facilitate comprehension and comparability. Parentheses indicate conjectured or inaudible strings, [...] indicates that a string of words has been left out of the transcript, and material provided in square brackets in a translation represents additions for the sake of intelligibility which are not present in the original text. Key illustrative material is highlighted in bold. For transcripts of oral discourse, recording references (e.g. [sermons:P 1991:2:A:271-277]) are made up of the name of the tape (sermons:P 1991:2), the side of the tape (A), and tape-recorder counter references (271-277). References to written discourse excerpts (e.g. [sermons:P 1991:10]) consist of a file name (sermons:P 1991) followed by a page number (10).
8. One grammatical construction associated with definitions and qualifications is only found in sermonic and other religious discourse. It consists of an equational construction in which the order of topic and comment is reversed from the usual pattern. For example, *Tasi o tuulaga faigataa teinei, [...] ko te manavasee*, literally, 'One of [the most] difficult states this [is, that of] fear' (sermons:Ke 1991:9). In this construction, the qualification or definition is in a position of greater informational prominence than the reference of that which is qualified or defined, which highlights its textual importance. The stylistic specialisation of inversion makes it a clear index of the sermonic genre.
9. Scholars such as Goody (1977, 1987), Olson (1977), and Ong (1982), view the search for objectivity, clarity, and truth as being intrinsically and universally related to literacy (see Street and Besnier 1994 for discussion). However, in many ethnographic and historical contexts (e.g. Axtell 1987, Bledsoe and Robey 1986, Clanchy 1979, Probst 1989), literacy is associated with the opposite, namely secrecy, falsehood, and concealment. The social and epistemological associations of literacy are, thus, culture-specific and historically situated constructs that are constitutive of the sociocultural meaning of literacy. Literacy's privileged position in Nukulaelae's truth market should not be taken as a symptom of some transcend-

ent characteristic of literacy *per se*, but must be understood as a probable consequence of literacy's historical link to Christianity and religious authority (compare Kulick and Stroud 1990).

10. An apparent exception to this pattern is the cross-linguistically unusual use of dual pronouns as forms of respect in political and recreational oratory. In the course of a speech, dual pronouns can be used to refer to speakers or the group they represent, to addressees, and to third parties, whether the referent is a singular, dual, or plural entity. However, this pattern differs in several respects from the frequent occurrence of dual pronouns in sermons. Most saliently, only the first-person inclusive dual pronoun *taaua* occurs with any frequency in sermons, while in secular oratory all dual pronouns other than *taaua* appear as respect forms.
11. If a Nukulaelae Islander says *toku kaaiga* 'my kin group', the reference is understood to be limited to the speaker's spouse and children, rather than to an extended kin group. Even then, the expression *temaa kaaiga* 'our [dual] kin group', in which the pronoun refers to a couple, would be preferred.
12. Echoes of this state of affairs are also found in spirit mediumship sessions, which were extremely important in Nukulaelae's pre-Christian religion and still continue today despite being frowned upon by Christian authorities. In spirit mediumship, the voice of the spirit merges with that of the medium, as discussed further in Besnier (1992b). Whether a historical link should be established between sermons and spirit mediumship is an open question.
13. Even the authority of the Samoan pastors, whom Nukulaelae Islanders and Tuvaluans in general held in extreme reverence, was carefully controlled. The Samoan pastors were thought to perform their duty as long as they confined their authority to such matters as the imposition of prohibition and the surveillance of intimate details of people's lives (even though this authority was highly intrusive by modern Western standards). But when they attempted to engage in economic transactions or to control political process, Tuvaluan congregations would ask the church authorities who supervised the pastors from Samoa to remove them (cf. Chambers, Chambers, and Munro 1978, Goldsmith and Munro 1992).
14. The person in question had recently returned from overseas. It is common practice for the pastor to ask recently returned or visiting notables to conduct Sunday afternoon services. The practice is further evidence of the bracketed nature of the preacher's authority: recent returnees remain in a liminal state *vis-à-vis* the rest of the community until re-integration rituals are performed (e.g. a feast held in their honour, during which they present a gift to the community), and, under normal circumstances, the community can use this liminality to control symbolically their overt displays of authority.
15. Scholars of different theoretical persuasions (feminism, critical theory, social constructionism) have argued convincingly that, while individualism plays a pivotal role in Western ethnopsychological models, it does so in the context of a specific middle-class idealisation of self-reliant upward mobility (cf. di Leonardo 1991, Ehrenreich 1989, Ortner 1991, Sennett and Cobb 1972, and many others). In other words, the individualism attributed to Western personhood is of an ideolo-

gical construct, and its promotion to the status of key symbol of the West in anthropological thinking instantiates the tendency in anthropological writings to reify Western culture, a tendency which Carrier (1992) aptly terms "occidentalism."

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