

# Humour and Humility

## Narratives of Modernity on Nukulaelae Atoll

Niko Besnier  
University of Amsterdam

For the 350 Polynesian inhabitants of Nukulaelae Atoll in the 1980s and 1990s, the radio-telephone represented an array of possibilities and constraints. Operated for two hours on weekdays during those decades, by a technician that the government of Tuvalu posted on the atoll (when it was in working order that is), the radio-telephone was a quintessentially modern piece of technology, which also had long become part-and-parcel of daily life. For Nukulaelae people, who called their relatives and friends in the country's capital, Funafuti, it was an instrument with both extra-local and local possibilities. Its extra-local possibilities resided in islanders' use of it to monitor relations of exchange and reciprocity with their off-island relatives: requests for money, imported food, consumer goods, and other items, and announcements that island food, flower garlands, or children were on their way on the

monthly ship. Compared to letter writing, the default tool for such monitoring since the early twentieth century, it was both more expensive and more expedient. Radio-telephone calls cost at the time a whopping A\$1.50 for three standard minutes, while letters were generally sent with trusted passengers and thus involved no expense. However, the radio-telephone was also more expedient, as letters could only be sent or received on the monthly ship and their addressees could claim they had not received them as a convenient way to ignore the requests they contained (Besnier 1995: 94–99); on the radio-telephone, such evasions were almost impossible. These different means of communication were thus deeply intertwined with the politics of reciprocity and its avoidance (cf. Gershon 2000; Berman 2012). In addition, the radio-telephone was a powerful tool for the manipulation of one's reputation

on the atoll itself, as one could always count on a crowd of overhearers gathered around the telephone shack to listen on and feed any over-heard information into atoll gossip networks within minutes, which some callers clearly saw as an excellent opportunity to toot their own horn.

However, not all islanders were equally adept at handling modern technology. If you were an elderly lady of no great status, who had had few occasions to interact in an agentive capacity with the trappings of modern life, using the radio-telephone could present formidable obstacles. Since one used the radio-telephone in full view of bystanders, the story of one's fumbling with a confusing array of buttons, hand-held mikes and crackling voices would travel fast through the gossip networks to everyone's merriment, save probably for the protagonist's. In mid-1985, while recording day-to-day conversation for a corpus of texts, my assistant caught on tape the following account of Saulai's recent radio-telephone discomfiture.<sup>1</sup>

#### 1985 Vol 3, Saulai and Radio-Telephone:

1	Sunema:	((heavy coughing))
2	Sepoima:	<i>He aa laa i maatou e olo atu, te mea hoki a ( ), palele ( )</i> 'How about this one, we were just going along, the thing that ( ), it had ( )'
3	Sunema:	((heavy coughing))

4	Sepoima:	Ttuu maaua i te:: i t:::- i te koga ki tai i te umu haa Savee, ((falsetto)) he aa laa i ((normal pitch)) maa kkata koo nnau eeloo, i maaua e kkata. 'We stopped by- by the area on the lagoon side of Save's family cooking hut, and we were laughing and laughing'.
5		Aku muna [( )] 'I said ( )'
6	Taamala:	[An] afea laa? 'When was that?'
7	Sepoima:	((mid-falsetto)) I::: lua aso konei ne olo nei [ei ttamaa!] 'Two days ago, when the guys left!'
8	Sunema:	<i>I aso oki konei ne- i aso oki konei ne tali ei taatou ki te:: Niivaga kaa vau nei.</i> 'The day on which we were expecting the M.V. Nivaga to come'.
9	Sepoima:	(Teenei laa kaa) faipati i ttelefoni, teenei laa e taalo iaa ia [( )] = 'So when she speaks on the telephone, she waves her hand ( )'
10	Ailima:	[Teena i te aso teena!] 'That's right, it was that day!'
11	Sepoima:	= hee iloo nee ia o faipati i te:: ttelefoni! = '[She] does not know how to talk into the telephone!'

12	Ailima:	= Kaa faipati, heeai hoki. Kaahai taatou e faippati kae ppaki te pate teelaa, nee? Tou fafine hee::ai! E faipati e tuku eeloo peelaa. Teelaa laa kaahai e faipati ttino, ((high falsetto)) e TUKU EELOO PEELAA TE MEA! 'When [she] speaks, nothing at all. When we speak we have to press on that button, right? Your woman, nothing! She speaks and just leaves it like that. And then when the other person speaks, ((high falsetto)) she just drops the thing!'
13		Aku muna, 'Sulai, puke o ppak'. HEEAI, a Sulai hee saga mai ((laughing)) [eeloo!] 'I said, "Sulai, take [it] and press [it]". Nothing, Sulai pays no attention ((laughing)) to me!'
14	All:	(((laughter)))
15	Sepoima:	Kia Falev- i haa Seigali e nofo i Funaafuti, hai hai telaa meaa. [She was speaking] to Falev- The Seigali [dance] group was on Funafuti, they were speaking'.
16	Taamala:	((falsetto)) Io- mea ko ttaimi teelaa ne fai mai, iaa ia kaa hano o faippati laaua mo Falevai. 'Oh, that's the time she told me that she was going to speak to Falevai'.
17	Sunema:	((heavy coughing))

18	Sepoima:	Teenaa, teenaa hai mai, ko te mea loo koo fakatoofaa mai! Koo hee vau ki tua, ana muna, kia Paulu, ((falsetto)) "Hai aka laa me hee-" ((falsetto)) "Ne aa aku mea kaa hai?" 'Yes, so she said, all of a sudden she says goodbye! She does not come out [of the booth], she tells Paulu [the radio-telephone operator], "Do it again because-" [Paulu answers,] "And what do you want me to do about it?"'
19	All:	((laughter and giggling))
20	Ailima:	Heeai ne pati ne hai, kae tolu miinute! 'They said nothing, and the three minutes were over!'
21	Sunema:	Tolu miinute. 'three minutes'.
22	Taamala:	Kae he aa laa ana mea ne tuu i LOTO? 'So what was she doing inside [the phone booth]?'
23	All:	((laughter and giggling))
24	Ailima:	Heeai, oti toe: toe fai mai i koo i Funaafuti, kee tuku kee toe faippati aka ttokuluaa, me heeai nelaa pati ne hai! 'Nothing, so then, then Funafuti said that those two should be put on again, because they had said nothing [to one another]!'

The public circulation of ridicule that this gossip excerpt illustrates was a frequent occurrence on the atoll. It instantiates Nukulaelae Islanders' propensity to seek out the humorous in the quotidian (Besnier 1994, 1996). Storytelling about people's discomfitures when faced with the complexities of modern life are of course widespread across societies on the edge of modernity, but I contend here that, despite formal similarities, the meaning of such storytelling is tied to local subjectivities.

In what follows, I develop an analysis of the meaning of the Nukulaelae humorous narratives beyond a straightforward 'reading off' of the literal denotation of the text. I ground this endeavour in a discussion of aspects of the context that are relevant to an understanding of the dynamics at play. In particular, the humour that islanders derived from talking about other people's and their own discomfiture is grounded in what it means to be a good person in this society in the face of social, economic and cultural transformations that the society was undergoing. More precisely, the deprecation of either one's self or one's kindred and the humility that it communicates are constitutive features of how a good person should act, particularly so in three ways: first, it is a specific kind of person who should display humility, namely older people whose contribution to the economic and social welfare of the society is no longer as important as it might have been in the past; second, it is women rather than men who should make efforts to communicate humility; and third, the primary context in which one should behave humbly is in situations where one engages with a threatening and anxiety-provoking modern world, one for which one's lack of sophistication, lack of cosmo-

politan experience and lack of linguistic or technical abilities provide little in way of coping resources.

Not surprisingly, the humorous narratives I focus on were told predominantly by and about older women on the atoll who find themselves in unfamiliar situations which make them feel deeply uncomfortable. I resist an interpretation of humour as simply a coping mechanism or strategy, as humour is often 'read' in the social sciences, particularly psychology (see for example Abel 2002; Sanders 2004; Mak et al. 2012; among many others). Rather than being a mechanism that the person employs for self-directed purposes, in this case at least, humour is primarily an intersubjective process that people deploy for multiple purposes, including a sense of mutual reassurance, a demonstration that one 'knows one's place', and a display of one's fundamental goodness.

The ethnographic focus here diverges from many thought-provoking anthropological works on humour in recent years, which have predominantly focussed on humour and satire in contexts that are overtly political, where the humour and the laughter it potentially produces have more or less clear political ends (see for example Goldstein 2003; Yurchak 2005; Trnka 2011; Bernal 2013; Haugerud 2013; Molé 2013). The contexts under scrutiny here do not have such ends. Yet the arguments I develop have a number of characteristics in common with these works where it comes to the analysis of humour. Humour is inherently intersubjective, and thus a social act rather than (or perhaps in addition to) a psychological one; it is deeply ambiguous, and indeed part of the effectiveness of a good humorous performance is predicated on this ambiguity; and it touches on multiple aspects of social and cultural life, including emotions, morality, value, rupture and conti-

nity, and social hierarchies of gender, age, and status. In fact, these continuities between humour in politically charged contexts and humour in seemingly apolitical ones accords with arguments about politics that I have made elsewhere: the boundary between the political and the rest of human life may not be as clear-cut as it appears at first glance (Besnier 2009), and humour plays a role in this blurring: inherently informal, humour can help politics infiltrate daily life or, in contrast, give politics a dose of the casual and the mundane.

My analysis concerns the way in which humour is staged in everyday narrative practices, and how everyday narrative practices articulate with the large-scale collective narratives that constitute the empirical basis of most anthropological work. By 'collective narrative' I mean principally narratives that are already distillations by research participants of the functioning of society and culture, of the kind, for example, that many anthropologists elicit in an interview situation. Here I shift the analytic focus in two ways. First, the empirical data I analyse consists of interactions between members of the society in question, unmediated by an anthropologist's intervention. Second, rather than seeking an understanding of cultural meanings on the basis of a simplistic 'surface' reading of what people say, I take the stance that what people say may be motivated by multiple intentions, which may articulate with one another in various ways. Thus a surface reading of humorous narratives of modern discomfiture would stop at an understanding of them as proof of islanders' inability to deal with the trappings of modernity and their acquiescence with a social order in which they accept their own inferiority to a larger, technologically

sophisticated, considerably more powerful outside world. Alternatively, in the analytic style that became fashionable in the 1980s and 1990s and that owed a particular debt to James Scott (1986, 1990), humour could be viewed as a tool of resistance, a 'weapon of the weak' that bears witness to the fact that oppressed people, far from being complicit with their own oppression, are perfectly able to reflect and act upon the conditions that create it. Instead, I will show that, through these narratives, narrators perform considerable moral work that hardly acquiesces to their own humiliation and inferiority, and thus does not fall in any straightforward way into the rubric of 'resistance'. What the narratives represent is an exercise in demonstrating one's goodness, and I see my analysis as contributing to Joel Robbins' (2013) plea for a paradigm shift in anthropology from an anthropology of the suffering subject, which has dominated anthropological debates in the last couple of decades, to an 'anthropology of the good', which focuses on such dynamics as the hope, value, morality, empathy and well-being that characterizes the lives of many of the people anthropologists study.

Drawing on the works of Arendt (1958), Ricœur (1998) and Bruner (2002), Mattingly (1998; also Mattingly and Garro 2000) and analysts like Jackson (2002) and have argued that narratives are not only ways of creating order out of a disorderly past, but also strategies that enable us to organize the present. Indeed, narrative is not just present in the constitution of talk, but also in the constitution of social action, to which agents often give a story-like quality. One of the important consequences of this perspective is that both narrative and social action are equally multi-layered

and complex, and that the cause-consequence relationship between experience and narrative is unpredictable. It is on these insights that I base my analysis of narrative subjectivities of modernity on Nukulaelae Atoll.

## Nukulaelae Atoll

Located in the Central Pacific, Nukulaelae Atoll is comprised of narrow, discontinuous strips of land arranged elliptically around a 3x8 km lagoon and fringed by an outer garland of submerged reefs. As is the case of atolls in general, the 1.82 km<sup>2</sup> of land barely rise above sea level, the soil is generally poor and agricultural resources limited and prone to environmental unpredictability. With eight other atolls and coral islands, Nukulaelae is part of Tuvalu, formerly known as the Ellice Islands, independent as a nation-state since 1978. The nation has gained international notoriety in recent years for being at risk of completely disappearing under rising sea levels because of global warming, an issue with which I shall not deal here because it had yet to be articulated as a problem when I conducted the fieldwork on which this paper is based, in the course of the 1980s and 1990s (although Nukulaelae gardeners were already complaining about the encroaching tides and increasing salinity).

Nukulaelae Islanders' engagement with modernity began in 1821, when the first Western navigators landed on the atoll, but because there were very few contacts between islanders and Westerners in the first half of the nineteenth century, this interaction only gained significance in the latter decades of the century. The early 1860s, in particular, were marked by two

consequential events. The first was a raid in May 1863 by Peruvian slavers who absconded with 80% of the population, taking them to guano fields on Salas y Gómez Island near Easter Island, from which none ever returned (Maude 1981:74–82; Munro 1990). Hurricanes, droughts, famines, and land dispossession by a German plantation between 1865 and 1890 also took their toll around the same period (Iosefa, Munro and Besnier 1991). The second history-altering event was the chance landing, in 1861, of a canoe that had drifted 1500 nautical miles from the Northern Cook Islands after being blown off-course in a storm. A Christianized Manihiki Islander named Elekana survived the journey and began missionary work. After leaving the atoll for Samoa, he convinced London Missionary Society (LMS) missionaries to begin the systematic missionization of the atolls (Goldsmith and Munro 2002). In 1865 the LMS posted the first Samoan 'native teachers' (whom the LMS later promoted begrudgingly to the rank of pastors) on the various Ellice Islands, including Nukulaelae, whom the British missionaries supervised during yearly one-day visits.

Samoan religious teachers would embed Christianity deeply into Nukulaelae society and culture, a process in which humiliation undoubtedly figured centrally. They lost few opportunities to remind their flocks of their role as guardians of a religion associated with European power, and, as members of a markedly hierarchical society emanating from rich high islands, of their cultural superiority over the egalitarian atoll dwellers subsisting on infertile strips of land. Nukulaelae worldview became organized around a master trope, in clear evidence in British missionary writings of the 19th century and widespread across the modern



Pacific, pitching the 'darkness' (*pouliuli*) of the past, characterized by paganism, anomie, dirt and lack of schooling, against the 'light' (*maalamalama*) of the present, in which Christianity, social order, cleanliness and schooling prevail (Besnier 1995: 62).

While at first glance there is scant evidence of agentive control in Nukulaelae Islanders' early engagement with modernity, a between-the-lines reading suggests that conversion may have already been a complex process in nineteenth-century atoll Polynesia, and one characterized by structural continuity as much as rupture. The native teachers posted on the various islands of Tuvalu often behaved like little tyrants, but the LMS also kept them under tight control through yearly one-day visits, and the islanders themselves integrated them in classic 'stranger-king' fashion (Goldsmith and Munro 1992). Should islanders voice complaints against their Samoan teacher to their British superiors, usually because he was meddling in politics or commerce, the latter promptly removed him. To this day, Tuvaluan congregations give their pastors (nowadays a Tuvaluan but always from another island) high rank while keeping him under close scrutiny.

A similar pattern of agentive ambivalence characterized colonization, which was less immediate and paternalistic than missionization. With the rest of the Ellice Islands, Nukulaelae remained the far-flung outpost of an insular protectorate (1892–16) and later colony (1916–78) scattered over vast expanses of ocean, whose administrative centres, Ocean Island or Banaba (1916–42) and Tarawa (1945–75), were thousands of miles away. Britain had declared the protectorate reluctantly to fulfil its treaty obligations with Germany, and the islands were of little interest to the Colonial Office

because they lacked resources it could exploit apart from Ocean Island phosphate (Teaiwa 2014). The local colonial administration happily left the task of regulating atoll life to the Samoan pastors. While it issued successive editions of *Native Laws* in the Samoan language from 1894, which spelled out rules of daily existence in increasingly minute detail (a fine for breaking prayer-time curfews, imprisonment for drinking coconut-palm toddy), but these pamphlets were merely reiterations of policies already put in place by the pastors.

In the colonial centres, however, the administration followed a divide-and-rule policy that gave preferential treatment to Ellice Islanders over Gilbert Islanders, the other and much more numerous ethnic group in the ad-hoc colony, because they found them more peaceful, civilized, industrious, and light-skinned, and thus in essence more 'European-like'. Consequently, at the advent of decolonization, the colonial administration employed more Tuvaluans than Gilbertese, including several Nukulaelae Islanders in important positions. The fear of post-independence retaliation from the Gilbertese majority for this racialized favouritism motivated Tuvaluans to seek independence on their own, rather than jointly with the Gilbert Islands.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, for Nukulaelae Islanders and Tuvaluans in general, humiliation was a contested terrain even in the course of their historical encounters with Christianity and colonialism.

## Contemporary engagements

150 years after initial missionization, Christianity is deeply embedded into Tuvaluan society, culture, and politics, all suffused with Christian practices, images, and tropes, and, if collective humiliation may have figured in the early conversion process, it has long ceased to do so. In this respect, Tuvalu contrasts sharply with the Papua New Guinea societies that Robbins (2004) and others analyse, for whom Christianity is both new and a source of collective humiliation. If anything, present-day Nukulaelae Islanders have become the agents of humiliation. First, a number of Nukulaelae people have worked as missionaries in Melanesia. Second, Nukulaelae Islanders think of societies of Melanesia, for example, as steeped in *pouliuli* 'darkness' because they are variously non-missionized, illiterate, unclothed, violence-prone and lacking a sense of decorum. These depictions are coloured by a mixture of amazement, disdain, and pity, emotions associated with a sense of humiliation in their objects. Finally and perhaps most significantly, present-day Nukulaelae Islanders see their own pre-Christian and early-modern ancestors with the same range of feelings, denoted by the term *fakaallofa*, with a meaning ranging from 'deserving of generosity and empathy' to 'pitiful'. For them, their pre-missionization ancestors were poor *fakaallofa* souls who were too benighted to know the truth of Christianity and to know how to fend for themselves in the modern world, particularly against ill-intended Westerners. Contemporary Nukulaelae Islanders are therefore the agents, rather than the victims, of practices that would induce humiliation in others, including their own forbearers.

At the time of my fieldwork, Nukulaelae Islanders saw themselves well on the way to development and modernity, although they viewed these categories with a complex sense of reachability and fragility. On the one hand, they saw aspects of the modern world, such as technological developments that make work lighter and life generally easier (for example, outboard motors, solar-powered electric lights, better communicative technologies), as desirable improvements of the conditions of life. On the other, many believed, quite rightly, that modern life would bring with it new problems: young men would become less respectful of their elders, people would become generally more individualistic and less prone to altruistic action, and the cohesion of the community, which they hold dear (although it is largely a fantasy), would be threatened. Of course, some people welcomed some of these changes, including for example younger men who felt that the gerontocratic organization of the island did not give them the credit they were due or a voice to express their views (Besnier 2009: 85–90).

Over a century's worth of experience with modernity have had a strong impact on atoll life, particularly in the quarter century since independence. The tangible signs became very visible in the course of my fieldwork: thatched open-wall houses, universal during my original fieldwork in 1979, were replaced entirely with cement-brick structures topped with corrugated iron (which allowed rain water catchment and somewhat relieved the constant threat of drought), most of which were partially built because people run out of money halfway through construction. Almost overnight, outboard dinghies replaced outrigger sailing canoes in the 1980s so that by 1985 men who still went fishing in



outrigger canoes wrote letters to their relatives overseas expressing their shame. Exchange became increasingly monetized, as cash was needed for increasingly expensive and difficult-to-obtain petrol; when returning in the early morning, fishermen began to hold fish sales, rather than fish distributions; younger men and young women began negotiating terms of employment for repairing sea-walls and weaving communal mats; and workers overseas (in the phosphate mines of Nauru until the early 2000s, in New Zealand orchards on fruit-picking workers' schemes since then) began to carefully calculate their public and private remittances against what they got in return. In parallel to the images of enduring timelessness, tradition and isolated solace that many islanders associate with atoll life, modernity is very much part of life on Nukulaelae, however slow and frustrating the struggle for development may be.

### Multi-layered narratives

It is in this complex and sometimes contradictory engagement with modernity that we must contextualize the public circulation of ridicule of which I presented an example at the beginning of the paper. These stories arise spontaneously, typically in the course of after-dinner conversations, or as people while away the midday heat, in cooking huts or under shady trees.

As in all the stories they tell, Nukulaelae Islanders take much care in contextualizing the narrated events in time and space, as they do in the example cited above, and the narratives always concern specific people. On the surface, the protagonists of these stories always come out as ridiculous as they experience loss of face in

a public setting, and doing so through their own doing for placing themselves in situations in which they have to deal with the trappings of modern life, such as radio-telephones, flush-toilets, electrical lights, mechanized transportation, or the physical arrangement of buildings like banks and government offices. If we take Nussbaum's definition of humiliation as 'the active, public face of shame' (2004: 203), these stories as narratives of humiliation. However, they differ from those upon which some cultural anthropologists have based their analysis of the psychological underpinnings of modernity and development (see, for example, Dalton 2005; Leavitt 2005), in that it is for Nukulaelae audiences, rather than for the anthropologist, that Nukulaelae storytellers produce them. In other words, the narratives can be understood equally as being about humiliation, the active face of shame that external forces bring upon oneself, and as being about humility, one's own self-abasement in the face of situations that are beyond one's capacity to remain in control. While humiliation is an action that is performed by a person or a situation onto another person, humility is a self-directed affect. In Nukulaelae ideology, humility (*fakamaulalo*) is a very positive affect, one that people talk about a great deal. It has both a secular basis, in that one should be humble before one's social superiors and the entire island community, as well as a Christian basis, as one should humble oneself before God and one's fellow Christians.

These stories hold a particular place in the society's lexicon of humour. Joking is always about particular people, places and events – thus the disembodied joke that Westerners tell one another ('three guys walk into a bar ...') make no sense in this local context. Funny stories about specific people are *tala fakkata*, namely

stories (*tala*) that make people (*faka-*) laugh (*kata*). Remarks meant to tease one's interlocutors are also termed *fai fakkata*, literally 'to act in such a manner as to make people laugh'. Teasing and joking that test the limits of appropriateness are termed *fakkata ffula* (the literal meaning of the adjective is 'fat'), while talk designed to mock, humiliate or ridicule someone is referred to as *fakatauemu*. Significantly, narratives of encounters with modernity are never referred to as such and always as *tala fakkata*.

So delectable are narratives of encounters with modernity that, at the time of fieldwork, one of the most popular programmes on the national radio station was one that was called *Tala Fakkata*. On a weekly basis, the programme host Peifaga, an elderly Nukulaelae Islander residing on Funafuti who claimed and was given the role of national trickster, and a guest or two would exchange stories that they had heard through the grapevine or that people had sent to Peifaga from various islands.<sup>3</sup> People finding themselves in embarrassing situations sometimes expressed apprehension that someone would report their story to Peifaga for national broadcasting, although most of the time they did so in good humour. I appeared in several of these stories, usually as an agent of modernity. In one, Nukulaelae young men visiting Funafuti had watched the video of a B-rated action film called *Above the Law*, in which actor Steven Seagal plays a character named Nico; when they returned to Nukulaelae, they told my adoptive mother Sina that they had seen me in a film partaking in deadly car races and shooting people indiscriminately (in contrast to my 'peaceful' behaviour on the atoll), which Sina swallowed wholesale. Her gullibility rested on the belief, common among less

worldly Tuvaluans, that there can be few people out there with the same name, and that movies represent real-life events that happen to take place while the camera is running.

Nukulaelae stories about people and modernity can endure in public memory for several generations. For example, islanders continue to tell stories dating back to the end of the 19th century or the early 20th century about particular individuals trying to speak English and making fools of themselves. Low-status people of the past can become forever imprisoned in one defining moment of their lives, the rest of their existence made inconsequential through the iterative re-telling of a single event (Jackson 2002: 186–9), commonly re-told, or simply alluded to, to embarrass their descendants. People in the present are acutely aware of this possibility, which today the radio can amplify to a national scale.

The reading I want to make of the narratives identifies several layers of meaning. The first layer is the most literal one: the narrative transcribed above relates the humiliation that the protagonist experiences when others see her fumble with the radio-telephone, betraying her lack of familiarity with what has become an essential tool of life on the atoll, but one from which unworldly members of society are largely excluded. However, there are other readings of these narratives, for which I present another example, with which I will add a couple of analytic twists. The most important is that the narratives are not always gossip about absent others, but can also be stories of self-deprecation, told by the very person who experienced the humiliation that they narrate.

In the following, for example, Sunema, an elderly lady of similar status to radio-telephone-fumbling Saulai, related to other women her own encounter with

modern bathrooms on a recent visit to Funafuti, where she had stayed with a cross-cousin Fagauta, a high-ranking national politician at the time, his wife Vaitaume and their children Donny and Sekau.

1985 Vol 2, Sunema and taps (00:00-02:23):

1	Sunema:	Aati laa ko te lua mo ko te tolu o oku aso, muna a Vaitaume, 'Naa hano o:: o koukou', 'It was about the second or third day [I was on Funafuti], Vaitaume said [to me], "Go ahead and take your bath!"'
2		Hano au ki ki te fale foo i te fale teelaa, i te suaa potu, te:: kii teelaa i ei o kii. 'I go to- to the outhouse- to that room, the other room, [the one with] a tap that you turn on'.
3		Hanatu au, ulu au ki loto i te mataloa, kaa ssala ssala ssala te koga e: e kii ei a t::e mea te paipa, me teehee laa te koga e kii ei te paipa, 'I go, go inside, then I look and look and look for the place where- where you turn on- turn on the tap, where you turn on the tap'.

4		A ko te mea hh, e isi ttakafi e fakapu- uhhlou heh heh! (hee iloo) laa ko fiti fakataallava peelaa te mea, koo hanatu au, koo puke: loo i luga loo i te fiti loo peenei, kae- kae teketeke laa au = 'The thing is, there is a mat that's on top of the pipes, (I didn't know) that the metal was running sideways like this, I go and grab the metal like this, and I pull on it',
5		= aku muna! hhh 'E e aa?', kae teehee laa nei te koga kii ei', = 'I tell myself, "So, where do you turn this on?"'
6	all:	= ((quiet laughter))
7	Sunema:	Fakattau mai laa, koo kae hai i te mea maa iloahh nee Fagauta! 'I'm thinking, let me find out so that Fagauta does not get to know about it!'
8		Kae kalaga atu au, 'Ee Donny!' 'Io!' ((falsetto)) 'VAU AKA!' 'So I call out to Donny, "Hey Donny!" "Yes!" "Can you please come over?"'
9		Vau a Donny. Aku muna hh, ((creaky)) "Teehee te paipa e:: hai ei a:: hhh vai kee aka hhhh kee kii aka kee koukou au?" 'Donny comes over. I go, "Where is the tap where the water comes out of, so I can take my bath?"'

10		((falsetto)) <i>Muna a tou tagata! VALEA PULALIFUULU! peenei EILOO mea!</i> 'He goes, "[You] stupid bloody fool! It's like this!"
11		((falsetto)) <i>Aku muna! 'He aa! 'Kiloko ki te paipa teelaa e kii! 'I go, "What?" "Look at that tap, turn it on!"</i>
12		((mid-falsetto)) <i>Aku muna, 'Maalie ua laa hh, e kii peehee te (paipa) hhhh! ((falsetto)) 'KII MAI KIAA KOE! 'I go, "Hold it, so how do you turn on the (tap) hhhh?" "Turn it right towards you!"</i>
13		((whisper)) <i>'Ttaapaa ee!, kii!, ttaapaa ee!, ((falsetto)) kae he aa te mea KOO GGANA PEELAA! 'Hey! Hold it! Hey! What's making that noise?"</i>
14		((normal pitch)) <i>Taku mea e kae muna aka au peelaa, ((mid-falsetto)) "Kae he aa te mea koo ggana peelaa?" "Then I- then I say, "But what is it that's making noise like this?"</i>
15		<i>Muna a::: = 'He goes-'</i>
16	Tamala:	<i>= Te paamu. = 'The pump'.</i>
17	Sunema:	<i>= muna a Donny mo ko te mea e hai ki te mesiini o te::: = 'Donny says it's the thing that makes the machine of the-'</i>

18	Mele:	<i>= mmm = 'hmm'</i>
19	Sunema:	<i>= o te vai. Ttaapaa ee!, Sepoima!, Kaa kii a motou mea, tapu kkii eeloo au e hano o kii, mo ko Donny, mo ko Sekau, mo ko Siuila, teelaa i te hanatuuga teelaa a Siuila. Mo ko::: Peenina. 'Of the water. Hey! Sepoima! When we needed to get stuff, I would never ever get the water, I'd let Donny or Sekau or Siuila, because it was the time that Siuila was there, or Peenina'.</i>
20		<i>A mea a motou puaka e hai, heki hano eeloo au o kii. 'When we'd [feed] the pigs, I'd never get the water'.</i>
21		<i>Fakamuli eeloo i au koo nofo atu peelaa, koo iloa ai nee au o kii te 'It's just much later on that I was there for a long time, that I'd know how to turn on the-'</i>
22		<i>((whisper, deliberate tempo)) Aku muna, 'Ttaapaa ee!, Peenina!, kiloko! koe loo haa fakamatala kia::: kia Peifaga, i au laa nei heki kau iloaaga lele he mea hh peehhnei! 'I go, "Hey!, Penina!, look, don't you go and tell this to Peifaga, it's just that I have no idea about any of this!"</i>

Sunema's concluding reference to Peifaga's radio programme *Tala Fakkata* can of course be read literally, as a plea that the host of the show not be told about her embarrassment, as easily as it can be read as the opposite ('do go and tell Peifaga').

Significantly, it is generally elderly women who narrate self-deprecating stories, and there is a strong gendered component to them. Elderly women as a group are least entitled to worldliness, as men and younger members of society expect them to find self-worth in domesticity or through their grandchildren, in classically gendered fashion. They are the social category that is particularly expected to display *fakamaulalo* 'humility'. In a sense, self-deprecating narratives affirm this group's expected alienation from the modern world. However, the narratives can be equally read as tales of morality about desiring what one does not have and only has limited access to: running water, electric power, radio-telephones, mechanized transportation, and so on. This second reading views them as tales of irony, which stands out quite clearly in the dramatic storytelling style: the falsettos, expressions of fear, whispered reported dialogues indexing dread that one's backwardness be overheard, and the cousin's young son calling his classificatory mother *pulalifuulu* 'bloody fool', like a colonial officer berating a native. Comedy and tragedy are thus co-present in these narratives: 'to tell a story is to immediately put a distance between oneself and the event with which the story is concerned. A degree of agency is recovered, ... a balance reestablished between our need to determine the world to the same extent that it is felt to determine us' (Jackson 2002: 186; cf. Goffman 1981). The narratives put forward an image

of the world as a stage, a Goffmanian game in which both the agonistic and the comic become difficult to tell apart, in which polysemy and ambiguous intentionality reign (cf. Schein 1999: 386). What we have here is reminiscent, on a microscopic scale, of Yurchak's (2005: 250–71) analysis of absurdist humour that Russians of the late Soviet era called *stiob*: forms of irony that presupposes an over-identification with its target, in which it becomes impossible to tell whether people are expressing sincere support, subtle ridicule, or a peculiar mixture of the two.

In a couple of widely influential publications, Marshall Sahlins (1988, 1992) posited a relationship between feelings of humiliation and the notion of 'development' (or, in alternative renderings, modernity). He contended that agents only come to engage with development if they first experience humiliation, that is, a feeling of inadequacy for what they have in contrast to a referential (commonly Western) Other. Through contacts with missionaries and other salient agents of change, people come to experience cultural debasement, accept the standards by which their practices are measured as inferior, and learn to 'hate what they already have ... despise what they are ... and want, then, to be someone else' (1992: 24). One can read this contention, which Sahlins never pursued further, as being directly related to Sahlins' approach to cultural change as the reorganization of structures, which he developed in particular in his analysis of Captain Cook's visit to Hawai'i (Sahlins 1985). If structures are simply rearranged when people respond to change, then change that truly affects the structures that govern people's lives, as one finds in many Melanesian societies, must take place in a context in which people no longer have

faith in these structures, i.e., they have come to despise them.

Astutely juxtaposing to Fanon's (1991 [1952]) psychoanalytic critique of colonialism, Wardlow (2005) finds that Sahlins' contention captures only part of the picture, as 'there are other emotional experiences that go hand-in-hand with self-contempt' (2005): anger and hunger for revenge, for example, for having been bypassed by unfulfilled promises of material and social betterment (Ferguson 1999). These are the emotions that Fanon's colonized experiences upon realizing that in the eyes of the colonizer he will never become French, no matter how impeccable his table manners or faultless his French may be (Fanon 1991 [1952]). To this range of emotions and experiences I would add cynicism, irony, contentment with what one has, comfort in one's localness, 'backwardness' and distinctiveness from those who appear to hold the key to wealth and power (cf. Bashkow 2006).

Nukulaelae humorous narratives of engagement with modernity present both explicit and implicit evidence of these affective complexities. On a literal level, storytellers sometimes articulate explicit cynicism. This is the case at the conclusion of the narrative session that includes the previous excerpt (which is followed by another story about the storyteller's baffled encounter with a gas stove). Here the conversationalists use food and food preparation to index a contrast between inclusion and exclusion, familiarity and estrangement, and comfort and anxiety, a trope familiar from many contexts in this society and many others (see, for example, Fajans 1983; Kahn 1986):

1985 Vol 2, Sunema and taps, conclusion (03:40-03:58)

32	Sunema:	((whisper)) <i>Taapaa ee-!</i> ((others laugh)) <i>Mata eeloo, taatou hee aogaa eeloo o olo ki [ fale] ki mea kolaa, =</i> 'And- I swear, it's useless for us [ <i>taatou</i> ] to go to houses where there is this kind of things'.
33	Sepoima:	[ <i>mm!</i> ] = <i>mm!</i> 'hmm!' 'hmm!'
34	Sepoima:	<i>Taatou e tasi loo ttou mea koo apo taatou i ei, ko te</i> ((falsetto)) <i>meakkai fakaTuvalu eeloo, ttafuga te afi =</i> 'We are proficient at only one thing, and that's Tuvaluan food, the kindling of the fire'.
35	Sunema:	= <i>Tafu te afi o- =</i> 'Kindle the fire to-'
36	Sepoima:	= <i>Ko pulaka, ko fuagaamei,</i> ((falsetto)) <i>meakkai fakataatou eeloo!</i> 'Swamp taro, breadfruit fruit, food that belongs to us!'
37		<i>Ka ko mea peelaa, ...</i> 'But when it comes to things like that, ...'

In this excerpt, the inclusive first-person plural pronoun *taatou* 'we (including the addressee)' figures prominently: it is the subject of the sentence in Sunema's first turn and the subject of two clauses in Sepoima's first turns, and appears in possessive form (*ttou* 'our') in Sepoima's first turn and in the modifier *faka-taatou* 'in our way of doing things' (a term that is a very frequent



substitute of the adjective ‘Nukulaelae’ or ‘Tuvaluan’). In all Nukulaelae interactions, this ubiquitous pronoun serves as a superbly efficient index of the sociability, consensus orientation, and egalitarianism that are so over-elaborated in Nukulaelae social life and moral ideology (Besnier 1996: 111–2; 2000: 380–2), its indexical power resting on the combined effect of its formal brevity, high frequency, and propensity for its important meanings to lie beyond the limits of awareness of its users (Silverstein 2001 [1981]). Of course, we can also read in this excerpt as much layering of literality and irony as in the other conversational excerpts I have presented. The point is that multi-layering permeates all talk about modernity and development.

## Narrative engagements

Jerome Bruner proposed that, through stories, ‘we constantly construct and reconstruct a self to meet the needs of the situations we encounter, and we do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears of the future’ (2003: 210). Storytelling is therefore a temporal articulation of the past with the future through the present (cf. Ricœur 1992; Mattingly 1998; Ochs and Capps 2001; Jackson 2002; and many others). But narrative can also juxtapose other seemingly incommensurable opposites, such as the agonistic and the comic, modernity and tradition, or desire and indifference. I have argued for greater ethnographic attention to the way in which humour is entangled with subjectivities of modernity, in a multi-layered and ambivalent fashion, in seemingly innocuous jocular

genres of the kind I have analysed here. Unfortunately, these genres are often hidden from ethnographic scrutiny and thus difficult to access and easy to dismiss, particularly if they are humorous, if they are told by old ladies of little social or political consequence, and if they are located in cooking huts. Yet the semiotic multi-layering that I have attempted to uncover here is the kind of analysis that we need to develop in observing people engage with modernity, getting us away from literal meanings and closer to a more complex, indexically informed, and less determinate kinds of analysis.

As Goffman (1981), Jackson (2002) and others have demonstrated, narratives, whether humorous or otherwise, enable us to recover our dignity in the eyes of others and in our own eyes after face-threatening events, minimizing these events and distancing one’s ‘real’ self from the defective self that emerged in these events. Least entitled to engage with modernity and incorporate it into their quotidian experience, elderly Nukulaelae ladies nevertheless do so through narratives that enable them to claim an agentive control over their own humiliating moments, as well as their kin’s. Through humorous self-deprecation, they seek to domesticate the formidable obstacles that modernity presents when they venture out to the radio-telephone booth, powerful relatives’ homes on Funafuti or, further afield, to Banaba, Nauru, Tarawa, Suva, and Auckland (in chronological order). And indeed, they demonstrate for us over-hearers that modernity, while diffuse, shifting, and ungrounded (Englund and Leach 2000), is perfectly real for Nukulaelae old ladies’ daily gossip practices (cf. Spitulnik 2002; Schein 1999).

Even when one’s discomfiture escapes the confines of the shreds of privacy one claims in atoll life, and gets

described on Radio Tuvalu for the delectation of the entire nation (all 10,000 people!), a mitigating but powerful message underlies the retelling: 'We are all in this together'.<sup>4</sup> It is significant that Radio Tuvalu, which continues to be the country's sole mediatized form of communication to this day, engages in a high level of self-censorship in its programming: the national news, for example, rarely departs from sanitized reports of happy events (visitors' arrivals, officials' departures on courses, sports tournaments) and eschews anything controversial, agonistic, or otherwise 'unseemly' (*maatagaa*).<sup>5</sup> It is significant that tales of people's fumbling with the trappings of modernity falls within the purview of the mild-mannered content that passes censorship. In fact, Peifaga, the host of *Taka Fakkata*, periodically reminds his guests and his listening audience, between howls of laughter, *Pati fua moo ttou kkata!*, literally, '[These are] words just so that we can all laugh!' In contrast, Radio Tuvalu in the 1980s also had an assiduously followed weekly programme called *Tala o te Lalolagi* 'News of the World', which consisted of stories that the broadcasting staff would cull from, evidently, Western tabloids and translate into Tuvaluan, describing the horrors of modern life in a temporally indeterminate fashion, particularly those that foregrounded themes that are particularly shocking to Tuvaluan sensibilities (parents abandoning their children, murders, incestuous relations, et cetera).<sup>6</sup> In *Tala o te Lalolagi*, no censorship was necessary, as these tales of modernity only reinforced the superiority of local lifeways.

Many anthropologists have documented how the underdog parodies mimetically various agents of colonialism or modernity – the colonial official, the

missionary, the military man, the judge, the tourist – to engage with colonial or post-colonial oppression (see, for example, Rouch 1955; Basso 1979; Taussig 1993; Stoller 1995; Herzfeld 2001; Ferguson 2002; Calavia Sáez 2004; Lipset 2004). Whether this engagement results in neutralization, appropriation, accommodation or resistance often remains as ambiguous as Bakhtin (1984 [1965]) would have predicted long ago. The materials that I have presented here demonstrate that, more subtly, deprecation (either of one's very own self or one's kin's) can serve as an equally effective and equally ambiguous form of engagement with a threatening and anxiety-provoking modern world. As such, in a Polynesian context, these dynamics present no rupture whatsoever from the past, as it is part and parcel of the politics of everyday life of yesteryears: the low-ranking humbling him- or herself before the high ranking to manipulate the latter is part-and-parcel of the drama of everyday life in Polynesian societies (Marcus 1989), and probably one that is widespread across societies (cf. Sandstrom 1992; Scott 1990). The humility that results from self-humbling can be a strong platform indeed, allowing a much greater range of possibilities than claims to power.

The humorous narratives I have analysed are stories about individuals seeking to present themselves as good people despite, and even because of, their lack of sophistication and familiarity with a complex and baffling outside world that is fast encroaching their local lives. Through humorous self-deprecation and the deprecation of each other, they seek to perform several things at once: reinforce their local grounding, they confirm each other's sense of belonging in this local grounding, they provide a moral commentary on the

modern world, and they distance themselves from it. I shy away from analysing these intentions as ‘strategies’, as this term presupposes an intentionality and a lack of ambiguity that I do not believe to be at the root of the storytelling. Nor do I opt for an analysis of the humour as a ‘weapon of the weak’, for the simple fact that the old ladies who tell each other stories do not experience their lives as one of oppression that they must somehow resist. Rather, I see the overall effect of this humorous storytelling as one that develops from various angles at once a sense of what is fundamentally good (that is, moral, comforting, empathetic and caring) about the storytellers, the subject of the stories, and the context in which they live (Robbins 2013). Focusing on the good is a considerably more productive way of understanding these humorous stories and provides an analysis that is considerably closer to how the subjects themselves experience them.

E-mail: n.besnier@uva.nl

## Acknowledgements

For my field research in Tuvalu between 1979 and 1994, totalling four years, I received funding from the National Science Foundation, the H.F. Guggenheim Foundation, the Wenner Gren Foundation, the Yale Council for International and Areal Studies, and the Fondation de la Vocation. My fieldwork received permission from the Government of Tuvalu and the Nukulaelae Council of Elders. I thank the numerous individuals on Nukulaelae who have supported my

efforts, particularly my assistant Mele Alefaio in 1985, whose insights and efforts figure prominently in this piece. I presented versions of this paper at the University of Chicago, the University of Amsterdam, the University of Toronto, LaTrobe University, and the University of California San Diego. For their very useful comments and criticisms, I thank participants in these events as well as Michael Goldsmith, Peter MacQuarrie, Doug Munro, Joel Robbins, Geoff White and two anonymous reviewers.

## Notes

- 1 In the textual fragments cited here, I use a simplified version of transcription conventions developed by conversation analysts (Atkinson and Heritage 1984) and widely used in linguistic anthropology. The relevant conventions are:
 

,	continuing intonation, not necessarily at the end of clauses
.	falling intonation, not necessarily at the end of sentences
?	rising intonation, not necessarily in questions
!	animated tempo
=	turn latching
wo::rd	non-phonemic segment gemination
[ word word ]	turn overlap (people speaking at the same time)
word-	cut-off or self-interruption
word	loud voice
hhh, heh	inhalation, laughter
( )	not intelligible
(word)	not intelligible, conjectured transcript
((comment))	transcriber’s comment

All names are pseudonyms unless indication to the contrary.

- 2 The two island groups separated in 1975, a few years before Tuvalu gained independence as one of the world's smallest micro-states in 1978, followed in 1979 by Kiribati, as the Gilbert Islands are now known. The United Kingdom punished Tuvalu for seeking independence separately from the Gilberts by allotting to it a disproportionately small share of the former colony's resources.
- 3 Since Peifaga was a public figure, I am using his real name.
- 4 The relationship between media and the quotidian in Tuvalu is the opposite of what we find in other places, where radio content trickles down to everyday practice, albeit selectively and critically (see, for example, Spitulnik 1996 on Zambia). In Tuvalu, it is the quotidian that feeds the content of radio programmes.
- 5 The one salient exception is the broadcasting of twice-a-year parliamentary sessions, which are not subjected to censorship. As a result, they keep the entire country glued to their radio receivers, listening to politicians going at each other.
- 6 Audience responses to these programmes were not unlike those of Bedouin women watching televised soap operas (*mosalsal*) that Abu-Lughod (1995) describes.

## References

- Abel, Millicent, H.  
2002 Humor, Stress, and Coping Strategies. *Humor* 15(4): 365–381.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila  
1995 The Objects of Soap Opera: Egyptian Television and the Cultural Politics of Modernity. In: D. Miller (ed.), *Worlds Apart: Modernity Through the Prism of the Local*. London: Routledge. Pp. 190–210.
- Arendt, Hannah  
1958 *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Atkinson, J. Maxwell and John Heritage  
1984 Transcript Notation. In: J. Maxwell Atkinson and John Heritage (eds.), *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. ix–xvi.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail  
1984 [1965] *Rabelais and His World* (translated by Helene Iswolsky). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Basso, Keith H.  
1979 *Portraits of "the Whiteman": Linguistic Play and Cultural Symbols Among the Western Apache*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Berman, Elise C.  
2012 Children have Nothing to Hide: Deception, Age, and Avoiding Giving in the Marshall Islands. PhD Dissertation, Department of Comparative Human Development, University of Chicago.
- Bernal, Victoria  
2013 Please Forget Democracy and Justice: Eritrean Politics and the Powers of Humor. *American Ethnologist* 40(2): 400–409.
- Besnier, Niko  
2009 *Gossip and the Everyday Production of Politics*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.  
2000 *Tuvaluan: A Polynesian Language of the Central Pacific*. London: Routledge.  
1996 Authority and Egalitarianism: Discourses of Leadership on Nukulaelae Atoll. In: Richard Feinberg and Karen A. Watson-Gegeo (eds.), *Leadership and Change in the Western Pacific: Essays Presented to Sir Raymond Firth on the Occasion of his 90th Birthday*. London: Athlone Press. Pp. 93–128.

- 1995 *Literacy, Emotion, and Authority: Reading and Writing on a Polynesian Atoll*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1994 The Truth and Other Irrelevant Aspects of Nukulaelae Gossip. *Pacific Studies* 17(3): 1–39.
- Bruner, Jerome
- 2003 Self-Making Narratives. In: Robyn Fivush and Catherine A. Haden (eds.), *Autobiographical Memory and the Construction of a Narrative Self*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum. Pp. 209–225.
- 2002 *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.
- Calavia Sáez, Oscar
- 2004 In Search of Ritual: Tradition, Outer World, and Bad Manner in the Amazon. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 10(1): 157–173.
- Dalton, Douglas
- 2005 ‘We Are All “Les” Men’: Sorrow and Modernism in Melanesia, or, Humor in Paradise. In: Joel Robbins and Holly Wardlow (eds.), *The Making of Global and Local Modernities in Melanesia*. Aldershot: Ashgate. Pp. 103–114.
- Englund, Harri and James Leach
- 2000 Ethnography and the Meta-Narratives of Modernity. *Current Anthropology* 41: 225–248.
- Fajans, Jane
- 1983 Shame, Social Action, and the Person among the Baining. *Ethos* 11(3): 166–180.
- Fanon, Frantz
- 1991 [1952] *Black Skin/White Masks*. New York: Grove Press.
- Ferguson, James
- 2002 Of Mimicry and Membership: Africans and the ‘New World Society’. *Cultural Anthropology* 17(4): 551–569.
- 1999 *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gershon, Ilana
- 2000 How to Know When Not to Know: Strategic Ignorance When Eliciting for Samoan Migrant Exchanges. *Social Analysis* 44(2): 84–105.
- Goffman, Erving
- 1981 *Forms of Talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Goldsmith, Michael, and Doug Munro
- 2002 *The Accidental Missionary: Tales of Elekana*. Christchurch: MacMillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury.
- 1992 Conversion and Church Formation in Tuvalu. *Journal of Pacific History* 27(1): 44–54.
- Goldstein, Donna
- 2003 *Laughter Out of Place: Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Haugerud, Angélique
- 2013 *No Billionaire Left Behind: Satirical Activism in America*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Herzfeld, Michael
- 2001 Irony and Power: Toward a Politics of Mockery in Greece. In: James W. Fernandez and Mary Taylor Huber (eds.), *Irony in Action: Anthropology, Practice, and the Moral Imagination*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 63–83.
- Iosefa, Suamalie, Doug Munro and Niko Besnier
- 1991 *Te Tala o Niuoku: The German Plantation on Nukulaelae Atoll 1865–1890*. 2nd edition. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.
- Jackson, Michael
- 2002 *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression, and Inter-subjectivity*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum.

- Kahn, Miriam  
1986 *Always Hungry, Never Greedy: Food and the Expression of Gender in a Melanesian Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leavitt, Stephen C.  
2005 'We Are Not Straight': Bumbita Arapesh Strategies for Self-Reflection in the Face of Images of Western Superiority. In: Joel Robbins and Holly Wardlow (eds.), *The Making of Global and Local Modernities in Melanesia*. Aldershot: Ashgate. Pp. 73–84.
- Lipset, David  
2004 'The Trial': A Parody of the Law Amid the Mockery of Men in Post-Colonial Papua New Guinea. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 10(1): 63–89.
- Mak, Bernie Chun Nam, Yiqi Liu and Christopher Charles Deneen  
2012 Humor in the Workplace: A Regulating and Coping Mechanism in Socialization. *Discourse & Communication* 6(2): 163–179.
- Marcus, George  
1989 Chieftainship. In: Alan Howard and Robert Borofsky (eds.), *Development in Polynesian Ethnology*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. Pp. 175–211.
- Mattingly, Cheryl  
1998 *Healing Dramas and Clinical Plots: The Narrative Structure of Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mattingly, Cheryl, and Linda C. Garro (eds.)  
2000 *Narrative and the Cultural Construction of Illness and Healing*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Maude, Harry E.  
1981 *Slavers in Paradise: The Peruvian Labour Trade in Polynesia, 1862–64*. Canberra: Australian National University Press.
- Molé, Andrea  
2013 Trusted Puppets, Tarnished Politicians: Humor and Cynicism in Berlusconi's Italy. *American Ethnologist* 40(2): 288–299.
- Munro, Doug  
1990 The Peruvian Slavers in Tuvalu, 1863: How Many Did They Kidnap? *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 90: 43–52.
- Nussbaum, Martha  
2004 *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Ochs, Elinor, and Lisa Capps  
2001 *Living Narrative: Creating Lives in Everyday Storytelling*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Ricoeur, Paul  
1998 *Time and Narrative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.  
1992 *Oneself as Another*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Robbins, Joel  
2013 Beyond the Suffering Subject: Toward an Anthropology of the Good. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19(3): 447–462.  
2004 *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rouch, Jean  
1955 *Les maitres foux*. 30 min film, originally produced and distributed by Les films de la Pléiade.
- Sahlins, Marshall  
1992 The Economics of Develop-man in the Pacific. *Res* 21(1): 13–25.  
1988 Cosmologies of Capitalism: The Trans-Pacific Sector of 'The World System'. *Proceedings of the British Academy* 74(1): 1–51.  
1985 *Islands of History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.



- Sanders, Teela  
2004 Controllable Laughter: Managing Sex Work Through Humour. *Sociology* 38(2): 273–291.
- Sandstrom, Alan R.  
1992 *Corn Is Our Blood: Culture and Ethnic Identity in a Contemporary Aztec Indian Village*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Schein, Louise  
1999 Performing Modernity. *Cultural Anthropology* 14(3): 361–395.
- Scott, James C.  
1990 *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press.  
1986 *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Silverstein, Michael  
2001 [1981] The Limits of Awareness. In: Alessandro Duranti (ed.), *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader*. Malden: Blackwell. Pp. 382–401.
- Spitulnik, Debra  
2002 Accessing ‘Local’ Modernities: Reflections on the Place of Linguistic Evidence in Ethnography. In: Bruce M. Knauft (ed.), *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Pp. 194–219.  
1996 *The Social Circulation of Media Discourse and the Mediation of Communities*. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 6(2): 161–187.
- Stoller, Paul  
1995 *Embodying Colonial Memories: Spirit Possession, Power, and the Hauka in West Africa*. London: Routledge.
- Taussig, Michael  
1993 *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. London: Routledge.
- Teaiwa, Katerina Martina  
2014 *Consuming Ocean Island: Stories of People and Phosphate from Banaba*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Trnka, Susanna  
2011 Specters of Uncertainty: Violence, Humor, and the Uncanny in Indo-Fijian Communities Following the May 2000 Fiji Coup. *Ethos* 39(3): 331–348.
- Wardlow, Holly  
2005 Transformations of Desire: Envy and Resentment among the Huli of Papua New Guinea. In: Joel Robbins and Holly Wardlow (eds.), *The Making of Global and Local Modernities in Melanesia*. Aldershot: Ashgate. Pp. 57–72.
- Yurchak, Alexei  
2005 *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

