THE POLITICS OF EMOTION IN NUKULAELAE GOSSIP

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Introduction: Emotions and Social Life

In the early days of psychological anthropology, the study of emotions was principally a cataloguing task: a typical endeavor consisted in identifying emotion terms in the language of the community that the anthropologist studied, and in attempting to arrive at a definition for each term. The resulting catalogue could then be compared with similar catalogues from other societies, and the similarities and differences that transpired from such comparisons would form the basis of hypotheses about the universality or cultural specificity of emotion categories.

In recent years, anthropological approaches to emotions have undergone important transformations. Rather than approaching emotions as discrete categories that can be observed *in vitro*, anthropologists now generally recognize that emotions are both psychological and social phenomena, and that, as social phenomena, they are profoundly intermeshed with other social and cultural categories from which they cannot be isolated. Thus, for example, anthropologists typically focus their attention on such questions as how emotions help mediate between personal experiences and their socio-cultural contexts; how they are used to reproduce or challenge power relations; how they are produced through the historical interaction of the ideological and the material; and how they find roots in and give rise to developmental theories that in turn inform socialization practices (Lutz & Abu-Lughod, eds., 1990; Lutz & White 1986; Schieffelin & Ochs 1986; White 1992, 1993).

A focus on emotions as embedded in a complex array of sometimes widely divergent phenomena can be paraphrased as follows: the problem for modern-day psychological anthropologists is to arrive at an understanding of how emotions *emerge* in society and culture. As it is used in the anthropological literature, the term "emergence" is polysemous: when applied to emotions, it denotes that the meaning of emotions is negotiated, reproduced, and changed in social settings; that emotions are linked to many other aspects of society and culture; that they are displayed, or perhaps better, performed in social settings; and that it is primarily through these performances that agents learn about emotions and negotiate their meaning. In short, "emergence" implies that emotions are in a significant way (although not exclusively) the product of the social world in which we live, rather

than being entities that arise in a pre-cultural world and that humans somehow come to understand by using the tools and categories provided by society. In this paper, I illustrate one way in which emotions emerge from the social world: I show how certain emotional experiences are constructed jointly by groups of interactors, and that, without the support of others, these experiences are difficult to maintain, devoid of significance, and morally suspect.

For an approach to emotions that elevates the social context to the status of a key problem, the source of one's data is an important issue. As many influential ethnographies of emotions and related concepts have demonstrated (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1986, J. Briggs 1970, Levy 1973, Lutz 1988, Riesman 1977, Rosaldo 1980), emotions are most fruitfully observed in the context of the *practice of everyday life*. In particular, everyday interactions provide extremely useful raw material for such an enterprise. Indeed, members of most societies (other than "emotion professionals" like therapists and other shamans, as well as their clients) do not generally theorize about isolated emotions and usually find it very difficult to talk about emotional experiences devoid of a context. Rather, people "do" emotions in the course of running their daily lives, and this "doing" is what an ethnographic focus should bear on (Lutz 1982:113, White 1994:225-6). Of course, this focus brings with it a host of complications, in that emotions are always intermeshed with other social categories and cultural processes, e.g., gender, social class, personhood, and religious and other belief systems. Yet this is how emotions "work" for the people whose lives we strive to understand.

However, most research on emotion in everyday life to date has either left the nature of "everyday life" unproblematized or have adopted a commonsensical definition of the notion. While space precludes full discussion of this issue, I contend that the nature of the "everyday" is complex enough to deserve some analytic scrutiny. Indeed, people can behave rather differently across different everyday events, a point which research on emotions in such bracketed contexts as affectively charged singing (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1986, Feld 1982) and lament (e.g., C.L. Briggs 1992, 1993, Feld 1990, Seremetakis 1991, Urban 1991) have amply demonstrated. But subtle differences may exist even across contexts of everyday life that are least bracketed and elaborated, to which a careful ethnographer should be attentive.

Eschewing vague categories like "the everyday," I focus here on a specific social context, namely gossip, a quintessentially mundane genre of interaction. Along with a small but growing body of works (e.g., Bauman 1986, Brenneis 1987, 1990, Goodwin 1990, Irvine 1990), this paper seeks to demonstrate that emotions play a pivotal role even in run-of-the-mill interactional settings where they are least overtly centralized, and that specific everyday contexts provide as compelling a scene for the emergence and manipulation of emotions as more elaborated settings. Focusing on the transcript of gossip segments recorded in naturalistic circumstances in a small-scale Polynesian atoll society, I demonstrate how emotions emerge and are negotiated in gossip, not as neatly defined packages of cognitive experiences, but as categories whose locus is often ambiguous, and whose meaning is intermeshed with the politics of narrative representation and the moral economy of everyday life. I

argue that it is in such mundane settings as gossip, in which emotions are enmeshed with all sorts of other socio-cultural processes, that one must seek an understanding of everyday conceptions of emotions.

Nukulaelae Gossip

This analysis is based on ethnographic material collected on Nukulaelae, a very small (449 acres), relatively isolated atoll in the Central Pacific, part of the island group and nation of Tuvalu.[1] The 350 residents of the atoll are for the most part monolingual speakers of the Nukulaelae dialect of Tuvaluan, a Polynesian language. They organize themselves in approximately sixty-five households (*fale*), at the head of which is a person (usually a man) called a *matai*, as well as about thirty land-holding groups of kin (*pui kaaiga*). Both these organizational units vary widely in composition and size across time and space, a symptom of the general malleability of the atoll's social organization. The atoll is ruled by a chief and a Council of Elders, whose exact function is the constant subject of debate. Even though most Nukulaelae Islanders agree that a hierarchical system is essential to the maintenance of communal order, they also articulate through talk and action a fiercely egalitarian spirit and a strong preference for consensus over the exercise of authority, both of which are highly subversive of the authority structure (see Besnier 1991, 1993, 1995a). One of the prime settings for the subversion of authority is gossip, which is at the same time one of the most devalued forms of social action.

Gossip, an interactional genre probably encountered in all societies in one form or another, is traditionally defined as a negatively evaluative and morally laden verbal exchange concerning the conduct of absent third parties that takes place within a bounded group of persons in a private setting (cf. Bergmann 1993, Brison 1992, Haviland 1977, Merry 1984, and others). However, there are many problems associated with this definition, of which space considerations preclude full consideration here (cf. Besnier 1995b). Suffice it to say that what I term "gossip" is strictly speaking not a named category in the language spoken on Nukulaelae, although one term, *fatufatu* "to make up [stories]," could describe many of the interactions I will draw on in this paper.[2] However, through their social practices, it is clear that Nukulaelae Islanders do recognize a style of interaction identical to gossip as defined here, although its boundaries are porous and subject to contestation: those who engage in a particular exchange may view it as harmless "conversing," while others may dismiss it as "mere" gossip (*pati agina i te matagi*, literally, "words blown about by the wind") or condemn it as insidious talk. Thus labelling a verbal exchange as an instance of gossip is an act of microscopic social power in this society, as it is elsewhere.

Gossip in this society is associated with liminal and devalued settings, such as kitchen huts, which Nukulaelae people view as dirty and smokey, building sites, i.e., barely domesticated areas, and the beach, which serves as the community's toilet, and where one always runs the risk of stepping on shit. The locus of gossip is constitutive of the genre itself, in that members of this community denigrate talk that takes place in such settings as the opposite of *gali* "beautiful," in contrast to verbal

genres like oratory. Gossip is not beautiful because it takes place in ugly contexts; it is disorderly in form; and its purposes are potentially disruptive of the *gali* "beauty" of the community, in which everything, from social relations to the physical appearance of dwellings and bodies, is tidy, orderly, and above-board. As I will demonstrate, the liminal and devalued associations of gossip has important implications for the ways in which emotions emerge in the course of gossip interactions.

Gossip About Emotions

In all societies, gossip is a complex phenomenon with many different facets: it can be a political tool, an instrument of community cohesion, an aesthetically valued genre of oral performance, a context in which biographies are constructed, a locus where community history is produced, and a way of displaying and manipulating cultural norms. What is of interest for the purposes of this paper is that gossip, on Nukulaelae and probably in many other societies, is a prime locus for the foregrounding of emotions.[3] In this section, I investigate one way in which their foregrounding takes place: gossip is often primordially *about* emotions, in that emotions often are the explicit focus of gossip interactions. This focus can be achieved in one of two ways, which are not mutually incompatible: emotion categories can be named or performed. I will describe both methods and demonstrate that they share an important characteristic: they are jointly achieved activities.

Most straightforwardly, conversationalists can *name* emotions and attribute them to the victims of their gossip. Once emotion naming has taken place, gossipers can then centralize as the main theme of their narrative the nature, appropriateness, and social consequences of these emotions. The following excerpt, in which the narrator identifies someone else as *ita* "angry," is typical:[4]

> *Kae fai mai loo tena pati ki maaua. (Muna mai,)* ((soft)) *"Siuila!*
> *Koe kai logo?"* ((mid-high pitch)) *"I te:: aa?" "Ia:: Putoko, ne ita*
> *kiaa Naakala i te mea ne fano o ttii te niu o ia." Aku muna, "I*
> *fea?" "I Oolataga hhh!"*
> [1985:5:B:158-161]
> And [she] says to the two of us. ([She] says,) ((soft)) "Siuila! Have you heard?" ((mid-high pitch)) "What?" "Tha::t Putoko got angry at Naakala because [he] picked coconuts off of his tree." I say, "Where?" "On Olataga Islet hhh!"

When emotions are named, several interesting patterns emerge. First, certain emotions are more conspicuous in gossip narratives than others. More specifically, anger is very commonly invoked in gossip. In Nukulaelae ethnopsychology, as elsewhere in Polynesia (cf. Levy 1984 on Tahiti), anger is hypercognized: it is talked about a great deal, the vocabulary referring to anger is comparatively rich, and displays of anger are met with alarm. Several terms refer to anger and anger-like

emotions, some of which overlap with neighboring emotional experiences. The most common is *ita*, which tends to denote prolonged, subdued, and harbored anger. *Ita* can also denote what English speakers would describe as "displeased," "obstinate," or "refractory." Another anger term is *kaitaua* "belligerently angry," which commonly denotes momentary, violent, and impulsive anger, while *matalili* describes anger mixed with loathing. Angry emotions are morally wrong, they are feared and dangerous; for example, chronic anger is thought to bring calamities, such as illness, onto the experiencer and his or her close relatives. Adults seldom describe themselves as *ita*, *matalili*, or *kaitaua* (although young men often like to talk about themselves as *kaitaua* with a certain amount of bravado, i.e., as the potential object of fear on the part of others). When describing their own anger or displeasure, mature adults commonly describe themselves euphemistically as *faanoanoa*, a term whose primary sense is "sad(dened)."

In contrast, gossip victims are very commonly portrayed as angry. A powerful gossiping strategy consists in demonstrating that the gossip victim's anger is out of control or indiscriminately focused:[5]

T:	*Muna a- muna a- muna a tou tagata i Oolataga, me e peefea eiloo te paalota,* [. . .] *vaevae te laukele, a ia e nofo nei, hee iloa nee ia Teika hee iloa nee ia a Lito.* (1.5) *kaati ko: Tito eiloo.*
L:	((creaky)) *aa ee naa!* ((normal voice)) *mo koo ita oki ki(a) Tito!*
S:	*Naa laa koo ita kia Tito, nee?*
L:	((mid-high pitch)) *Koo ita oki kia Tito, ia Tito e::-*

[1985:5:B:179-184]

T:	The guy says- he says [while we were] on Olataga Islet, whatever the outcome of the elections, [. . .] the land will be divided, he'll be here [but] will no longer recognize Teika he no longer will recognize Lito. (1.5) Maybe the only one [he'll acknowledge] is Tito.
L:	((creaky)) What are you saying! ((normal voice)) He's angry at Tito as well!
S:	So he's angry at Tito as well, uh?
L:	((mid-high pitch)) He's angry at Tito as well, because Tito-

Alternatively, gossipers often describe the victims of their gossip as constantly angry. Note, for example, the following set of commentaries at the close of a particularly virulent gossip session (to be discussed presently):

S:	*me ko mea katoa, mea katoa a:iloo::, koo:: ita ailoo maa hai mea:::,* =
T:	= *Soko ki tena tamana,* =
Si:	((in background)) = *mm,* =

S: = ((falsetto, fast)) *Aku muna, "E tonu kkii eeloo!"*
        ((creaky, high pitch)) *kae::-*
        (0.5)
F: *Kae, ko t- ko te:: aakoga o ia i te faiaakoga teelaa.*
        (2.0)
S: ((soft)) *Mm.* (1.0) *Tonu koe,*
F: *Teelaa i uta-* =
S: = *Olotou fai aakoga konaa.*
        (1.0)
T: *Teketeke nee laatou a mea a te fenua.*
[...]
S: ((mid-high pitch)) *Ailoga eeloo:: e:: isi ne mea e llei e::*
        toe: maua i:::
        (1.5)
F: *manafai   e toko uke te lauvaaega teelaa.*
                    [   ]
S: *mana toko uke te vaegaa (tino) ko laa?*
[1985:1:A:129-143]
S: because <u>everything,</u> <u>absolutely</u> everything, he is displeased
        by everything that, =
T: = He takes after his father, =
Si: ((in background)) = hmm, =
S: = ((falsetto, fast)) I say, "You're absolutely right!"
        ((creaky, high pitch)) but-
        (0.5)
F: Also, it's what he learns from that teacher of his.
        (2.0)
S: ((soft)) Hmm. (1.0) You're right,
F: Over there in the bush- =
S: = That's their teacher.
        (1.0)
T: They opposed everything the island community wants to
        do.
[...]
S: ((mid-high pitch)) I doubt that anything good will ever
        come out from
        (1.5)
F: if there are many from that species.
            [   ]
S: if there are many of that sort (of people)?

S, the main gossiper, identifies the gossip victim, Tito, as constantly displeased with every decision made by the Council of Elders; his interlocutors then attribute this trait first to "genetic" inheritance, and then to the fact that Tito is imitating the community's black sheep (not identified by name here).[6]

Furthermore, emotion naming is often done not by the main gossiper, but by an interlocutor. For example, the gossip session of which the last segment is the conclusion concerns a recent meeting of the Council of Elders, during which the victim of the gossip, Tito, voiced his angry disagreement (*kaitaua*) with the rest of the Council regarding arrangements for a feast in honor of soon-to-visit government officials. This move made him wildly unpopular with the present gossip group, since such disagreement potentially threatens the image of the community as a cohesive unit to be projected for the visitors' consumption. The segment begins with the following interaction:

S: ((falsetto)) *teelaa laa* ((high pitch)) *e poko ei te pati a*
        Tito, (aati e::) =
F: ((falsetto, creaky, soft)) = *kae   kai taua a Tito,* =
[1985:1:A:106-107]
S: ((falsetto)) so then ((high pitch)) Tito throws a wrench in
        the meeting, (perhaps he::) =
F: ((falsetto, creaky, soft)) = and   Tito got pissed off, =

In this segment, S begins by describing a situation, the first few details of which are immediately interpreted by F, who identifies the emotion that drives the behavior just described. Once an interlocutor has identified an emotion category, the gossiper can then thematize it in the rest of the gossip; such is the case of the previous segment, which continues as follows:

                                    [   ]
S: *kai-* ((high pitch)) = *a*
        Tito laa (e leaka) ki:- i meakkai ne mea faatauvaa ee loo
        e mafai eiloo nee maatou o (fai)
                                    [
        ]
Si: ((high pitch))   *kae aa?,* ((normal pitch))
        kaahai- kaahai ua laa e ita, naa nofo maalie laa,
S: *e mafai eeloo nee maatou o fai, (k)a ko te mea,* ((slow,
        deliberate)) *ko agan<u>uu</u>: kee au<u>mai</u> kee <u>fai</u> faka<u>llei</u>,*
                                    [   ]
F: *mm,*
[1985:1:A:107-110]
                                    [   ]
S: so-   ((high pitch)) =
        Tito then (may be thinking) that- that food is just trivial
        stuff,   we can just do it ourselves [without you]
                                            [
        ]

Si: ((high pitch))   well   then,
       ((normal pitch)) if- if [he] is displeased, why don't [you]
       sit quietly,

S: we can just do it ourselves [without you] but the point is,
       ((slow, deliberate)) that the tradition should be brought
              out   and done properly,
       [   ]

F: Right,

Once the victim's emotional response has been identified by an interlocutor, the gossiper, with the help of other interactors, centralizes it as the theme of the gossip and comments on it at great length by describing his own reaction and by providing an elaborate moral evaluation.

Alternatively, emotion naming can, and often does, take place within reported speech strings. The first excerpt cited in this section illustrates this pattern well: Putoko's anger is identified in a reported turn attributed to someone other than the gossiper herself (*"Ia:: Putoko, ne ita kiaa Naakala i te mea ne fano o ttii te niu o ia,"* "Tha::t Putoko got angry at Naakala because [he] picked coconuts off of his tree"). As we know from the work of Voloshinov (1929[1978]) and many others since (e.g., Briggs 1992, Hill and Irvine, eds., 1992), reported speech is a complex communicative strategy in that, while it tacitly purports to present an authentic rendition of what someone said on a past occasion, it also allows the speech reporter's agenda to infiltrate the reported utterance, while the speaker more or less evades responsibility for these "added" messages. In other words, when morally weighty emotions such as anger are named and attributed to the victim of gossip in a reported speech construction, the gossiper can simply act as if she or he were a neutral reporter of someone else's speech, while assuming full control over what to report and what not to report, and how. Reported speech thus allows for a complex blending of voices that can be manipulated to the gossiper's advantage.

How voices can blend in reported speech is illustrated in a particularly powerful manner when an utterance has characteristics of both reported and non-reported speech. Several examples appear in the complex exchange presented in the last two extracts cited above. At the beginning of the segment, S and F are in the process of producing a narrative of the Council of Elders meeting in non-reported style (although speech actions occupy a prominent place in the narrative). However, half-way through the third turn, S uses the exclusive plural pronoun *maatou* "we, excluding addressee," which suggests that he is addressing Tito in the narrative world, rather than F and Si, his current interlocutors (otherwise the pronoun would have been *taatou* "we, including addressee"). Yet all other characteristics of his utterance (e.g., the reference to Tito in the third person) mark it as non-reported speech. In his final turn at speaking, he follows the reverse trajectory: he begins as if he were addressing Tito in the meeting, and continues ambiguously, although no marker of either reporting or non-reporting appears in the utterance. Si uses a similar strategy in the fourth turn: she begins speaking of Tito in the third person (*kaahai- kaahai ua laa e ita,* "if- if [he] is displeased,"), but switches to the

imperative mood at the end of her utterance as if she were addressing Tito directly (*naa nofo maalie laa,* "why don't [you] sit quietly,"). In no case does prosody help distinguish between the different voices being animated. These strategies, which are reminiscent of (although not identical to) literary "free indirect styles" (cf. Banfield 1982), consist of strings of talk that occupy an ambiguous position between reported or non-reported speech, and of subtle switches from non-reported to reported speech occurring in mid-utterance without being marked overtly. The quoted and quoting voices are thus very difficult to extricate from one another, and the named emotions and their consequences become part of both the past situation and the ongoing gossip context.

Emotion naming is not the only way in which emotion categories can be the focus of gossip. Indeed, gossipers can also *perform* emotions without naming them, i.e., recreate them to their audiences, in part to demonstrate their communicative virtuosity, and in part because such displays provide a particularly powerful way of conveying the emotional tenor of incidents being gossiped about.[7] It should first be noted that naming and performing emotions are not mutually incompatible activities: emotion naming often takes place in the course of an emotion performance, particularly when the gossiper leaves the task of naming to another interlocutor. Indeed, I will show presently that naming and performing share an important characteristic: they are jointly achieved by several participants, be they participants that are physically present, or absent participants whose voices are animated by the gossiper.

The following excerpt is a good illustration of an emotion performance; the gossip is the narrative of an encounter between the gossiper and a woman named Luisa, who had accused him wrongly of having cut down some of her banana trees. As is typical of Nukulaelae gossip in general (Besnier 1992), the encounter is narrated as a sequence of reported turns:

> *Aku muna "Luisa, lle:i,* (.) *i au ne m- manako kee: fetaui taaua i Fagaua kae:- mea aka laa koe koo tele mai ki Oolataga.* (1.2) *Ko au fua e: faipati atu kiaa koe ki luga i te:* (.) *peelaa mo tau: fekau ne avatu nee Samasone."* (2.2) ((high pitch)) *Muna mai "io-,* ((fast)) *io- io-!"* ((laughing)) *(Muna) hh a tou fafi(ne)!*
> [1982:2:A:308-312]
> I said, "Luisa, good (.) [I am glad we are running into each other], because I very much wanted to meet you on Fagaua but- the thing is that you ran away over here to Oolataga. (1.2) I just wanted to talk to you about (.) like, your complaint that [I heard about] through Samasone." (2.2) ((high pitch)) She says, "Yes-, ((fast)) yes- yes-!" ((laughing)) That's hh what [she] said, the woman!

This excerpt is a rich emotional performance, of which I will only analyze a few details. When representing his own turns at speaking in the narrated dialogue, the gossiper employs an even and poised tone of voice. His self-reported utterance is

well formed, rather formal-sounding, and syntactically complex. In contrast, his opponent's turn is uttered on a high pitched voice and at a seemingly uncontrolled tempo that speeds up after the first word, and consists of a series of yeses, all of which end in an abrupt cut-off. The contrast between the two quoted speakers is devastating: while the gossiper is a composed and dignified man, in control of his emotions and demeanor, his interlocutor in the narrated dialogue is an erratic speaker subject to emotional outbursts. Since Nukulaelae Islanders brand uncontrolled emotions as morally suspect, this excerpt establishes an obvious but unstated moral hierarchy, in which the gossiper is the morally superior party, while Luisa's erratic behavior places her on morally slippery ground.

More specifically, any Nukulaelae Islander listening to the gossiper can recognize that Luisa comes across as experiencing intense *maa* "shame" for having wronged her interlocutor. Indeed, *maa* "shame" leads one to hide from the cause of the experience (the gossiper insinuates at the beginning of the excerpt that Luisa had been attempting to do so), and, if fleeing is not or no longer possible, it makes one behave in an uncontrolled fashion (e.g., laugh hysterically, stutter, or burst out in tears). The narrative never states that Luisa was ashamed, i.e., the gossiper never has recourse to emotion naming. Rather, his strategic use of reported speech attributes the emotion to the victim of his gossip in a clearly recognizable fashion, and, by the same token, in a singularly powerful way. One important implication of this recognizability is the fact that the emotions that are performed in gossip clearly correspond to emotion categories in the local ethnopsychology, rather than categories in some generalized affective spectrum. Gossip narratives circumscribe specific, locally recognizable emotional experiences.

To summarize: when gossipers identify emotions and impute them to others, either by naming or performing them, they often target one of the most morally weighted areas of the emotion domain in Nukulaelae culture, namely anger and anger-like categories. This is of course not surprising in light of the fact that gossip is geared to damage other people's reputations: presenting them as particularly prone to displaying negatively valued emotions, and to doing so in an uncontrolled fashion, are simply additional methods of disparaging them. The way in which negatively sanctioned emotions are thematized is interesting: gossipers name or perform these emotions in reported speech, or they leave the task of identifying emotions to their interlocutors. Both methods are ways of putting some distance between the gossiper and the liability of having made morally charged allegations. The implication of these patterns is that the representation and attribution of emotion categories are *cooperative tasks*: emotion attribution is jointly achieved by the quoting and the quoted parties if the emotion is identified in a reported speech string, and it is jointly achieved by the gossiper and his or her interlocutors when the former lead the latter to name the relevant emotion. Without relying on other people's contributions, it is very difficult to conduct gossip successfully and, in particular, to attribute to third parties morally suspect emotions. The social cooperation that these tasks presuppose demonstrate one way in which emotions emerge from the social context in which gossip is embedded.

Emotional Gossip

So far, I have described how emotions can be, and often are, the theme of Nukulaelae gossip. However, emotions emerge in gossip in a different, although not unrelated, manner: gossip is a site for the *production* of emotions. In other words, Nukulaelae gossipers and, I would surmise, gossipers in many other societies (cf. Brenneis 1987, 1990 on Fiji Indians), use gossip to trigger certain emotional experiences among themselves. Crucially, whether the production of these experiences is successful or not depends on the availability, support, and cooperation of a group of individuals. While I would not affirm that these emotional experiences are completely unavailable to the solitary individual, they are nevertheless best achieved communally, in the same fashion that the representation of emotions in gossip narratives is jointly produced.

To begin, not all conversations on Nukulaelae can be classified as gossip, even if one opts for a very broad definition of gossip. Many conversations focus on minor past and present events, such as the weather, the tides, the catch of the day, the growth of food plants, and communal activities. Nevertheless, whenever the conversation focuses on other people (and even when it does not), conversations always appear to be on the brink of turning into gossip, and conversationalists appear to be constantly on the lookout for the opportunity to turn verbal exchanges into derogatory talk about others, even if nothing overtly scandalous is actually said.[8] Crucially, the success of the transformation from everyday small talk to gossip depends on whether gossipers can *create* a certain emotional intensity in the conversation, and whether they are able to *maintain* it.

The following excerpt of a failed transformation from small talk to gossip illustrates the difficulties involved in creating and maintaining this emotional intensity. The excerpt is part of a conversation between several adult men socializing around a cooking hut; when one of the men, T, hears a cracking noise, the following exchange occurs:

T: ((fast)) *Ttino teelaa e pakeekee mai, e a ai te vai teelaa i feituu ki tua o saa Ioopu?*
     (2.0)

F: ((laconic)) *(o) Laapana,*

T: = *Laapana? Me e isi ttino e pakeekee mai,* =

K: ((mid-falsetto)) = *M- me ne vau hoki laa ki te umaga!*
[1985:1:B:046-048]

T: ((fast)) [There is] someone making cracking noises, whose grove is it behind Ioopu's?
     (2.0)

F: ((laconic)) (it's) Laapana's, =

T: = Laapana's? Because there is someone making cracking noises, =

K: ((mid-falsetto)) = an- and he's already been to the taro swamp!

In the first turn, T frames his question about the identity of the individual making noise in terms of the ownership of the banana grove from which the noise has come, rather than simply asking who the person might be, suggesting that the person might not be where he should be, a suggestion that his fast tempo and level intonation contour accentuate. F does not take up the lead, since he knows that the person in the grove is its rightful owner, and thus that the possibility of a scandal is non-existent. K, however, tries to rekindle the gossip on a different note, and does so on a mid-falsetto pitch that also suggests potential urgency: Laapana has already been to the taro swamp, and now he is again down in the banana grove, a zeal that is testing dangerously the bounds of common sense. (People who work too assiduously at a single task are often labelled *fakavalevale* "asocial, crazy.") Both T and K tried to get the ball rolling, and, while their efforts failed (the last turn was followed by a long pause), they could easily have transformed an innocuous exchange into gossip.

The missing ingredient in both cases was interlocutor cooperation. Indeed, gossip and the emotional intensity necessary for its success can only happen if interlocutors cooperate, and getting others to cooperate can be hard work. As mentioned earlier in this paper, gossip is at best morally suspect in Nukulaelae society, a fact that militates against attempts to engage in it. While the moral dilemma of whether to engage in gossip probably isn't foregrounded in Nukulaelae interactors' consciousness at all times, gossipers must nevertheless work against the grain of overarching mores.

There are several ways of dealing with this moral dilemma. One way is to simply flaunt social mores and initiate gossip, as F and K appear to do in the previous extract. The sense of urgency conveyed by the voice, tempo, and intonation contour of their utterances indicates that they are prepared to assume the responsibility for providing the emotional intensity required for gossip. This strategy is not the most subtle, in that it presupposes a great deal more interlocutor collusion than is often available. In this case, no interlocutor appeared to be willing to sustain the affective intensity of F's and K's utterances. Alternatively, interlocutor collusion can be elicited through what I have described elsewhere as *information withholding* (Besnier 1989b). Briefly, information withholding is a conversational technique in which a gossiper refrains from providing a particularly crucial piece of information, usually the identity of the victim of the gossip, requiring one of the interlocutors to request a more precise identification. In the following example, F begins to talk about someone whom he identifies as *ttamaliki ponaa ua teelaa* "that moronic child" (literally, "that goitrous child"); one of his interlocutors, in the next turn at speaking, asks him who he is referring to, and F provides the identity of the child in the third turn:

> (13.0)
> F: ((mid-falsetto)) *(Kilo) laa ki ttamaliki ponaa ua teelaa e-*
>   *e:: hano mo te sipeiti see fakafoki mai,* =
> S: = *A ai (laa)?*
>   (0.5)

F: *A Ako.*
[1985:1:B:048-051]
>   (13.0)
> F: ((mid-falsetto)) (Look) at that moronic child who- who::
>   borrowed the spade [and] has not returned it, =
> S: = Who?
>   (0.5)
> F: Ako.

Information withholding resembles gossiping strategies familiar from other societies (e.g., "Guess what?"), although their recurrence and structural characteristics give them particularly prominent status in Nukulaelae gossip.

Information withholding has several implications for the gossip performance. The implication of interest here is that it encourages (perhaps even forces) interlocutors to become co-producers of the gossip, and thus helps distribute the moral weight of gossiping among all participants. This diffusion of agency is nicely illustrated by an interesting variation on the basic pattern, in which the principal gossiper withholds the identity of the victim of the gossip over the course of more than one turn at speaking. Witness the following exchange about an old man being stingy with his radio:

> S: *Ko au i ei, fakalogo mai i te leet:ioo e tagi atu, (3.0) me*
>   *ulu mai maaua ki loto i te fale kae taamate aka tena*
>   *leetioo!*
>   (.)
> T: *A ai?*
> S: *A puunana hoki teelaa!*
>   (1.8)
> V: *Neli?*
> [1985:4:B:579-582]
> S: Me, I heard that the radio was playing, so I came into the
>   house [to listen to it], but then he just turned it off!
> T: Who?
> S: That cunt-hole again!
> V: (You mean) Neli?

Delaying the identification of Neli allows S to accomplish several tasks: she creates a situation of suspense in which her interlocutors' curiosity is increasingly piqued; she uses the delay to insert a very derogatory descriptor of her victim (*a puunana hoki teelaa!* "that cunt-hole again!"), which she could not have easily inserted at another conversational moment; and, most importantly, she forces one of her interlocutors to identify who she is talking about, thereby handing over to someone else the responsibility of actually identifying the person of which a highly derogatory description has been made. This is thus a powerful example of the strategic use of information withholding to grapple with the moral dilemma posed by gossip.

Information withholding has important consequences for the achievement of a specific emotional tenor (i.e., a specific level of intensity of a particular emotional experience). In many cases, the disclosure of the identity of the withheld information is followed by an expression of dismayed and scandalized outrage. This reaction is always provided by an interlocutor, rather than the gossiper. In the following excerpt, the interlocutor reacts to the identity disclosure by whispering *tthaaphaa eehh!!* "you must be kidding, you don't say" on an affectively charged high pitch:

K: *ttoko luaa koo: (0.3) peelaa, hee maallie ki luga i te:-*
        (.)
F: *I te aa?*
        (0.8)
K: *I te mea teelaa (a) Alieta.*
        (0.8)
F: ((whispering, exhaling, high pitch)) *thaaphaa eehh!!*
        [1982:2:A:370-372]
K: Those two are not pleased about the:-
        (.)
F: About the what?
        (0.8)
K: With that thing of Alieta's.
        (0.8)
F: You mhust be kiddhhing!!

The foregoing case is particularly interesting because, while the interlocutor provides the desired expression of scandal (thus marking the gossip performance as successful), the gossiper limits himself to narrating events "as they happened" in a dispassionate manner.

What these examples demonstrate is that the responsibility for achieving the emotional tenor required for gossip does not rest on the gossiper alone. In fact, more successful gossipers (of which K in the last segment is an example) do not attempt to achieve emotional intensity by themselves, but rather manipulate their interlocutors into providing and maintaining it. Once this emotional tenor is achieved and appears solid, gossipers can then further fuel the feelings of outrage and disgust generated through the scandalous narrative in the minds of all present, by providing derogatory descriptors or other displays of displeasure directed at the victim of the gossip.

In other words, the creation and maintenance of the "right" emotional tenor is *jointly constructed* by the various participants involved. Achieving the proper emotional tenor is thus not a simple matter of displaying the emotions that the speaker experiences internally, but rather is a matter of finding a way to elicit a specific emotion from one's interlocutor, and to maintain that particular emotion in focus and at a level of sufficient intensity. Conversationalists can thus begin with an affectively flat "statement-of-facts"; if they are good gossipers, this affectively neutral

narrative can elicit in their interlocutors a certain emotional response, which they as narrators can then partake in. The creation and maintenance of emotional tenor is thus a social accomplishment, which, if successful, affects in turn the individual's own emotional experiences. What happens if it is not successful, as is the case in the first segment presented in this section? While I do not want to argue that the negative feelings towards Laapana that F and K attempted to generate in the conversation disappear automatically when the attempted gossip fails, they nevertheless become *socially irrelevant* in that specific context. While F and K can continue suspecting that Laapana is up to no good, they are under much pressure to think of other things (such as other potential scandals) if they are to continue being thought of as gregarious social beings, a trait to which a great deal of positive value is attached in this society.

Conclusion

This paper has focused on emotions and emotion displays in a very mundane context of social life, namely gossip. Through an ethnographic and textual analysis, I have shown that Nukulaelae gossip is both discourse about emotions, i.e., talk in which emotions are thematized, and emotional discourse, i.e., talk through which emotions are displayed and negotiated. The boundary between these two forms of discourse is not always crystal clear, because gossipers often talk emotionally about emotions, and because certain gossiping strategies, such as reported speech, tend to cloud the distinction between the narrated world (which discourse about emotion refers to) and the context of narration (in which emotional discourse is performed).

Whether it be discourse about emotion or emotional discourse, Nukulaelae gossip is a context in which interactors must rely on one another to create and maintain emotions. For example, gossipers typically attribute emotions to the victim of gossip in a multi-vocal fashion, either by animating the voices of others and using these voices to impute particular emotions to the gossip victim, or by letting interlocutors identify the emotion category being imputed. When engaged in the production of emotional discourse, gossipers must achieve a certain emotional tenor, and this can only be done with the participation of interlocutors. Indeed, the more adept the gossiper, the better he or she will be at shifting the responsibility for providing the appropriate emotional tenor onto his or her interlocutors. Without the participation of others, gossip itself and the emotions that are elaborated in gossip (anger, disgust, outrage) are difficult to sustain, and, while they may stay with particular individuals for a certain period of time, there are strong social motivations for them to disappear. In short, emotions associated with gossip emerge in the context of social interaction.

There are several reasons why emotions should be socially constructed in Nukulaelae gossip. First, gossipers in this community stand on thin ice morally speaking. As a social activity, gossip is thought to undermine some of the most fundamental tenets of the image of Nukulaelae society that its members would like to project, namely that of a society based on consensus, oneness of spirit, and

interpersonal harmony. While Nukulaelae Islanders love to gossip and do it all the time, they must nevertheless contend with the dilemma posed by the immorality of the activity. Second, the particular emotions that gossipers elaborate are the very emotions that Nukulaelae Islanders view as most problematic. Both of these factors strongly encourage gossipers to turn their activities into a cooperative task, which diffuses the responsibility for engaging in them and sometimes even exonerates the gossiper from this responsibility, as in cases when gossipers present their narratives as statements-of-facts and interlocutors provide the morally tainted emotional response. Finally, turning an activity into a joint effort fits well with central values of Nukulaelae society, in which individualistic endeavors and achievements find little appreciation. Referring to physical labor, for example, a Nukulaelae dance song asks, *E maua mai fea te manuia?* "Where is prosperity to be found?" and then provides the reply, *E maua mai te uke o lima*, "It is found where there are many hands." In a similar vein, non-work activities like dancing, feasting, or simply relaxing are ideally conducted in the company of other people. The sheer pleasure that Nukulaelae Islanders find in being together and focusing on the same task is evident in gossip, where the joint construction of a good degradation ceremony and of the concomitant emotional tenor clearly fuels the conviviality and sociability shared by the participants.

The recognition that emotions are jointly constructed in gossip is not incompatible with the fact that members of this society have a very strong sense of self. I have not tackled here the question of how this sense of self can co-exist with the intersubjective nature of emotions, a task that I am reserving for other writings. However, understanding emotions as emerging from a social context like gossip does not preclude that emotions are also experienced by the individual; on the contrary, "emotions arise in contexts of transaction, marking boundaries between inside and outside, and defining relations between me and you, or we and you-plural, that are probably always in flux and subject to the moment-by-moment negotiations of social interaction" (White 1994:233). In particular, I do not wish to claim that all emotions are socially constructed, and that emotions are socially constructed in all contexts of social life (the restriction of my focus of inquiry to one aspect of the everyday, namely gossip, is indeed an attempt to control the scope of my claims on this issue).

The patterns I have described in this paper are certainly not specific to the particular setting of my research. Indeed, the observations I have made about Nukulaelae gossip bear many similarities to and is inspired by Brenneis' (1984, 1987, 1990, this volume) analyses of emotions and gossip in a rural Fiji Indian community (see also Duranti and Brenneis, eds., 1986). Further afield, scholars like Holland (1992, this volume) have demonstrated that, even in a society like middle-class North America where emotions are viewed as paramountly individualistic experiences, many emotions are collectively constructed and crucially dependent on interaction with others for their development. Clearly, the basic argument I have developed in this paper will apply to many other social settings. Furthermore, one can probably find echoes elsewhere in the world of the values elaborated in Nukulaelae society and the behavioral patterns that these values engender and derive from. I am therefore making no claim for the uniqueness of the situation I have

described here, nor do I think that the principal mission of anthropological work is to hunt down the exceptional. However, what is particular about the situation I have described here is the overall picture, the "fit" (or lack of it) between the diverse pieces of the socio-cultural puzzle, and the way in which agents deal with, engender, or challenge pre-existing structures.

This paper illustrates how a focus on mundane interactional practices can inform an understanding of how emotionality is constructed, exploited, and experienced. However, this approach can only be successful if equal attention is paid to microscopic details of interactions and macroscopic aspects of the context in which they take place, such as ethnopsychologies, the politics of narrative representation, and the politics of interpersonal relations. Furthermore, the methodology adopted in this paper offer a way of handling the problematic relationship between the cultural constructs that informants create for anthropologists in the field, anthropologists' distilled models of their informants' statements, and the personal experiences of agents-in-action. As Spiro (1993) points out, many anthropologists mistakenly assume that the symbolic representations of culture that they build are identical to models of personal experience that actors live by (cf. also Hollan 1992, Wellenkamp 1988). In gossip, one finds both experience and models, but, what's more, the models one finds are not elicited for the benefit of an outsider, but are animated for the benefit of agents themselves. Gossip is thus an ideal setting in which agents can be observed constructing and making sense of experience.

Notes

2. The term *fatufatu*, in contrast to "gossip" as I use the term here, is based on a criterion of truth value: someone who engages in *fatufatu* is someone who "invents" stories. However, on Nukulaelae Atoll as elsewhere, whether a story about someone else is "true" or not is a very complex question, which invokes considerations of narrative entitlement and social power as much as the relative "fit" between the narrative and the events it purports to describe.

3. However, it is not the only setting in which emotions are centralized nor is it the setting in which emotions are most central. The letters that Nukulaelae Islanders write are considerably more emotionally charged than any face-to-face interactional genre in the community. See Besnier 1989 for a sketch analysis, which is developed more fully in *Literacy, Emotion, and Authority: Reading and Writing on a Polynesian Atoll* (Cambridge University Press, in press).

4. The orthography of the excerpts of gossip transcripts is based on phonemic principles, 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. In translations, square brackets enclose materials that do not correspond to any wording in the original language but must be added for the greater intelligibility of the English translation. All names that appear in the

transcripts and translations are pseudonyms. The transcription method is adapted from conventions developed by Conversation Analysts for the ethnomethodological analysis of talk (Atkinson and Heritage 1984), a key to which follows:

(1.2)	length of significant pause in seconds
(.)	short untimed pauses
word-	abrupt cut-off
word	forte volume
WORD	fortissimo volume
hhh	audible exhalation
.hhh	audible inhalation
wo::rd	non-phonemic segment gemination
?	rising pitch (not necessarily in a question)
,	slightly rising pitch
.	falling pitch (not always at the end of a sentence)
!	animated tempo
=	turn latching
[ ]	beginning and end of turn overlap
((text))	information for which a symbol is not available
((high))	dominant pitch level of utterance string
((creaky))	voice quality
( )	inaudible string
(word)	conjectured string
[...]	deleted materials
[1985:3:B:046-048]	tape reference

5. The last line of this exchange is an example of a common gossip feature, whereby speakers leave utterances unfinished. The information missing is most likely the fact that Tito had voted against the candidate that the victim of the gossip had supported in the national parliamentary elections that had just preceded the gossip session.

6. The first of these explanations is a nice illustration of one important aspect of Nukulaelae ethnopsychology: perdonal biographies begin before a person is born. In particular, one inherits one's *pona* "stigmata," like a volatile temper, from one's parents and grandparents. A *pona* "stigma" is a negative character trait known to everyone in the community and frequently invoked in everyday discourse as an explanation for behavior. A *pona* is an attribute of both families and individuals; the latter inherit their *pona* through bilateral kin ties, be it through filiation or adoption. Thus, whenever an individual's *pona* is mentioned, Nukulaelae Islanders immediately attempt to relate it to a familial *pona*. Indeed, local discourses of personhood consist primarily of searches for links between people's conduct and the *pona* associated with their family. While one can inherit positively valued personal attributes, these are considerably less interesting to everyone than the negative traits that run in families. This model of personhood does not preclude the possibility that an individual will break the familial pattern; however, to do so, the individual must work awfully hard to "prove" to the community that *pona* do not *always* run in families, because, at the slightest slip, everyone shakes their heads knowingly.

7. I am drawing here on the notion of performance developed most explicitly in the works of Bauman (1977, 1986), Bauman and Briggs (1990), Briggs and Bauman (1992), and Hymes (1975).

8. It may seem surprising that small talk on topics other than the actions of other people could be turned into gossip. Yet adept gossipers on Nukulaelae sometimes succeed in transforming conversations about morally and emotionally neutral topics into derogatory talk about others (as illustrated in Besnier 1995a).

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