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THE DEMISE OF THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING: SORCERY AND AMBITION ON NUKULAEALAE ATOLL

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Two ideological currents underlie political life on Nukulaelae Atoll (Polynesia): one that calls for a strong leadership structure and another that argues for egalitarianism. This paper focuses on the fate of one ambitious leader who fails to heed the community's egalitarian ideology and whose career is cut short by gossip alleging him to be a sorcerer. The analysis of a meeting in which this man attempts to deny the accusations shows that the ambiguous epistemological status of sorcery turns such accusations into particularly effective political tools. Public discourse colludes with offstage gossip to deny the accused the possibility of denying the allegations and transforms his attempt to do so into a degradation ceremony, through which his marginalization is further affirmed. Sorcery accusations have been described as either hierarchy-maintaining devices or weapons of resistance. On Nukulaelae, they help maintain a delicate tension between hierarchy and equality.

IN EARLY 1991, Iloopu,¹ a healthy-looking thirty-seven-year-old married man from Nukulaelae Atoll in Tuvalu (Western Polynesia), returned to his home atoll from the phosphate-rich Republic of Nauru, 1,500 kilometers northwest of Nukulaelae. Like many other citizens of Tuvalu, Iloopu had been employed as a laborer on a three-year renewable contract with the Nauru Phosphate Company (NPC), which provides one of the few sources of cash-generating employment to Nukulaelae and the rest of Tuvalu.² Unlike most Tuvaluan wage laborers, Iloopu returned from Nauru before the end of his contract; during a medical examination prompted by Iloopu's frequent physical discomfort, the NPC's medical staff found him to have malfunctioning kidneys. (The NPC's policy of returning contract workers with serious health problems to their home country is one of many scandalously exploitative labor practices, by international standards, directed at its non-Nauruan employees.)

Eight days after his return, Iloopu died. It is true that he had been diagnosed with kidney problems, but how could such a young man develop such problems

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all of a sudden? Such things do not happen so unexpectedly, thought his relatives and friends on Nukulaelae. While Nukulaelae Islanders do not invoke foul play as an explanation for all deaths, as members of many Melanesian societies do (see, e.g., Knauff 1985; Brison 1992), the specter of sorcery becomes conspicuous when death strikes suddenly or when its victims are in their prime. Slowly, things started falling into place, as news from the Nukulaelae community on Nauru began trickling in: there was talk of internal strife, of people not getting along, of power struggles, and of sorcery. Much of this talk centered around one individual, Paanapa, an ambitious member of the Nukulaelae community on Nauru who had served as its leader for several years and who was reported to have victimized potential rivals on Nauru, including Iopu. Swift action was needed; Nukulaelae's Council of Elders met and ordered Paanapa to resign from his job with the NPC and to return to Nukulaelae in disgrace.

This paper analyzes the events that led to and followed Paanapa's social demise and argues that the shape of these events illustrates fundamental ambiguities in Nukulaelae's political makeup.³ More specifically, I will show that, despite their overtly articulated idealization of a strong leadership structure and clear-cut hierarchy, Nukulaelae Islanders see powerful and ambitious leaders as a threat to social order. In the following discussion, I will analyze the transcript of a highly eventful Council of Elders' meeting which followed Paanapa's return to Nukulaelae, through which the ideological ambiguities that brought about Paanapa's downfall become evident. I will show that Paanapa was guilty, in Nukulaelae eyes, of loving power and prestige too much. Yet, because strong leadership is highly valued in some respects, he could not simply be disgraced for exerting authority. The solution was therefore to accuse him of sorcery. The cultural complexities of Nukulaelae beliefs in sorcery, which I will describe further on, make such an accusation a particularly powerful political tool.

The case on which this paper focuses falls squarely in a long tradition of anthropological inquiry into the politics of sorcery accusations and attributions, the importance of which has been demonstrated for many ethnographic settings (see, e.g., Basso 1969; Collier 1973; Douglas 1970; Favret-Saada 1980; Kluckhohn 1967; Lindenbaum 1979; Selby 1974; Stephen 1987; Zelenietz and Lindenbaum 1981).⁴ Sorcery accusations and gossip about them may affect the political order in various ways. In some cases, sorcery accusations and attributions can help preserve and maintain hierarchy and inequality (see, e.g., Brison 1992; Douglas 1991; Forge 1970; Malinowski 1926; Tonkinson 1981; Tuzin 1976). For example, among the Kwanga of the Sepik region, high-status men use innuendo and veiled allusions of sorcery to reinforce their authority over the less powerful, since knowledge of sorcery is associated with power and authority (Brison 1992:47-77). In other cases, sorcery accusations emerge as "weapons of the weak" (Scott 1985), i.e., as counterhegemonic tools which, in the hands of the disadvantaged, can undermine or alter the existing sociopolitical order, and which do so in offstage arenas of social life (see, e.g., Jackson 1989; Lederman 1981). Accusing someone of sorcery can also be a

reaction to older forms of power and authority that persist inappropriately in the face of social change (see, e.g., Fisiy and Gershiere 1991; Gershiere 1988; Rodman 1993 this issue). Thus, rather than reproducing the status quo, these sorcery accusations call for change, which can in turn lead to new forms of inequality. Alternatively, in societies with egalitarian tendencies, accusing someone of engaging in sorcery is one way in which followers can keep in check or eliminate completely the overassertiveness and authoritarianism of leaders or would-be leaders (see, e.g., Ardener 1970; Bleek 1976; Douglas 1963; Knauff 1985; Rowlands and Warnier 1988). Thus sorcery accusations can function as a leveling mechanism with which followers exert some forms of domination over their leaders (Boehm 1993) or at least resist their authority when the latter is perceived to be excessive.

My analysis of the events I describe here differs from previous accounts of the politics of sorcery accusations in that, in the Nukulaelae case, sorcery is invoked both to destroy the career of a powerful leader with ambitions to surpass others and to ensure the reproduction of already-existing structures of power and authority. Thus the sorcery accusations have the effect of leveling structures of inequality and furthering egalitarianism on the one hand and of reproducing hierarchy on the other. I will argue here that these complexities and apparent contradictions result from both the systemic ambiguities that characterize Nukulaelae political ideology and the epistemologically complex role that sorcery plays in Nukulaelae culture. Because of these complexities, the successful exploitation of a sorcery accusation for political purposes on Nukulaelae presupposes the simultaneous orchestration of onstage political action, best illustrated by the political meeting I will analyze in detail here, with the offstage manipulation of information through gossip. It also pitches together elements of Christian doctrine (part of the "cover story" of Nukulaelae culture) and elements of a local belief system which in other circumstances is viewed as antithetical to Christianity.

TWO COMMUNITIES

Understanding the events described in this paper presupposes some background on the social and political relationships between two communities: Nukulaelae Atoll and its subsidiary community in temporary residence on Nauru. I must preface my brief description of these two communities by stating that I have no firsthand acquaintance with the Nukulaelae community on Nauru; my understanding of it rests solely on observations and interviews recorded on Nukulaelae.

Nukulaelae is a very small, relatively isolated community which, like the rest of Tuvalu, is currently undergoing a great deal of change. The 350 residents of the atoll are for the most part monolingual speakers of the Nukulaelae dialect of Tuvaluan, a Polynesian language historically affiliated to the Polynesian Outlier languages spoken in Polynesian enclaves in Melanesia and Micronesia. Nukulaelae was first sighted by Westerners in 1821, but significant contacts

were rare until the latter part of the nineteenth century. The atoll underwent traumatic transformations between the 1860s and the 1890s, the most important being a raid by Peruvian blackbirders, who made off with 70 to 80 percent of the population in 1863. (All victims of this raid quickly perished abroad without returning to their home atoll.) Around the same time, Nukulaelae Islanders converted to Christianity and abandoned many aspects of the former social order and culture in the process. As a result, very little is known about Nukulaelae society prior to the intensification of contact with the outside world in the second half of the nineteenth century. The contemporary inhabitants of Nukulaelae organize themselves in approximately sixty-five households (*fale*) which together comprise about thirty landholding groups of kin (*pui kaaiga*). Both of these organizational units vary widely in composition and size across time and space, a symptom of the overall malleability of the atoll's social organization.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, the atoll has been under the political leadership of a Council of Elders (*taupulega*) headed by an elected chief (*ulu fenua*). The exact function of the council and the chief and the extent of their authority are hotly contested topics, which I have described elsewhere (Besnier n.d.a). Briefly, much of the controversy surrounding leadership and authority on the atoll can be traced to the complexities of its inhabitants' political ideology. Two broad strands can be discerned in the Nukulaelae prescriptive schema for political organization. On the one hand, one finds a yearning for an ironfisted leadership which, when it operates legitimately, brings *manuia* "prosperity, fortune," *gali* "beauty," and *fileemu* "peace, quiet" to the community. This ideology, which echoes many of the common themes encountered elsewhere in Polynesia (cf. Marcus 1989), is thought by contemporary Nukulaelae Islanders to have characterized the community in *aso taumua* "the days bygone," when the chief's authority over the atoll was never challenged. This *discourse of nostalgia* (Besnier n.d.a) is at the root of the reestablishment, in the early 1980s, of a "traditional" chiefly structure, comparable to the invention of tradition witnessed in many other parts of the Pacific (see, e.g., White 1992).

Yet there are simply too many ideological factors that argue against the full actualization of what Nukulaelae's yearning for the chieftainship of "days bygone" calls for. Indeed, 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. In this discourse, the possibility of one individual effectively engaging in meaningful political action is limited. Not surprisingly, the *discourse of egalitarianism* is most explicitly articulated in offstage, private contexts, echoing comparable dynamics reported even of hierarchy-conscious Polynesian societies like Samoa (Shore n.d.). Where Nukulaelae differs from better-documented cases in the region is the extent to which the discourse of egalitarianism surfaces in onstage social contexts and in the power that it has in sabotaging front-end political action. The events described in this paper provide a vivid illustration of such sabotage.

The resulting ideological schema presents severe problems for political action in that it leaves little basis for the successful exercise of authority. When an ambitious leader emerges and is promoted to the chieftainship, events always seem to conspire to bring him down to his knees.⁵ Power and status are thus painfully temporary and as such are not very desirable in the eyes of the wise. At the time of the events reported in this paper, Nukulaelae's Council of Elders was headed by a chief whom many judged to be particularly inept and oafish and whose words and deeds often were the subject of ridicule in private contexts. I have argued elsewhere that the election of this man to the chieftainship is a functional answer to the ideological contradictions surrounding leadership (Besnier n.d.a). By choosing this individual, Nukulaelae people could ensure that leadership was constantly subverted while the appearances of a highly stratified political structure were maintained. As will be seen later in this paper, Nukulaelae Islanders find powerful persons in positions of authority highly threatening.

The second community involved in the events described presently is a non-permanent, nonautonomous group of Nukulaelae Islanders in temporary residence on Nauru, whose members each spend a few years working for the NPC and are expected to return to Nukulaelae (or at least to Tuvalu) at the end of their term. Nukulaelae people on Nauru organize themselves as a minicommunity, which includes principally able-bodied young men, but also a number of married couples and their children, since the NPC allows workers of a certain seniority to bring along their spouses and two children to Nauru. This community of a dozen or two individuals is a miniature replica of the *fenua* "atoll community" back home: its members frequently hold feasts and dance performances together, sponsor a soccer team, and form a natural unit for socializing activities. Most importantly, the Nukulaelae community on Nauru stages fund drives, during which significant sums of money are gathered to be sent back to Nukulaelae to fund development endeavors and other communal activities. Indeed, the very purpose of Nukulaelae people being on Nauru is to procure cash for the *fenua*, for their kin groups, and for themselves. Nukulaelae people on Nauru are frequently under enormous pressure to hand over the fruits of their labor to relatives and to the atoll community and often express their discontent about the dearth of gratitude they receive in return. This is evident in the often pleading and sometimes bitter tone of letters home:⁶

My contribution to the atoll community is done, [and] now what's left is the gift [to the pastor], and I have not made my contribution to the church yet. I'll do that at the end of May. . . . I can't even keep up with money matters any more. My mind is hurting just to think about it all. The contribution we [each] have to make is greater than my own salary. So I wish I could just run away from here and return home. But despite that, here I am, applying myself to my work. If I don't send you soon the dinghy propeller and the fishing lures [that you've requested], it's

probably because I don't have enough money in my hands to buy them. (Letters 1985:558)

So some members of our atoll community go on living in peace, while here is the rest of us [on Nauru] killing ourselves providing for the atoll community's projects. We should not be called [Nukulaelae's] sons on Nauru. . . . And then when we reach land on our atoll for holidays, no one wants to pay any attention to us. They pay attention only to their own children. (Letters 1985:537)

In short, the Nukulaelae contingent on Nauru is crucially important to the economic viability of the atoll, and this importance places it under tremendous pressure. As it is hurtling headlong into a cash-based economy through increased dependency on imported food, imported house-building materials, and gas-guzzling outboard motors, Nukulaelae is fast becoming desperately cash-hungry. Until the late 1980s, workers on Nauru provided most of the financing for community projects (e.g., the construction of seawalls, of a new meeting house, etc.) and were quite literally the "hope" (*fakamoemoega*) of the atoll community.⁷

. . . tamaliki Nukulaelae i Naaluu, e *fakamoemoegina* kkii nee te fenua mo ttaupulega i mea fai a te fenua i feituu tau sene, e *fakamoemoegia* kkii a tamaliki i Naaluu e lasi telotou fesoasoani ki te fenua ki mea tau sene. (F 1991:1:A:178–182)

. . . Nukulaelae's sons on Nauru are the atoll community's and the Council of Elders' very *hopes* for the community's plans that involve money, the sons on Nauru are the very *hopes* because of their important assistance to the community with respect to money.

At the head of the Nukulaelae community on Nauru is a *toeaina* "elder," which the Nukulaelae Council of Elders chooses among the workers employed by the NPC. In charge of fund raising to meet Nukulaelae's needs and demands, in control of law and order for the Nukulaelae community on Nauru, and as the link between this community, other Tuvaluan communities in Nauru, and the Nauru Government (including the NPC), the *toeaina* occupies a position of high responsibility, power, and prestige. When they return to Nukulaelae at the end of their contract, former *toeaina* commonly can claim a loud voice in the political life of the atoll, which is further underlined by the comparatively substantial financial wealth they are often able to accumulate as cash-earning workers on Nauru. In short, the Nukulaelae community on Nauru serves as a training ground for Nukulaelae leadership.

PAANAPA IS ACCUSED OF SORCERY

No one was as aware of the importance of his own position as *toeaina* of the Nukulaelae community on Nauru as Paanapa. A former policeman with the

Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony and, after separation and independence, with the Government of Tuvalu, Paanapa brought with him to Nauru a glamorous past. (Many former colonial policemen now occupy important positions in Tuvaluan politics and civil service.) In particular, Paanapa's thirty-odd years of employment as a policeman over a period of time when such opportunities were only open to a relatively few lucky individuals gave him a clear economic lead over most other islanders. A physically imposing man, allegedly a rather vain and boisterous womanizer, an infamous liar and braggart, Paanapa was a natural target of the envy, jealousy, and venomous gossip mongering that Nukulaelae Islanders are famous for in the Tuvalu group. In short, Paanapa was not liked, and his friends and supporters were few and far between. Paanapa also had the bad fortune of having very few kindred amongst the *sina o te fenua* "elders [literally, white-hair] of the atoll community." Yet his experience, age, and economic well-being made him a good candidate for the position of *toeaina* on Nauru and, eventually, for the Nukulaelae chieftainship.

One day, Paanapa was spotted at one extreme end of Nauru, standing over one of the many abandoned phosphate quarries and allegedly flaying his arms about, whereupon a large red cloud appeared and enveloped him. The sensational news spread quickly through the Tuvaluan community on Nauru and, before long, reached Nukulaelae: Paanapa was dabbling in sorcery, since weather phenomena like sudden clouds are evidence of the activities of spirits, which enable sorcery.

The sorcery accusations leveled at Paanapa must be understood in the context of the cultural meaning of sorcery for Nukulaelae Islanders.⁸ Briefly, Nukulaelae Islanders define sorcery as the harnessing of the power of spirits (*agaaga*). While the nature of spirits and of their actions is ill understood and controversial, it is generally agreed that their principal function is to enable the work of human sorcerers. There is a continuum between "local" medical practices and sorcery performed for malevolent ends, with the moral value of the practitioner's intentions, rather than the means employed, being the distinguishing factor. As is common cross-culturally (cf. Malinowski 1961 and many others), the same term refers to both curing and sorcery: *vai laakau*, literally, "liquid [or water or juice] of vegetable substance." Medical practitioners are thought to be capable of performing both curing and sorcery, although moral rectitude and adherence to Christian doctrine restrain most from engaging in the latter. The principal tools of sorcery and curing are concoctions of vegetable ingredients, usually infusions of herbs, barks, and coconut oil, commonly referred to as *fagu* "bottle," short for *fagu vai laakau* "bottle of liquid of vegetable substance." *Vai laakau* can be used for a whole panoply of purposes: killing opponents and enemies, increasing one's success in fishing, increasing one's erotic success with persons of the opposite gender, prescience and divination, and making soccer teams from one's home island win in Tuvalu's national tournaments. There is constant gossip about who possesses a *fagu*, although no one admits to having one, and bottles are covertly transmitted from one generation to the next.

Beyond these basic observations, Nukulaelae Islanders' relationship with sorcery and sorcery-enabling spirits becomes very complex. First, Nukulaelae discourse about the existence, importance, and relevance of sorcery practices and spirits is shifting and full of contradictions. For example, Nukulaelae Islanders' dramatic narratives of sorcery and encounters with spirits often conclude with disclaimers of belief in sorcery and spirits, and these contradictions cannot simply be ascribed to context shifts. Rather, they must be understood as evidence of the ambivalence, uncertainty, and multivocality of Nukulaelae models of sorcery and related categories. There is strong pressure to underplay the importance and relevance of sorcery, pressure stemming from Christian discourse, the discourse of government, and other forms of public authority. Yet there is also strong evidence of the efficacy of sorcery, and the heteroglossia that derives from these mutually contradictory forces is constitutive of the cultural meaning of Nukulaelae sorcery. Paanapa's story, as I will show presently, offers a striking example of the implications that this chorus of contradictions can have.

As time went on, the Nukulaelae community on Nauru began to unravel the details of Paanapa's actions. Several facts converged to "prove" (*fakamaaonia*, *fakatalitonu*) the veracity of the sorcery accusation. First, as is common practice, a spirit medium was consulted on Nauru, a woman from the Tuvaluan island of Niutao.⁹ During her trance, she confirmed that Paanapa's sorcery was aimed at two kin groups, headed by Naakala and Iloopu, both potential contenders for Paanapa's position of *toeaina*:

Ne fakallee i Naaluu, nee? Kae faipati nee ia a te mea teenaa, ia Iloopu mo tena kaaiga e ttaa nee Paanapa, fakavaiakau nee Paanapa, mo Naakala mo tena kaaiga foki e ttaa nee Paanapa. Teenaa te mea . . . e *fakatalitonu* nee laatou a-, te faine teenaa ne fakallee, faipati mai loo peenaa i- ia Iloopu mo Naakala mo tena kaa- mo laa kaaiga ne- e fakavaiakau nee Paanapa. (F 1991:2:A:109–120)

[She] made [the spirit] speak on Nauru, right? And [she] said that Iloopu and his relatives are being killed by Paanapa, ensorcelled by Paanapa, and Naakala and his kin group are also being killed by Paanapa. That's what . . . *proved* to them that the-, that woman through which [the spirit] spoke said that Iloopu and Naakala and his- and their kin groups were being ensorcelled by Paanapa.

This was confirmed by another spirit medium on Funafuti, Suunema, whom several people from Nukulaelae went to consult; more will be said about Suunema later.¹⁰ Second, the accusations were already grounded in suspicions, held by many, that Paanapa was the owner of a fagu, which several claimed to have seen; witness the following testimony:

I, for one, have seen with my own eyes Paanapa's sorcery bottle. But I don't know what's its status these days, where Paanapa's sorcery bottle

is that bears witness. . . . I just don't know where Paanapa's sorcery potions are, but Paanapa is someone, I believe and have proof of, who was acquainted with those things, who knew how to do these things. . . . I saw it once, when my wife got sick, and she was treated by Tauseke. She was treated by Tauseke and Paanapa, who came with a bottle of sorcery potion. A bottle like this. They treated my wife's sickness with it. (F 1991:2:A:277–290)

Finally, and most damning, both Iloopu and the wife of Paanapa's other alleged victim were constantly sick around the time of the accusations:

. . . te aavaga a Naakala e ssoko loo te masaki i Naaluu, nee?, kee oko foki kia Ioosefa. E ssoko loo te- te masaki, nee? Ia, teelaa laa, kee oko mai loo ki ttaimi teenei, teelaa koo- koo galo nei a Ioosefa mo te-, te masakimaiiga loo mai Naaluu, masaki masaki masaki, oko mai ki Nukulaelae nei, ne masaki, mea loo koo- koo mate, nee? Aati laa teenaa te suaa feittuu peelaa e tai *fakatalitonu* atu ei ki te moolimau teelaa, moi ne fai e- e ola nei a Ioosefa, aati, peelaa, see *fakatalitonugia* te aa?, a te- te mau a laatou teelaa mai koo, nee? Ia, kae nei, peelaa, kaa maafaufau atu taatou ki- ki te fakallee a te faine teelaa, fai mai, me ttaa nee Paanapa, fakavaiakau nee Paanapa, ka koo mafai foki nee taatou o tai *fakatalitonu*, me ia Ioosefa nei, koo seeai nei, nee?, koo oti ne mate. (F 1991:2:A:127–143)

Naakala's wife kept getting sick on Nauru, see?, and Iloopu as well. He kept getting sick, see? So, even now, now that Iloopu has- has died of the-, when he got sick all the way back on Nauru, he was sick [and] was sick [and] was sick, [then] arrived here on Nukulaelae, he was sick, and then he died, right? Perhaps that's another thing that *proves* that account, [because] had Iloopu survived, perhaps, like, the- the- the explanation they developed over there would not have been *proved*, right? But now, if we think about what- what the woman said during her spirit mediumship, she said, Paanapa killed him, Paanapa ensorcelled him, so now it's been *proved* for us, because Iloopu has now disappeared, see?, he's dead.

Iloopu's sudden death was the final straw; along with Paanapa's actions in a deserted corner of Nauru, the spirits mediums' pronouncements, and the recurrent ill-health of several of his suspected victims, it proved beyond doubt that Paanapa engaged in malevolent and lethal *vai laakau*. Gossip of it spread like wildfire in the Nukulaelae community on Nauru and before long reached Nukulaelae.

These accusations occurred in the context of several other incidents, in which the behavior of Paanapa and his family provoked the wrath and disapproval of the Nukulaelae community on Nauru. First and foremost, the arrogance (*fia maualuga*, literally, "having pretensions of being higher up") that Paanapa and his family had been exhibiting appeared to know no bounds. What

was to become the most oft-quoted example of it concerned his wife: during one of the many quarrels pitting her against Nukulaelae women on Nauru (their identity was never made explicit in gossip), she was heard to declare in public that she and her husband were the *tupu* "king" or *aliki* "chief" of Nukulaelae (the various versions of the story differ as to what term was actually used).¹¹ This statement, always presented as having been made on the Nukulaelae community's *malae* "public green," a location of some significance, is a claim to genealogical descent from the historical holders of the Nukulaelae chieftainship, rather than a direct challenge to the current holder of the chieftainship, since the latter is never referred to as *tupu* and rarely referred to as *aliki*. However, it is a very serious challenge, because it invokes a genealogically based legitimacy which is usually tiptoed around in the reinvented chiefly system. The same claims were heard from Paanapa's adult daughter, married to a Nauruan, who was as quarrelsome as her mother. These various statements were all symptoms of the boundless ambition of Paanapa and his family, which Nukulaelae people found socially inappropriate, scandalous, and un-Christian.

Second, Paanapa's wife was alleged to treat young unmarried Nukulaelae men on Nauru poorly, in direct conflict with the expectation that she, as the spouse of the leader, serve as a surrogate parent; the example of this most frequently cited in gossip was her refusal to allow these young men to come and eat with her family, an action of symbolic significance. Third, Paanapa was accused of favoring (*faapito*) his own son Fitolalo over other young men in the community, by looking after his welfare on the job and neglecting to represent the interests of others. Finally, Paanapa's son frequently acted in an intolerable manner, but Paanapa made no evident attempt to discipline him. In particular, on one occasion, Fitolalo came to a feast drunk, ate from the young men's communal tray, and vomited the food back into the tray, a particularly ignoble act in the context of the mild pollution taboos surrounding food in Nukulaelae culture. Paanapa was alleged to have ignored his son's behavior. Underlying these various vignettes, one finds a common theme: members of Paanapa's family were abusing the power and status associated with his position as *toeaina* of the community and also did not fulfill obligations associated with positions of leadership by failing to provide for the community and by placing their own interests and ambitions ahead of other people's. In short, the problem was one of abuse of power.

The sorcery accusations and the alleged abuses of power articulate with one another in a complex and ambiguous fashion. Unlike members of certain other Pacific societies (see, e.g., Brison 1992), contemporary Nukulaelae people view sorcery as the antithesis of leadership and power. Leaders should be models of Christianity, modernity, and enlightenment. They ideally exert some control over nature through their *mmāna* (Besnier n.d.a), but this control is not mediated by spirits and does not require the aid of sorcery bottles. Sorcery undermines the community's mutual trust and spirit of togetherness, which proper leadership should strive to nurture. So the sorcery accusations against Paanapa were in line with other allegations leveled at him.

However, the sorcery accusations played a particularly important role in the overall situation. First, they were the only allegation of misconduct directed at Paanapa himself, rather than at a member of his family. While keeping one's family under control is a prerequisite for leadership, the failure to exert such control is not as serious as one's own breaches in conduct. Furthermore, in all discussions of Paanapa's actions, sorcery is invariably centralized as his most scandalous and dangerous behavior. It is one thing to be a poor leader and to be surrounded by an unmanageable family, but quite another to be a murderer, since murder by sorcery is morally on par with murder *tout court*. As one Nukulaelae respondent asserted, fear of Paanapa's sorcery subsumes the general discontent with his other reprehensible actions:

. . . [Nukulaelae] people on Nauru are afraid, . . . people are afraid of sorcery. That's the simple reason. As for me, when I start to think about sorcery, I can't think how you-, why, is a spirit going to come and throttle you while you're just sitting around like this? Because spirits are afraid of people. And they grope around, [saying] that Paanapa does this, Paanapa does this [and] does this, but the real reason, they are afraid of Paanapa's sorcery. (N 1991:1:A:567-571)

Later, Paanapa himself will argue publicly that, underlying all other allegations, lie the sorcery accusations:

Ne lafo peenei nee au te pati ki luga i te faanau a taatou mai koo, "Au e faipati ttonu atu, a te mea teenei ne tupu ki luga i toku faapito kia Fitolalo, e see fia maaina loo koe i ei, ona loo ko te mea teenaa e nofo mo koe, ia Paanapa e fai vai laakau, ia Paanapa e fai vai laakau." (Fono Taupulega 1991:1:B:533-535)

I said the following to our sons over there [on Nauru], "I am speaking straight to you, what really happened [that you interpret as] my having favored [my son] Fitolalo, you don't want to try to understand, because all you can think about is that Paanapa is a sorcerer, that Paanapa is a sorcerer."

It is the sorcery accusations that would later prove to be the most difficult for Paanapa to defend himself against.

In April 1991, members of the Nukulaelae community on Nauru sent two telegrams to Nukulaelae's Council of Elders, the second more forceful than the first, outlining the various allegations against Paanapa and asking the council to order Paanapa to resign from his post with the NPC, to give up his leadership of the Nukulaelae community on Nauru, and to return home. The second telegram stipulated that, if the Council of Elders did not comply with their request, all members of the Nukulaelae community on Nauru would return home. The blackmail was effective and left the Council of Elders little choice. Paanapa was forced to resign and returned to Nukulaelae in June 1991. His

disgrace was complete: he had lost his job on Nauru, with little hope of ever getting another salaried job again; he was of course no longer the *toeaina* of the Nukulaelae community on Nauru; and he was widely held to be a sorcerer. His ostracism was even enforced by his own kindred, some of whom refused to greet him upon his return. The following is his own description of how he was met by his *tuagaene* "classificatory sister" (FFZSD) on Funafuti:

Ia, fanatu au, e sagasaga mai ko toku tuagaene teenaa ko Oolepa. Fakataalofa fakataalofa fakataalofa kia Oolepa, muna a Oolepa ia ia e tapu kkii e fakataalofa ki au, me se aa te maumea o loopu ne fano ei au o fakavaiakau loopu. (Fono Taupulega 1991:2:A:440–442)

So, I come along, [and find] my classificatory sister Oolepa sitting down. I greeted [and] greeted [and] greeted Oolepa, [but] Oolepa says that she absolutely won't greet me, [asking me] on account of what wealth of loopu I had gone out and performed sorcery on loopu.

Paanapa will later bear witness to the agony (*loto mmae*) that he was subjected to, alluding to the accusations as shackles around his ankles and praying to God that he be given the fortitude to bear the pain of his thorough marginalization:

. . . au e manako ki te seni teenei i oku vae, mo te seni teenei i vae o taku faanau, kee ttoo keaattea. (Fono Taupulega 1991:1:B:411–412)

. . . I want these shackles around my ankles, and these shackles around my children's ankles, to come away.

Au (n)e tuku taalosaga nee au ki te Atua, kee maua nee au o onosai, kee maua nee toku kaaiga o onosai. (Fono Taupulega 1991:1:B:550–551)

I gave my prayers to God so that I'd have the fortitude, so that my family would have the fortitude [to endure it all].

THE COUNCIL OF ELDERS MEETING

Upon his return to Nukulaelae, Paanapa requested that a special meeting of the Council of Elders be held to enable him to defend his honor and salvage what little was left of his reputation. It is significant that Paanapa did not attempt to seek redress through the court system. Like the Longanans of Ambae (Rodman 1983, 1993 this issue), Nukulaelae people strive to keep a healthy distance between sorcery matters and postcolonial legal institutions. The latter, they believe, give little credence to sorcery, because it is antithetical to enlightenment and modernity, of which governmental law is a prime example. Indeed, a number of attempts by Tuvaluans from other islands of the group to bring issues of sorcery to court in preceding years helped confirm the futility and danger of pitching sorcery against the power of modernity. Paanapa thus knew well that, if issues of sorcery were to be brought out for public scrutiny at all, it should be done in a more local forum like the atoll's Council of Elders.

However, what transpired from this dramatic meeting, which I was fortunate to attend armed with a tape recorder and the council's permission to record the proceedings, is that talk of sorcery does not fare well there either.

The meeting was scheduled at short notice and took place right after a community feast held to welcome the returnees. Paanapa had requested that the entire atoll community be allowed to stay on after the feast to attend the meeting, an unusual occurrence since only council members normally partake in council meetings. Riveted by history being made in front of its eyes, expecting (and hoping for) the worst, the atoll community played the role of a Greek chorus, murmuring disapprovingly or holding its collective breath at particularly dramatic moments.

The meeting first dealt with a couple of routine matters. An hour and a half into the meeting, the chief announced, almost as an afterthought, "Let us turn to the matter that was brought up to our attention by our son who has something to say, this opportunity is now open to him." Getting up to his feet to heighten the importance of the occasion,¹² Paanapa began by asking the Council of Elders for an explanation for his disgrace. The chief answered as follows:

Ia, e fakailoa atu nee au, ee Paanapa, kiaa koe, a te aumai o koe nee ttaupulega, e seeai se vaa maasei o koe mo ttaupulega i konei. A te vaa maasei, (e) ia koutou loo i Naaluu. A ko te mea teelaa ne fakatoka nee ttaupulega, ko te llei- te *nmofo llei* o ana taagata. Teelaa ne avatu ei tena uaelesi, kee fakamolemole, kee tuku aka koe kee vau. (Fono Taupulega 1991:1:B:404–405)

All right, I am making known to you, Paanapa, that you have been brought back by the Council of Elders, but that there are no bad feelings between you and this council. The bad feelings are between you all over there on Nauru. What the council decided was meant to keep the *peace* between men. That's why it sent a telegram to the effect that you should please come home.

The theme underlying the chief's initial answer will surface time and again in the meeting: the council had no choice but to act as it did to keep the peace (*fiileemuu* "peace," *nofo llei* "stay well") among members of the Nukulaelae community on Nauru. The council members also stressed that the Nukulaelae community's threat to leave Nauru had left them little choice:

. . . te mea fua teelaa ne saga ei taatou kia Paanapa, kae teenei eiloa Paanapa e fakalogologo, fakamunaaga- koo lua taimi ne aumai te fakamunaaga nee faanau a taatou i koo, "Kaafai e see fai nee koutou se faiga kia Paanapa kee avatu, a maatou kaa olo katoa atu." (Fono Taupulega 1991:2:A:159–163)

. . . the only reason why we took notice of Paanapa, here you are Paanapa listening to this, were reports- our sons over there [on Nauru] sent us reports on two occasions [saying], "If you don't order Paanapa to come home, we'll all come home."

The Council of Elders could not afford, literally, to ignore the telegrams.

Paanapa then delivered several speeches in succession, arguing that the charges brought against him were all untrue. He began with allegations other than the sorcery accusations, denying, for instance, reports of the belligerence and arrogance imputed to his wife, Seeluta:

Faipati ttonu atu au peenei, te mmalu o te fenua i konei, seeai eeloo se fafine ne taua mo taku aavaga i (taku)- maa nnofooga i Naaluu. Seeai, seeai eeloo se fafine ne taua mo taku aavaga, maa nnofooga i Naaluu. Seeai, seeai. E seeai ne pati a Seeluta ne fai peelaa iaa ia se aliki. Seeai, seeai. (Fono Taupulega 1991:1:B:551–554)

I am speaking straight to you, with due respect to this atoll community, my wife didn't fight with any woman while we were on Nauru. My wife didn't fight with a single woman while (I)- we were on Nauru. There is no such thing, there is no such thing. Seeluta never said anything about her being a chief. There is no such thing, there is no such thing.

In the course of his lengthy deliveries, Paanapa used a wide range of persuasive strategies. At times, his performance consisted of hyperemotional displays of pain, vulnerability, and humility, complete with sobs, breaking voice, and trembling:

I au se faanau fua. A kaa sutesue koe ki luga- ki luga i au, toku tupumaiiga, au ne tupu mai fua i ika, mo aa?, mo niu. Kae kilo atu au ki luga i tauvau, see aamanaia [*voice breaking*] au nee koe i au ne (ave nee koe). Teelaa ne oko ifo ki luga i au, faipati ttonu atu peenei ki luga iaa koe ttaupulega, toku fakaalofa mo toku kaaiga see fakattau eeloo. (Fono Taupulega 1991:1:B:564–568)

I am just a son [of the community]. If one inquires who- who I am, how I grew up, I simply grew up on fish and- and coconuts. And then I look at how I came back, I am not appreciated [*voice breaking*] by you (who sent me away) [to work]. This is what has occurred to me, I am speaking straight to you, the Council of Elders, there are no bounds to the pitiful state that I and my family are in.¹³

At other times, Paanapa made rather pointed accusations, in a tone of voice which betrayed his anger and frustration. For instance, he dramatically confronted the chief Tito and another elder, Faamalama. These confrontations drew disapproving murmurs from the audience and yielded the following dramatic exchange:

Paanapa: Ttaimi ne nnofo ei koulua i Funaafuti, ne lagona nee au ki oku taliga, e isi se tino- se tino ne faipati atu peenei ki Naaluu- i Naaluu, “Koo fai foki aamioga a Paanapa ne fai i konei?” Fakamolemole, kooi laa ttino ia koulua teenaa

ne faipati i koo? Ne faipati atu ki Fu- ki- ki Naaluu, mo kooi ia koulua ne faipati atu ki koo? Kaafai e- e fakafiti koulua, kaafai seeai, toku toe taimi nei e tuu atu ei au. (Fakatoetoega) [*sobbing*]

Tito: [*interrupts*] Paanapa, fakamolemole, koe koi fano koe i konaa, nee? Au fua e fia iloa nee au mo ko ia ttino teenaa ne fakasae aka nee ia toku igoa i koo?

Paanapa: Te faituu teelaa. Faituu teelaa.

Tito: Aa, ikaai, au seki faipati eeloo i se telefoni ki Naaluu. E see iloa nee au a faituu konaa.

Paanapa: Au e fakafetai. [*turning to Faamalama*] Te ssuga a Faamalama, tou mmalu! E isi se pati peelaa ne lafo atu nee koe i loto i ttelefoni e peelaa?

Faamalama: Ee, Paanapa, kae mmalu a te fenua! Ia, kae koo fia iloa nee koe te faituu teelaa, au e aamene au ki ttou Tamana teenei i te lagi, seei saku faipatiiga i ttelefoni ne fai ei nee au se faituu peenaa. (Fono Taupulega 1991:1:B:573–582)

Paanapa: When the two of you were on Funafuti, I heard with my own ears, someone- someone said the following to [someone on] Nauru, “So Paanapa is again doing what he used to do here?” Please, who said that? Someone said that to- Fu- to- [someone on] Nauru, so which of the two of you said that? If you deny it, if there is no such thing, this is the last time I ask you about it. (Shorten) [*sobbing*]

Tito: [*interrupts*] Paanapa, please, you are still harping on this, are you? I just want to know who involved my name in this?

Paanapa: This matter. This matter.

Tito: Ah, no, I never spoke over any telephone to Nauru. I know nothing about this matter.

Paanapa: I thank you. [*turning to Faamalama*] Faamalama, your respected honor! Did you ever throw such words over the telephone?

Faamalama: Paanapa, with due respect to the atoll community! So since you want to know about this matter, I say amen to our Father in Heaven, I never said any such thing over the telephone.

Finally, Paanapa turned to what everyone was waiting for, the sorcery accusations. Opening his remarks by apologizing profusely to the atoll community for bringing up such an inappropriate topic in a public context, Paanapa went on to deny the accusations. As the emotional tension increased, he announced dramatically that he was about to show the atoll community the sorcery bottle he had taken with him to Nauru. As a dead hush fell over the audience, he

picked up a lady's handbag at his feet and, searching it long enough to maximize the suspense, pulled out of it a Bible, which he opened and kissed three times:

Te mmalu o ttaupulega, e teenei te fagu ne fano mo au ki- ki Naaluu. Faipati ttonu atu nee au, teenei te fagu ne fano mo au ki taku gaaluega ki Naaluu. [*takes Bible out of handbag, audience falls dead silent*] Te mmalu o ttaupulega! Au e faipati ttonu i loto i ttaupulega, te mmalu o laaua konei e sagassaga mai. Au ko Paanapa! Au e faipati ttonu ki mua o te Atua e tapu! Au e ssogi fakatolu ki ttusi tapu! E see iloa nee au o fai vai laakau! [*kisses open Bible three times*] (Fono Taupulega 1991:1:B:586–591)

Due respect to the Council of Elders, this is the [sorcery] bottle I took with me to Nauru. I am speaking straight to you, this is the [sorcery] bottle I took with me to Nauru. [*takes Bible out of handbag, audience falls dead silent*] Due respect to the Council of Elders! I am speaking straight to the Council of Elders, due respect to those sitting facing me. My name is Paanapa! I am speaking straight before the Almighty God! I am kissing the Bible three times! I do not know how to do sorcery! [*kisses open Bible three times*]

Almost as dramatic was his narrative, further along in the meeting, of his confrontation with several of the individuals primarily responsible for spreading rumors about his being a sorcerer. Among these figures was Suunema, the Funafuti spirit medium who had confirmed that Paanapa had caused Iopu's death and the deaths of several others. While waiting on Funafuti for the monthly ship to Nukulaelae, Paanapa wrote a letter to Suunema, a copy of which he read out in the meeting; the following are highlights:

"I loto laa i taku tusi teenei, koo fakailoa atu ei kiaa koe, iaa koe kaa ave nee au ki te fono. . . . Me i tala ne fai nee koe, koo oko ei ki au mo toku kaaiga te mmafa, mo te inoino mai o tino ki au mo te kaaiga katoa. Teenaa foki loa te auala ne fakafoki mai ei au mai Naaluu. Teenei laa, tou avanoaga kee vau koe o fakatoose mai ki au, kae fai mai foki nee koe ki au peenei, i tau tala ne fai se tala ppelo fua. . . . Kaafai laa see fai tau- tou avanoaga teenaa . . . teelaa kaa tagi ei au ki te fono, kee ttogi mai nee koe ki au, e tolu afe taalaa." (Fono Taupulega 1991:2:A:418–447)

"In this letter, I am informing you that I am intending to take you to court. . . . Because the stories you fabricated weigh very heavily on me and my family, and people are showing their disgust towards me and my family. It is also the reason why I was recalled from Nauru. So you have the opportunity to come and apologize, and to tell me that the story you fabricated is only a lie. . . . If you do not take this opportunity, . . . I will ask in court that you pay me three thousand dollars." [*audience gasps audibly, general murmur*]¹⁴

At stake in the meeting was Paanapa's integrity and credibility. Symptomatic of this concern was his repeated insistence that he was "speaking straight" (*faipati ttonu*): in the course of the hour and fifteen minutes of deliberations (during which many members of the council spoke in addition to him), Paanapa uttered the statement *Au e faipati ttonu atu* "I am speaking straight to you," or slight variations on it, thirty-one times. Unfortunately for him, the position he was speaking from put him at a clear disadvantage. First, as I alluded to earlier, his *pona* "[behavioral] stigma" was his *gutu ppelo* "mouth full of lies," a well-known fact which, solidly confirmed by his past actions, was often talked about in the community. Paanapa himself recognized that challenge, as evidenced by his attempt to confront the problem in a statement that blended together threats of lawsuits and talk of emotion in a complex manner:

Soo se tino Nukulaelae e fai mai i au e ppelo, soo se tino Nukulaelae e fai mai i au e ppelo, kee siki aka tena lima. Taimi nei. *Faipati ttonu atu au*, mea nei ko taimi o toku alofa, Suaaliki! Kae mai tua, koe kaa ave nee au ki te fono. Tala konei koo oti ne lagona nee au, ttala a ttino mo ttinoo mo ttinoo, au e tautoo atu ki mua o te Atua, koe e fakamaagalo nee au, [*voice breaking*] koe e fakamaagalo nee au. Kae fai atu au, "Moi ave koe nee au ki te fono, te taga nei e ffonu i tupe." Ka ko koe e fakamaagalo nee au. (Fono Taupulega 1991:1:B:600–605)

Would any Nukulaelae person who thinks I'm lying, would any Nukulaelae person who thinks I'm lying, please raise your hand. Now. *I am speaking straight to you*, this is time for me to have empathy, Suaaliki!¹⁵ But later, I shall take you to court. The stories I have heard, the stories [told] by one person to another person, I swear before God, I forgive you, [*voice breaking*] I forgive you. But I am telling you, "Had I taken you to court, this pocket [of mine] would be full of money." But I forgive you.

Second, Paanapa was in a bad position to prove his integrity because members of the Council of Elders went to great lengths to distance themselves from the various accusations directed at him. The problems that arose, as elders made clear over and over again, only concerned Paanapa and the Nukulaelae community on Nauru. Since no member of that community could come forth to confirm or contradict Paanapa's testimonies,¹⁶ the council could not rule on the veracity of Paanapa's propositions. Paanapa's denials were thus left in limbo, and the elders stood on safely neutral grounds.

Finally, and more important, the council brushed aside Paanapa's oratorical performance as inappropriate to the context at hand. While council members responded variously to the sorcery accusations that Paanapa had brought up, all responses were geared towards dismissing these accusations as not worthy of the council's attention. One stance represented in council members' responses stated flatly that any talk of sorcery was inappropriate to a council meeting. This stance was represented by the chief's forceful reaction:

Ia, a ko te mataaupu e tautoo atu ki luga i te fenua, au seeai soku fia saga ki te mataaupu teenaa ki tau vai laakau. E seeai eiloa soku fia fakalogologo ki se tino kee faipati ki ei ki seoku talitonuga, fia faipati ki ei. (Fono Taupulega 1991:2:A:107–111)

Now, regarding the matter you swore about to the atoll community, I just have no desire to pay attention to matters of your being a sorcerer. I have no desire to listen to people speak about any belief of mine [in this matter], [or] desire to talk about it.

While other reasons for the discord between Paanapa and the Nukulaelae community on Nauru could be discussed (they never were in much detail, since they were dismissed as matters that only concerned Paanapa and the Nauru community), sorcery and its attributes, as well as Paanapa's oath on the Bible, are ideologically censored (cf. Sansom 1972:200–201) from public forums.

A second stance, closely related to the first, maintained that individual members of the council simply did not “believe” (*talitonu*) in sorcery, that talk of sorcery was irrelevant to their lives, and that they did not want to be subjected to it in any shape or form. This stance was illustrated by the remarks of a mild-mannered elder who takes some pride in his worldliness and enlightenment:

Kae tasi te mataaupu mai mataaupu konaa, (e) seeai s-, peela, e fia tuku atu toku maafaufauga ki ei, io me seoku talitonuga ki ei, ko mea tau vai laakau. E seeai, e seeai lele eiloa seoku maafaufauga e tau ki te faituu teenaa, ko mea tau vai laakau. Kee oko foki eiloa ki toku olaga e nofo nei, seeai soku maafaufau e faipati eeloo ki ei, seeai soku maafaufauga e fia talitonu atu au ki mea konaa. Vaegaa mea foki konaa kaa ave ki ttuulaafono, e- e see taaitai eiloa o fakatalitonugina nee te tuulaafono mea tau vai laakau. (Fono Taupulega 1991:2:A:037–053)

As for there is one matter among these matters, I have no-, like, desire to put my thinking to it, nor do I have any belief in things relating to sorcery. I have no [thought], absolutely no thought whatsoever on things having to do with sorcery. And this is also true of the life I lead, I have no thoughts [about this] to talk about, I have no thought of believing in those things. That sort of thing, if you bring it up to the law, the- the law is not about to believe in things having to do with sorcery.¹⁷

The third and most complex stance was represented by Sautia, a prominent member of the council and a recently retired pastor with a great deal of political ambition. Sautia, who was not present at the original meeting during which the council decided to recall Paanapa, first addressed other members of the council and ridiculed them for having paid attention to talk of sorcery:¹⁸

Nukulaelae! [*very slow*] au faanoanoa faanoanoa loa au i ttaupulega o Nukulaelae, ne aumai nee koutou te faanau, ona ko te vai laakau. [*false*] Koutou e talittonu ki vai laakau? (Fono Taupulega 1991:2:A:299–301)

Nukulaelae! [*very slow*] I am very very distressed, I am very distressed by Nukulaelae's Council of Elders. You recalled a son because he was a sorcerer. [*false*] You believe in sorcery?

Then Sautia turned to Paanapa and engaged him in the following exchange, the drama of which was heightened by the swift tempo:

- Sautia:* [*addressing Paanapa, very fast*] Paanapa, koe e fai vai laakau?
Paanapa: Ikaai!
Sautia: [*very fast*] E tii taaua, maafai e tonu koe e fai vai laakau?
Paanapa: See iloa nee au! (Fono Taupulega 1991:2:A:301–304)
Sautia: [*addressing Paanapa, very fast*] Paanapa, are you a sorcerer?
Paanapa: No!
Sautia: [*very fast*] Will you cast a die with me to see if you are a sorcerer?
Paanapa: I know no such thing!

Again turning to the Council of Elders, Sautia went on ridiculing and scorning the council for allowing talk of sorcery to be held in full light and concluded by invoking a Christian discourse, to which his status as a recently retired pastor made him particularly entitled:

[*false*] Au e ofo! Kaiaa e fakaffifi ei fua te vai laakau, Tinilau, ki luga i te aumai o Paanapa? Kaiaa seki aumai ei Paanapa i mea kolaa? . . . Ttuvalu e nnofo, kae aumai e tasi eiloa te pati, “A Paanapa ne aumai, e fai vai laakau!” [*slow*] Maaumau laa, Nukulaelae!, ffonu te fale saa i taeao mo afiifi, kae talittonu ua ki vai laakau? (Fono Taupulega 1991:2:A:304–311)

[*false*] I am astounded! Why do you tangle up sorcery, Tinilau, with the issue of Paanapa's recall? Why didn't you recall Paanapa for those other reasons? . . . [All of] Tuvalu is here [listening], and [you] only say one thing, “Paanapa was recalled, [because] he's a sorcerer!” [*slow*] What a waste, Nukulaelae!, the church is full, mornings and afternoons, and [you] believe in sorcery?

The structure of this exchange is particularly complex: there are clear indications that Sautia was exploiting the opportunity at hand to accumulate political capital, as he had been doing since his recent return to Nukulaelae. (He had barely concealed ambitions of being elected as the atoll's representative to the national parliament.) Suffice it to say that, while Sautia appeared on the surface to side with Paanapa against the Council of Elders, it is not clear at all that the exchange was of much help to Paanapa. Indeed, like the other statements made earlier, Sautia's tirade dismissed all talk of sorcery and was as effective as more transparent statements in silencing Paanapa's attempts to justify himself.

The reasoning underlying these various positions is straightforward: responsible adults pay no attention to beliefs in sorcery, and therefore sorcery accusations should not be talked about in a meeting of the Council of Elders. Instead, what should predominate in meetings is the voice of *maalamalama* "enlightenment," as embodied in Christian ideology, governmental law and order, the maintenance of peace (*fileemuu*), and mutual empathy (*feaalofani*) among others. Rumors that particular individuals engage in sorcery practices were simply not worthy of the dignified attention of the council. In other words, the sorcery accusations, which Nukulaelae respondents identified in private as the main source of Paanapa's downfall, were simply dismissed as inconsequential and irrelevant, and talk of them was ideologically inappropriate to this context. Yet what was so easily branded as inconsequential and irrelevant was the principal cause of Paanapa's social demise, by now a fait accompli.

This reasoning hinges crucially on the contradictory and shifting nature of Nukulaelae discourses on sorcery. Paanapa was caught in the heteroglossic web created by these contradictions; on the one hand, he was utterly helpless before the overwhelming power of faceless gossip, as his own description bears witness to:

. . . see fakattau eiloo te mmae i (te) koga teelaa. . . . ppoi fua maatou, maanu mai se tala, maanu mai se tala, kee oko loa ki luga i mea ttupu konei i luga i ttou fenua nei, maanu mai se tala, maanu mai se tala. Ia, kae fakalogologo faaka nei, kaati laa koo tai sili atu maalie ttou fenua teelaa mai koo, i te mea loa ki te fakalasilasi o tala. (Fono Taupulega 1991:2:A:565–575)

. . . the pain that stemmed from this was indescribable. . . . to our surprise, one story would come our way, another story would come our way, even things that would happen here on our atoll [Nukulaelae], another story [about these] would come our way. And now I hear that this atoll of ours is even worse than [the Nukulaelae community on Nauru] over there, in regards to blowing up every story out of proportion.

On the other hand, his attempts to extricate himself in public were stifled as inappropriate to public forums. Thus one communal voice can enact the social demise of an individual through gossip and rumor mongering in such a way that no other voice can challenge it. Yet even in private interaction, Paanapa had trouble confronting his accusers. I quoted earlier a brief narrative of the difficulties he was having in getting his classificatory sister to greet him upon his return; by not greeting him, his relative was refusing to ratify his social presence, thus denying him the possibility to defend himself before her. Another example of the impasse in which Paanapa found himself was his threat of a lawsuit against the Funafuti spirit medium, Suunema, who had hosted one of the spirits that had accused him. After receiving the letter of threats excerpted earlier, she came to see him and told him the following:

"Paanapa, au e faipati ttonu atu ki luga iaa koe, a mea kolaa ne faipati nee au, e see iloa nee au. Kaa oti faaka, koo fai mai a tino, 'A mea kolaa ne faipati nee koe, a mea kolaa ne faipati nee koe.'" (Fono Taupulega 1991:1991:2:A:458–459)

"Paanapa, I am speaking straight to you, I have no knowledge of what I said. When [the mediumship session] is finally over, people tell me, 'This is what you said, this is what you said.'"

According to her, the accusation did not stem from her, but from the spirit, which exonerates her of any wrongdoing. (A more detailed discussion of responsibility and spirit mediumship is presented in Besnier n.d.c.)

What was actually achieved in the council meeting, during which a son of the atoll displayed his grief and misery for all to see, pleaded and threatened, took a formal oath of his own initiative, and wept in public? Remarks made by various members of the council at the close of the proceedings are particularly enlightening.¹⁹ Praising Paanapa for his "contentment" (*malie*) with the council's decision to recall him (which he never expressed), council members thanked him for his "forgiving" (*fakamaagalo*) attitude:

Ia, kae *malie* koe ki soo se mea teelaa koo oti (ne) faigia nee te fenua, kee *malie* tou loto. Te aofaga teelaa koo oko ki ei. . . . Teenaa, *maallie* (kouluu) ki te koga teelaa. Ia, kae fakafetai, peela mo tau faipatimaiiga, *maaggalo* katoa katoa mea katoa. Paanapa, fakafetai! *Fakamaagalo* nee koe, manafai eiloo e tonu koe! Ia koe e tonu, kae *fakamaagalo* nee koe ou taina. Fakafetai. (Fono Taupulega 1991:2:A:285–294)

So, be *content* with any decision that the atoll community has made, be *content* with it. Any decree that it has made. . . . There, let the two of you be *content* with it. And thank you for what you said, [that] everything is *forgiven*. Paanapa, thank you! You have *forgiven* everything, if you speak the truth! You are right, *forgive* your brothers. Thank you.

Other concluding statements invoked very general, normative ideas: "this day was of use," an elder proclaimed, because it enabled everyone to "tidy up" (*teu*) the community of conflict, after which it would return to its ideal state of beauty (*gali*), mutual empathy (*feaalofani*), and peace (*fileemuu*):

Kai!, e llei, koo aogaa te aso teenei! *teu* ei a fenua, *teu* ki te *gali*, *teu* ki te *lle*, *teu* ki te *feaalofani*, *teu* ki te loto o te Atua. . . . A ko te aso nei, koo aogaa, Tito! Koo *gali*. . . . *Teu* mea katoa loa ki te *lle*, *fileemuu*, ka kee taakkato taatou i lima alofa o te Atua, e *gali* ei ttou fenua i moo taimi konei mai mua. (Fono Taupulega 1991:2:A:339–342, 354–355, 357–359)

Yes!, good, this day was of use! The atoll community has been *tidied up*, *tidied up* to be *beautiful*, *tidied up* for *mutual empathy*, *tidied up* as God

wishes it to be. . . . This day has been of use. Tito! It is *beautiful*. . . . Everything has been *tidied up* for the *good*, [for] *peace*, so we can rest in God's loving hands, in which our atoll community finds *beauty* for the few moments that remain [to be lived].

These remarks show that the meeting had somehow been transformed into a conflict-management session familiar to many social contexts on Nukulaelae (Besnier 1990) and whose features echo comparable disentangling settings in many Pacific societies (Lutz 1988; White and Watson-Gegeo 1990). Potentially unsociable emotions, like anger and grief, have been displayed and talked through *faiapati fakallei* "speaking properly," conflicting points of view have been presented, and all that is left is for the most socially prominent participants to *polopolooki* "counsel, exhort" other participants and lead them back towards harmony and trust.

AFTERMATHS

It is difficult to know precisely the extent to which the Council of Elders meeting provided Paanapa with what he had sought in the first place (if indeed he had sought anything specific, which is open to question). Nukulaelae Islanders do place much value on ironing out socially disruptive emotions together and on providing a moral, rather than a practical, conclusion to conflicts (Besnier 1990). The importance of emotional disentangling in resolving social difficulties is undeniable. However, one wonders whether a member of the Nukulaelae community can be led to simply accept his fate in one disentangling meeting, given that the fate imposed on him by the Council of Elders deprived him of a lucrative job, deprived his son of a job, demoted him from a position of prestige, and triggered his social disgrace and ostracism by the rest of the atoll community.

Many statements were made at the conclusion of the meeting that, thanks to the meeting, life had returned to its idealized state of beauty, trust, and peace. But had it? After the meeting, gossip continued as ferociously as before, if not more so, fueled by the new information presented in the meeting, which had opened entire new vistas for interpretations and speculations. Gossips gleefully pounced on Paanapa's public performance, ridiculing in private his inappropriately emotional display. The Nukulaelae community was obviously not going to let one of its members get away with such a performance without squeezing out of it as much juicy gossip as it could. In retrospect, what Paanapa had hoped would be an opportunity to exonerate himself in the public eye had turned into a degradation ceremony (Garfinkel 1956) of the first order, despite token efforts on the part of some members of the council to frame it as a disentangling meeting (cf. Sansom 1972). And, like other degradation ceremonies, it had further rallied the community against Paanapa.

Three weeks after the meeting, the pastor asked Paanapa to lead the Sunday afternoon church service. During this service, taking advantage of the position

of authority with which sermonic discourse is associated (Besnier n.d.b), Paanapa delivered a highly emotional sermon. Abandoning his sermon notes halfway through his performance, dropping his Bible to the floor in the process (a member of the congregation had to go and retrieve it), he became more and more pointed and precise in his allusions. Sobbing again, he forcefully urged the congregation to abandon the ways of the *poouliga* "times of darkness," amongst which sorcery figures prominently:²⁰

NUKULAEALAE I TTAEAO TEENEI! NUKULAEALAE E PELE I MAN-
ATU, NUKULAEALAE E TAGI KI EI TE LOTO, I TE AFIIFI TEENEI!
. . . I TE AFIIFI TEENEI, E FAKAPILIPILI ATU, NUKULAEALAE,
NE AA LEO KONEI E TTAGI I LUGA I TE FENUA? . . . [*voice*
breaking] TE FILIFILIGA A TE ATUA, KOO TONU MOO KOE, Nu-
kulaelae! E fakapilipili atu i te afaifi teenei, kee SEE TOE AUMAI NE
MANATU SSEE, E FAKASSEEGINA EI TAATOU MO TTOU FAA-
NAU! 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 1991:1:B:477-490)

NUKULAEALAE THIS AFTERNOON! NUKULAEALAE BELOVED IN
ONE'S THOUGHTS, NUKULAEALAE FOR WHICH THE HEART CRIES,
THIS AFTERNOON! . . . THIS AFTERNOON, [GOD] 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 ER-
RONEOUS THOUGHTS AGAIN, WHICH MAKE US AND OUR CHIL-
DREN 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!

This overflow of emotion was not well received. Shuffling their feet and staring at the floor, members of the congregation murmured their disapproval. Later, one respondent described her reaction to the sermon as follows:

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, [I wonder,] were these tears of anger, or what kind of tears were they that he shed this afternoon, see? (S 1991:1:A:129-134)

Again, in his desperation, Paanapa had miscalculated his steps, and the emotional appeals of his sermon performance became the subject of further scorn and disapproval.

Koo aogaa te aso teenei! "this day was of use!," an elder had declared at the conclusion of the council meeting. Indeed, the day was of use in certain ways. For besides being reminded of the moral imperative to strive for harmony, enlightenment, and trust, so clearly articulated in the "official" version of Nukulaelae culture, Nukulaelae Islanders, and in particular one islander, were shown what happens to men with too much personal ambition who let their spouses claim chiefly descent. Paanapa's story is a living example of the praxis of Nukulaelae's discourse of egalitarianism, which, as one of my Nukulaelae respondents summarized particularly well, is deeply grounded in the social and political ideology of the atoll:

This atoll is made of coral reefs fashioned out of such material, like, people do not want other people to rise above [others], they keep watching in ambush, right? That person, one person, who rises to the top, [everyone says], "Oh!, who's he [to do such a thing]?" "Hey! Try to tarnish [him]!" That's the- the way of this atoll, the way I know it. . . . That trait was born with this atoll. It's a trait that's deeply ingrained in this atoll community. Nukulaelae people do not want another person to be higher up than themselves (N 1991:1:A:591-595, B:001-005)

Paanapa's story demonstrates that this discourse is not just an ideological construct; rather, it can affect people's lives in a dramatic and painful manner.

CONCLUSION

As discussed in the introduction, the prominent role that sorcery accusations can play in shaping the course of political life is far from unique to Nukulaelae. Numerous ethnographies have illustrated the power of sorcery and witchcraft, of accusations and confessions, and of the concomitant gossip and rumor in reinforcing established structures of dominance and subordination or in contesting these structures. However, the case study I have presented here is rather complex. On the one hand, the sorcery accusations leveled against Paanapa can be understood as "weapons of the weak" in the hands of the Nukulaelae community on Nauru, i.e., as grass-root defiance of the abusive authority of their leader. As Scott (1985) would have predicted, gossip about Paanapa's sorcery was effective in ways that more open forms of rebellion might not have been, in that it resulted directly in Paanapa's demise and recall. On the other hand, gossip about Paanapa's sorcery was effective only after it had secured, through blackmail, the collaboration of Nukulaelae's Council of Elders, which saw in the situation that had developed a serious threat to its ability to function: had the Nukulaelae contingent on Nauru resigned en masse, the council would have lost its cash income and, by the same token, its political foundation. In other words, Paanapa was caught between the authority of the council and the subversive action of the Nukulaelae community on Nauru. The sorcery accusations are thus both dominance-reinforcing action and contestation. This complexity is the direct result of the coexistence in Nukulaelae

political ideology of a discourse of nostalgia and a discourse of egalitarianism (Besnier n.d.a): the success of socially leveling action, of which sorcery accusations are a superb example, depends on the authority of a chief and a Council of Elders; at the same time, these institutions are ultimately at the mercy of the community's blackmail.

This case study also demonstrates that we cannot trivially explain the coexistence of the discourse of nostalgia and the discourse of egalitarianism as a tension between the public and the private, between onstage and offstage action. At first glance, this tension appears to be at play in the events I have described: one can talk about sorcery in gossip, but not in a meeting. However, the situation is more involved: the censorship of sorcery talk in the meeting *ensures* the effectiveness of offstage accusations. While the "work" of sorcery accusations is performed in offstage gossip, talk and action in public forums *collude* with gossip in bringing about the sociopolitical consequences of the accusations. Thus the sabotage of an individual's ambitious quest for power takes place in both onstage and offstage settings. The successful collusion of public talk and private gossip depends crucially on the heteroglossic ambiguities and contradictions of Nukulaelae discourse on sorcery, which make sorcery accusations such attractive resources for political manipulation.

I do not claim that the particularly efficacious nature of sorcery accusations explain completely why they emerged in this situation. Indeed, like Rodman (1993 this issue) on Ambae, I have been struck by the increased prominence that sorcery has acquired in the last decade. (This situation may derive in part from my own increasing familiarity with the complexities of Nukulaelae social life over that period, but Nukulaelae Islanders themselves recognize that sorcery is considerably more in the foreground today than it was a decade ago.) The link between the escalating centrality of sorcery and emergent capitalism, monetization, and modernity is as suggestive as it is elsewhere (cf. Douglas 1991; Fisiy and Gershiere 1991; Gershiere 1988; Rodman 1993 this issue; Rowlands and Warnier 1988; Taussig 1980, 1987), and it is clear that Paanapa's considerable wealth and swaggering style triggered the envy and antipathy of the less fortunate, for which the accusations became a convenient channel. However, reading the antagonism directed at him solely as a text of a precapitalist community's reaction to creeping capitalism would be an oversimplification. Indeed, Nukulaelae society has been steeped in capitalism long enough that many of its prominent members, including the current chief, owe their power and prestige to the accumulation of wealth. Furthermore, not all targets of sorcery insinuations are accumulators of wealth (contrast Rodman 1993 this issue), as I will discuss momentarily. The role of sorcery accusations in their broader sociocultural context is undoubtedly complex, and the association between sorcery and incipient capitalism is only one piece of the puzzle.

In many ways, Paanapa was very much abiding by the standards of Nukulaelae politics throughout the events leading to and following his demise: accumulating wealth on Nauru, walking the tightrope between ostentation and humility, and calling on the multiple discourses of togetherness, sociability, and subservience of the individual to the welfare of society. Yet he miscalculated his timing.

Through immoderate ostentation on Nauru to excessive humility after his forced return home, he only manage to irritate everyone. The basic principle underlying his personal strategy was normative, but his management of these principles was deviant. Relying too much on the discourse of nostalgia one day and invoking the discourse of egalitarianism excessively the next, Paanapa somehow failed to apprehend that both discourses must coexist at all times.

Paanapa is not the only Nukulaelae Islander by far to have been the target of sorcery accusations in recent years. The effect of these accusations differs widely from one case to the other, depending on the identity of the accused. When they target a politically ambitious man like Paanapa, who attempts to play by the rules of the Nukulaelae game of politics, rumors of sorcery can destroy a career. In contrast, when they are directed at a twice-widowed woman of loose morals who is widely suspected to have instigated the death of both her husbands, gossip about sorcery can become a useful tool in the hands of its target, who can use it to increase the awe in which she is held because of the supernatural powers attributed to her. (Gender also plays a role here, although its nature is far from straightforward, as suggested in Besnier n.d.c.) In short, the more "mainstream" a personal image the alleged sorcerer strives for, the greater the fall after the sorcery accusation strikes.

NOTES

1. Most names used in this paper are pseudonyms.
2. At the time of writing, Nauru's phosphate supply is virtually depleted, and wage-labor migration from Tuvalu and other island nations (principally Kiribati) is about to cease. In recent years, Tuvalu has gained access to another source of cash, as Hong Kong and German shipping companies have begun hiring young Tuvaluan men on short-term contracts. These seamen will soon become the sole substantial source of monetary income for the country. This labor force is structured very differently from the Nukulaelae contingent on Nauru. While the latter includes women, older men, and children, only younger men who have successfully completed rigorous training at Funafuti's Amatuku Marine Training School can become seamen. Furthermore, while Nukulaelae people form a community on Nauru, seamen are relatively isolated from one another. Finally, the income from seamen's salaries greatly exceeds the sums which Nukulaelae Islanders have been used to handling. The implications of these changing circumstances for the future of Nukulaelae and other islands of Tuvalu remain to be investigated.
3. Field research on Nukulaelae, totaling approximately three and a half years, was conducted in 1980–82, 1985, 1990, and 1991. The last two sojourns, during which the data and analysis presented here materialized, were funded by the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, the National Science Foundation (grant no. 8920023), and the Wenner-Gren Foundation. I thank the Government of Tuvalu and Nukulaelae's Council of Elders for permission to conduct field research. I am grateful to Avanoa Luni and Tufue Niuioka for assistance with the materials presented herein and to the Nukulaelae respondents whose words I cite here, but whom I cannot name. This paper was originally presented in the symposium on "Chiefs Today in Oceania" at the 1993 meeting of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania, Kona, Hawaii. It benefited greatly from

detailed comments from Philip Bock, Ian Condry, Harold Scheffler, and Robert Tonkinson. Harold Conklin, Joseph Errington, and Floyd Lounsbury also provided useful advice. The usual disclaimers apply.

4. We owe Evans-Pritchard (1937) for our current theoretical understanding of the distinction between sorcery and witchcraft: sorcery consists of the learned and voluntary use of tangible or symbolic tools for maleficent purposes, while witchcraft is the innate ability to perform otherwise impossible tasks. However, because notions of instrumentality and, in particular, intentionality on which it rests are culturally and historically variable (Duranti 1993; Gluckman 1972; Hill and Irvine 1992), this contrast is problematic as a theoretical distinction (cf. Thomas 1970 and others). It does not correspond to any identifiable categorial contrast on Nukulaelae, and what I refer to as "sorcery" here bears affinities to both sorcery and witchcraft as Evans-Pritchard defined them.

5. While there are historical instances of women leaders, all serious leadership contenders today are men.

6. The letters cited here are part of a large corpus of letters gathered in the field in 1985 and 1991. The reference following the extract (e.g., Letters 1985:558) refers to the location of the extract in this corpus.

7. Transcript excerpts in the original language 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. The transcripts represent an unedited rendition of what is audible on tapes, including false starts, repairs, etc. (indicated by hyphens); however, volume, tempo, and voice quality are indicated (by italics within brackets or as specified in the discussion) only when relevant to the discussion. Italics in the transcriptions and their translations highlight important passages discussed in the text. Parentheses indicate conjectured or inaudible strings, ellipses indicate that a string of words has been left out of the transcript, and square brackets surround material not in the original text which has been added to the translation for the sake of intelligibility. Recording references (e.g., L&S 1991:2:A:024–028) are made up of the name of the tape (L&S 1991:2), the side of the tape (A), and tape recorder counter references (024–028). For space considerations, some quotes are provided only in translation.

8. I attempt to unravel the complexities associated with sorcery and various related categories in Besnier n.d.b and will only summarize relevant aspects of this discussion here.

9. Spirits know who is a sorcerer and who isn't because sorcery cannot be performed without their assistance. As usual, it was an outsider who was called to mediate the relationship between Nukulaelae Islanders and spirits (see Besnier n.d.c for further discussion).

10. At the time of these events, Suunema had acquired quite a bit of notoriety by acting as the medium of a powerful spirit, Saumaiafi, which accused many people of being either sorcerers or the victims of sorcery (she even included me in the latter category). I provide more details on Suunema's mediumship in Besnier n.d.c.

11. The word *tupu* is a borrowing from Samoan whose meaning in Nukulaelae Tuvaluan is rather vague (Besnier n.d.a). It is sometimes applied to the chief of precontact and early contact days, as well as to such modern-day sovereigns as the queen of England.

12. Participants in meetings of the Council of Elders normally deliberate while sitting down on the floor. Orators get up to their feet to make formal speeches on special occasions, e.g., at feasts or dances. By standing up, Paanapa was bracketing his performance as a formal speech, rather than a routine contribution to a council meeting.

13. A very interesting linguistic detail of Paanapa's speeches is his consistent use of the singular pronoun *koe* "you" to address the Council of Elders, instead of the usual honorific dual pronoun *koulua* "you [two]." This is the only instance of this practice I ever witnessed in the course of many years spent recording council meetings. I did not ask my Nukulaelae respondents about their views on this, but I propose that Paanapa eschewed polite forms because civility was not what the meeting was about. In addition, referring to the council in the singular may have indexically emphasized the dyadic nature of the conflict, pitching Paanapa against one other entity, the island community.

14. While sorcery is not a matter to be brought before the courts, slander certainly is.

15. Suaaliki is a member of the council. During speeches in the *maneapa*, it is customary to call out the name of particular individuals sitting at the opposite end of the house, and this is an example of this practice. The threats that follow this vocative expression were not directed at Suaaliki, but to a generalized "you."

16. In fact, several people who had come to the natural end of their contract on Nauru had come home at the same time as Paanapa. However, these people were unusually silent during these events, and the council never asked any of them to come forth and testify.

17. Illustrated in this quote is the common practice of referring to sorcery in public contexts as *mea konaa* or *mea kolaa* "those things." The demonstrative pronouns *konaa* and *kolaa* denote locations away from the speaker, and the noun *mea* "thing" is the vaguest anaphoric expression available in the language. The expression connotes that the use of a more precise term for sorcery is beneath the dignity of the speaker and that the speaker wants to keep sorcery as distant as possible.

18. There is contradictory evidence regarding whether the council broached the topic of sorcery in the original meeting, which I did not attend. In the meeting under study, some council members claimed that no such thing occurred. Others stated that the sorcery accusations were considered along with the many other problems that had arisen between Paanapa and the Nukulaelae community on Nauru. However, in private, interviewees told me that the sorcery accusations were the central theme of the original discussion.

19. Several members of the council attempted to conclude the proceedings at various stages. Clearly, the council was anxious to put an end to the meeting as quickly as possible. But Paanapa would consistently ignore these various attempts and would continue presenting new aspects of his misfortunes. All attempts had the same characteristics, and excerpts from all of them are quoted here.

20. In this excerpt, capital letters indicate fortissimo voice volume, which is commonly used by sermon deliverers after they reach a trancelike state called *matagi* (literally, "wind"). Most of Paanapa's sermon was given in this mode, in contrast to regular sermons, in which fortissimo volume alternates with regular volume (Besnier n.d.b).

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