

Profile of a Composer: Ihaia Puka, a *Pulotu* of the Tokelau Islands

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By the designation *pulotu* Tokelau Islanders acknowledge master-craftsmanship in their contemporary song-poetry tradition. The title is only given to experienced and distinguished composers who have built for themselves a reputation through many works over a considerable period of time. *Pulotu* may be translated as “composer-maker of songs,” but “poet” would be equally apt as the words of a song are the first element to be created and are the foundation for the music and dance features. The composer/poet is often also the choreographer who devises dance movements that extend and express the words of the song, and he or she may perform in the work as dance leader or as part of the singing or dancing group.

Songs are composed by unique individuals, who have their own complex relationship with the communities and cultural traditions to which they belong. This article describes a remarkable composer/poet, Ihaia Puka, against the background of the tradition to which he belongs; some of his songs are given, and extracts from interviews. Through this portrait of a single individual we also attempt to describe something of the work of all Tokelau *pulotu*: their roles and status, their genres and the subjects of their songs, and the performance context.

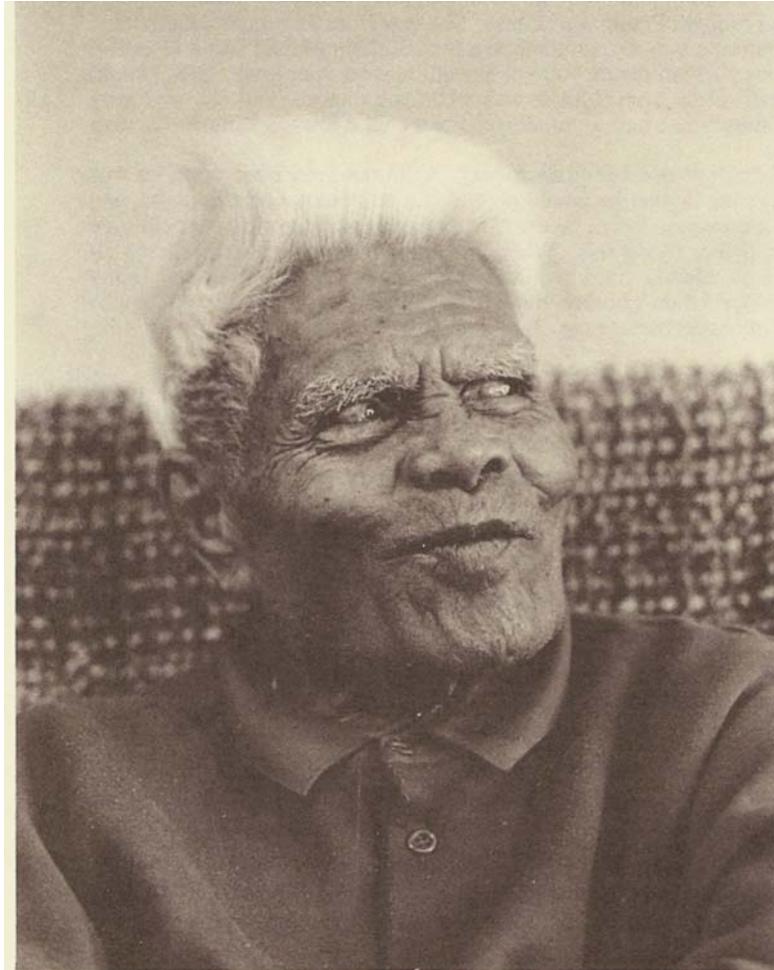
Ethnomusicologists have been slow to acknowledge the composers/originators of the musical material they are studying. There is very little literature on Pacific composers, though plenty of evidence of their work. This study, focused on an outstanding exponent and innovator, moves away from a generalized and static view of the music system. It emphasizes a particular preference and individual contribution within the musical domain.

Ihaia and His Background

The atoll of Nukunonu, the Tokelau community in which Ihaia has lived most of his adult life, is a small-scale, isolated, and intensively regulated traditional society. Its population is about four hundred. The

three Tokelau atolls, Nukunonu, Atafu, and Fakaofu, are in touch with one another only by radio telephone and through the monthly visits of the supply ship. Each atoll consists of a group of islets around a lagoon, with the population more or less concentrated in a single village area and the remainder of the land area planted in coconut palm. Within the society much work is undertaken in common, and authority is exercised by *toeaina*, senior men. In the nineteenth century the Tokelau societies experienced major disruption from the visits of slave raiders, epidemics, the setting up of missions, and the activities of traders (Hooper and Huntsman 1973). Although the atolls are isolated, various circumstances in this century have brought the people into contact with other Polynesian islands, and these contacts have enriched the cultural life of Tokelau by providing composers and performers with dance and music adopted, accepted, and altered from several sources. New Zealand Tokelau communities date from the 1960s and are now located in four main centers: Auckland, Porirua, Hutt Valley, and Rotorua-Taupo. Although members of these communities maintain close links with other Tokelauans in New Zealand, and with family members in the islands, they are also integrated into the work, residential, social, and sporting patterns of other New Zealanders. It is chiefly in the fields of traditional music and dance that Tokelau identity is celebrated and renewed in the New Zealand Tokelau communities.

Ihaia is an outstanding and prolific composer, and at eighty-two years of age a commanding personality. With his direct speaking and ready humor he dominates any gathering, whether in Nukunonu where he lived until 1987, or in the Hutt Valley in Wellington, New Zealand, where he now lives. He is recognized as an authority in many areas of traditional lore, and his opinion is sought after and deferred to. But he is also something of a tease, has a sly sense of humor, and hugely enjoys a joke. At gatherings of Tokelau people his speeches are greeted with unusual attention out of deference not only to his age but also to his knowledge and forceful opinions. To this attention is added the tension which comes as the audience wait for the next skillfully aimed and witty barb: sometimes a criticism of dancing, drumming, or composition, sometimes an observation on community events. As a storyteller, he is a fluent raconteur of traditional tales, *kakai*, often emphasizing the more lurid aspects to hold his audience. He talks about his life too with relish, though sometimes straying from the literal truth of events. He can be willful and walk out of a group rehearsal if he thinks that his compositions are not receiving due attention. He can be wickedly funny at others' expense. Above all he is unpredictable and, one senses as the community listens to him, he needs to be carefully watched; a wary as well as respectful attention is accorded him.



Ihaia says of his early life:

I was born in Atafu in 1907 and lived there until I went to Nukunonu in 1931. There was a group traveling to Fakaofu, for a cricket match. We traveled on the ship Tamalina, a very small boat with hardly room for the passengers; quite a few of them had to stand up all the way it was so overcrowded. We stopped for the night at Nukunonu, and the ship left in the morning, but I stayed behind.

My real mother was Mativa, who had sisters Sui, Tapogi, and Inosia and brothers Hakai, Hale, Teo, Etoma, and Matagi. The father of that family, Kalepo, had a brother called Ihaia. It was his wife, Patisepa, who was mother to me, she was a Kiribati woman. They met in this way. [Great-uncle] Ihaia went Honolulu as a laborer but decided to train and study as a pastor. He met Patisepa, who was servant to an American couple called Pinamu. That's how they met. He was ordained and returned to

Atafu and brought Patisepa with him. She was from Tapitoua in Kiribati.

Patisepa was a great dancer, a beautiful singer, she had a beautiful voice. For Kiribati dance you get a small mat on your knee, then. . . could she dance! How marvelous it was when she danced, and she was very good in music and had a wonderful voice. She always sang in Kiribati language.

I don't remember Ihaia so well, but I can remember when he was going over the lagoon he would pick me up and put me on the canoe, and give me a coconut. When he came back from a fishing trip he would give me a raw fish or flying fish. When Ihaia died Patisepa married Ielemia. It was through Ielemia that I acquired knowledge of things-Tokelau. In my younger days I didn't bother, but when Ielemia died some of the things he had told me came back to me. But most of them were lost.¹

Among the "things-Tokelau" to which Ihaia refers are the traditional fisherman's knowledge of moon, tides, and winds and the traditional tales, *kakai*, told for entertainment. He is a consummate performer of these tales, and they are often the inspiration for his *fatele*, "action song compositions."

Judith Huntsman, who recorded traditional tales told by Ihaia in 1968, remarks that "three of the 10 tales which Ihaia told have to do with a protagonist who decimates the inhabitants, ogre or human, of some village or island and takes over the land for himself" (1977:138). This perhaps reflects a fact of Ihaia's adult life which is also apparent from the autobiography above, namely that his status in Nukunonu has been that of an "immigrant" or "landless" person. In the Tokelau Islands, people inherit land from their families, so an immigrant has no land rights. Ihaia had access to his wife's family land in Nukunonu, but his own family land is in Atafu. During his adult years in Nukunonu, Ihaia built a reputation as a more than ordinarily fine fisherman, a skilled canoe maker, an expert in traditional lore, and a keen leader in communal work. These, together with his activities as a composer, are all activities outside the responsibilities and concerns of land-holding. Ihaia mentions this landless status in a *mako*, or "love song":²

¹ Interview extracts are composites from two taped interviews carried out in January and March 1989 by Tuia and Thomas, with translation by Tuia. The tape cassettes of the original interviews are lodged in the Asia Pacific Archive School of Music, Victoria University of Wellington, and in the New Zealand Music Archive, National Library of New Zealand, Wellington.

² As the orthography of the Tokelau language only became standardized in 1986 with the publication of the first dictionary, some irregularities may be expected in the song texts published here. In addition, some Tokelauans write Tokelauan song texts in Samoan. Texts in this article are in Samoan, Tokelauan, and Tuvaluan. Long vowels are not indicated. The translations attempt to convey what is understood by these short songs rather than simply translate the words. Translations are by Tuia, except for the first song

Toku vaka e toku se alofa e
 Oku vae ka fatifati ki salasalaga kia koe.
 Maua i Motuhaga e fifili oma fou
 Fifili fakatahi ma te pua talotalo.
 Sea sea sea e kita si matua e
 E ke iloa foki i au se fakaalofa.

My love, I didn't give you true love
 I am worn out looking for you.
 I found you weaving at Motuhaga
 Making leis of pua and talotalo flowers.
 Why why why [do you love me], I am old,
 You know I am a poor man.

Because of his great-aunt's upbringing Ihaia knows the Kiribati language, and he has learned other languages from visitors to Nukunonu. He composes most often in Tokelauan and Tuvaluan, but also in Samoan and Kiribati. While his skill with languages is notable, it is common for Tokelauans to be bilingual or trilingual.³ Language itself, and difficulties with communication, are a common theme in the atoll society, appearing in the hilarious *faleaitu*, "dramatic skits." In these performances some participants portray foreigners who speak a gibberish that provokes gales of laughter from the onlookers. In such dramatic entertainments the foreign-sounding nonsense, with a few Tokelauan swear-words thrown in for effect, is mostly an imitation of the language of Korean and Japanese fishermen who have visited the islands.

Tokelauan Song: Change and Continuity

In secular contemporary Tokelauan music there are three main genres: *fatele*, "action song"; *mako*, "love song"; and *pehelagilagi*, "choral song." *Fatele* are the major form of the three, and generally celebrate aspects of Tokelau life and the environment: fishing, history, traditional tales, biblical stories, current events. The *fatele* are distinguished by their epigrammatic brevity; a story or incident is not told, but only indicated by the song text. This brief *fatele* by Ihaia, for example, is drawn from the

quoted and the last three, which are from the UNESCO Territorial Survey of Oceanic Music, 1986 (Thomas 1988) and were translated by Kotelano Kele.

³ Linguist Even Hovdaugen gives the opinion of Ihaia's Tokelauan speech that "phonetically he has undoubtedly developed his own style by exaggerating the 'dark' character of Atafu pronunciation and combining it with phonetic aspects of colloquial Samoan. . . . I think that this is done to create a specific artistic, maybe archaic impression on the audience. But in other respects his language is not archaic at all. I would rather characterize it as modern and colloquial" (personal communication 1.18.89).

traditional tale of the *fahua* clam (Huntsman 1980:51-53). In it Hina is calling on her mother, who is transformed into a clam, to come to dance for the chief Tinilau. The drama or emotions of the situation are not elaborated in the short *fatele*, and can only be understood by those who know the background:

Amutia mua koe e mamoe te fahua e
 Kako kita nei e he mamoe te fahua e.
 Taea te fakatinoga o ilamutu e
 Taea te fakatinoga o matua e.

Fahua [clam] you are lucky to be sleeping,
 But I can't sleep like the *fahua*.
 Tomorrow the children perform,
 Tomorrow the parents perform.

Similarly, with *fatele* drawn from the Bible, a story may not be made explicit but only brought to mind. The story of Noah is a favorite in *fatele*, with the fact of the “boat” being grounded causing considerable amusement:

E ia Noa
 Kua nofo i tona vaka
 Kua kasa i te mauga.
 Talofa ia Noa
 Kua kasa i te mauga.
 Ta la la.

Look at Noah
 Stuck on his boat
 Grounded on the mountain.
 Poor Noah,
 Grounded on the mountain.
 Tut tut tut.

The composer exercises his skill first in the selection of an incident that captures the imagination, and then in the economy and precision of his text. It must be remembered too that his short text is appreciated in actual performance rather than through reading. A *fatele* begins with the text sung slowly, unadorned by the dance. As the text is repeated dance movements are added (some of which highlight aspects of the text), the tempo accelerates, and other music and dance intensification creates an exhilarating experience. The repetitions of the text provide opportunities for enjoyment and contemplation of its message and craftsmanship. Typically a group of thirty or more dancers performs a *fatele* in rectangular formation in lines of men or women, with a group of drummers and singers sitting behind them. For a formal performance a *fatele* will have been rehearsed and a uniform costume for the group will have been made. But *fatele* can be sung informally as well, for example

during work, at a cricket match, or on a journey. Formally or informally sung, a *fatele* mobilizes a group and unites them in the presentation of a song. The *fatele* is truly the “national” song, frequently heard and with a large repertoire that is continually being increased.

The *mako*, “love song,” is quite different. It is a solo song which is mostly sung on solitary pursuits such as fishing or climbing a coconut palm to collect the juice—when the song is said to sweeten the drink. The text is private and romantic, and the only time it is likely to be heard in public is at weddings, when a *mako* teases the groom or compliments the bride. On these occasions the *mako* is led by a solo singer, with a group repeating each line after the leader. The only dancing involved is improvised by the leader.

The *pehelagilagi*, the third major contemporary form, is a song with a much longer text with several sections. The form originated in the Samoan *laulausiva*, “introductory *siva*,” and it follows the conventional pattern of Samoan oratory (sections of welcome, thanks to God, reference to the departed, message for the gathering). *Pehelagilagi* are composed in Tokelau to mark special occasions.⁴ For the performance of a *pehelagilagi* there is a seated choral group with a standing “conductor” who interprets the text to the audience with improvised gestures. Ihaia does not compose *pehelagilagi*, although there are Tokelau composers who create both them and the shorter *fatele*.

Of these three contemporary forms the *fatele* is by far the most common and the best loved. While it is acknowledged to be of Tuvaluan origin, it has been composed and performed in Tokelau since at least the beginning of the century, long enough for it to have become thoroughly Tokelauan. Ihaia observes: “As time passed Tokelau just carried on until they came to create their own *fatele*, and now the Ellice [=Tuvalu] people are saying the Tokelau *fatele* is more interesting and beautiful than theirs.” Ihaia has also remarked that in *fatele* in the early days the dance gestures, *taga*, could be “as you like,” not choreographed and uniform for the whole group.⁵ A feature of the performances today of which he is critical is the playing of the *pokihi*, or box drum. He says that the acceleration in the *fatele* that the *pokihi* leads should occur much more gradually. (This feature, as he also notes, marks the Tokelau *fatele* as different from its Tuvaluan counterpart.) In addition, he notes that when the dance moves from the slow to fast tempo the pitch often goes too high, and the people cannot sing it properly. In addition to such performance differences between the Tokelauan and Tuvaluan *fatele*, there are differences in theme

⁴ A related choral form, *viki*, is often used for commemorative songs for a person who has died. It lacks the Samoan oratory form of the *pehelagilagi*.

⁵ Tuia Aselemo and Ana Tuia confirm this.

and subject. These too have changed over time:

In my younger days, as far as I can remember most of the *fatele* were from Bible stories. I can't remember any about *kakai* [tales] or traditional dances, all were Bible *fatele*. The composers [in Atafu] were Temusu, Temo, Lua, Tanielu [the Samoan pastor for 28 years], and Tai. Mostly old people.

At the time of Ihaia's arrival in Nukunonu a group of younger people were responsible for *fatele* composition, a fact which may indicate a later adoption of the *fatele* in Nukunonu. These composers were Ihaia's wife Selina, Niu, Lui Kena, and Atonio, all on the Amelika side of the Nukunonu village. There was probably rivalry as well as collaboration within this group, and there are distinct differences of style and emphasis among the composers. For example, Atonio's compositions are often extremely abbreviated:

E e te mavaega
A Tavita ma Ionatana.

Oh the farewell
Of David and Jonathan.

Here a contemporary farewell, perhaps to families moving away from the island to live in New Zealand, is likened to the grief expressed in the biblical story. Ihaia's *fatele* on the same theme makes the comparison explicit:

Te faigata ote alofa
Ko tatou ka mavae
Na iloa e Tavita ma Ionatana.

The deep love
Of our parting;
Like David and Jonathan.

Another active composer was Ihaia's wife Selina, who died in 1987. Her *fatele* often emphasize the domestic, as in this example located in Talikilagi, the center of Nukunonu village:

Te matagi agi mai e agi malie e
Te namo kua likiliki e.
E nofo au i Talikilagi toko lotu kua
Pupu ite alofa e.

The wind blowing softly
The lagoon so calm.
There I wait at Talikilagi
My heart full of love.

Composition

Ihaia's composition sometimes involved an element of collaboration. He says of his wife Selina:

I worked with Selina. Sometimes I would get into difficulties and would say "Could you listen and watch this *fatele*?" Or I would make the tune and Selina the words. I am missing her, we worked together a lot in *fatele* making.

Another kind of collaboration is reported of Ihaia; he has been known to sing a *fatele* to someone and tell them to remember it and bring it to a group rehearsal. This is not usual for Tokelau composers, but it is a feature of traditional composing in some nearby areas.⁶ It is intriguing that this use of a composer's assistant occurs in Kiribati, and that Ihaia had a Kiribati stepmother, but rather than explaining his habit as an "inheritance" from his upbringing it is probably better to observe that Ihaia seems to have a fertile imagination and the ability to compose songs rapidly, but not a retentive memory: he often needs to be prompted or reminded of a *fatele*.

In discussing the composition of *fatele* Ihaia also explains his own personal contribution:

When I begin a *fatele*, I don't think or worry about it, it will come naturally. No guessing or uncertainty, I will just pick it up. For the words: a bit here, a bit there, a bit here, a bit there, and . . . got one! The *fatele* can be about fishing or the wind, or from a Samoan *siva*, or a Tuvaluan song. There is nothing difficult about creating a Tokelau *fatele*. Once the words are in my head the tune is also already there. What I am telling you is that when I make a *fatele* it is like a movie: if I do one there is another ready in my head; I present one and there is another—like looking into a book. More words, more ideas keep coming into my mind. It is a gift of God, there is nothing about it which is difficult for me. It is quite simple to create a *fatele*, the more you do it the easier it is.

Here Ihaia is speaking as a prolific and outstanding composer, but he is also aware of others' difficulties and has often criticized or guided other composers' compositions.

There is another kind of *fatufatele* (*fatele* composition) in Tokelau which is not original work by an individual *pulotu* but collaborative work. In this type members of a performing group, or an individual, may put together familiar lines or alter an existing *fatele* to suit an occasion. In the Lower Hutt suburb of Naenae, Ihaia's daughter Meli made a *fatele* of this

⁶ Composer's assistants are a feature of certain kinds of Kiribati and Fijian composition; see Laxton 1953 and Saumaiwai 1980.

kind for a wedding in 1982. The song bids farewell to the bridegroom; the second and fifth lines have phrases common in *fatele*:

Taku manamea Pio,
E he galo i te loto
A ta mahaniga
A ta nofonofoga.
Pio e he galo i Naenae.

My loving Pio,
Never in my heart will be forgotten
Our relationship,
Our life.
Pio will never be forgotten in Naenae.

Such *fatele* can have a slightly disjointed feel to them, as lines have been borrowed from other songs and are known elsewhere. However, they are ideal occasional pieces, quickly learned because of their familiarity.

Frequently, too, *fatele* are reworkings of old Tokelau song types (*tafoe*, *hiva*, *hahaka*, *tagi*). Often here the text remains the same or is shortened, but the music and choreography are new. Ihaia recommends this procedure as a way of starting *fatele* composition. Several of his songs are such reworkings, particularly of the *tagi*, short songs sung in the course of telling traditional tales, or *kakai*. Because such songs are heightened moments in the tales, often revealing the denouement of the story, they make ideal *fatele*. While such compositions may not seem to an outsider to be very original, the composer is selecting from an enormous range of old songs and tales. One of the effects of such songs is to popularize these tales and old songs and to remind listeners of their contemporary relevance.

Ihaia's Songs

Ihaia's earliest *fatele* was composed in 1931 during his first year in Nukunonu. It was composed for a specific occasion, a farewell to Samoan builders on the completion of the community's large church building, and consists mainly of the names of those who are about to leave:

Faamavaega
Ma Falaniko, Pepe,
Punefu, Taemoa.
Tofaina koutou.

Farewell
Falaniko, Pepe,
Punefu, Taemoa.
Goodbye to all of you.

In contrast to this brief piece are his later works with developed imagery. While many of the *fatele* quoted in this study are derived from old songs and tales, the two examples below draw instead upon the community and the natural world. First, *Tiga te pouli*:

Tiga te pouli kautatago tiga te agi o te timu-a-toga
 Kako au e fitoi atu ke pa atu kia te koe.
 Agi mai te laki momoka mai ma ua
 Oi aue toku tino kua tatapa i te makalilia.

However dark the night, however strong the *timu-a-toga* wind
 I will still try to reach you.
 The *laki* wind is coming, the rain is falling
 And my body is shaking with the cold.

This song, composed in 1983, is a strikingly original *fatele* in its use of the names of the two hurricane winds (the second one, the *laki*, is the stronger of these), and in the graphic image of a person searching for his or her lover. *Fatele* are seldom about such individual passions; they are most frequently community expressions of joy and solidarity. The few that communicate such emotions as grief at a parting are presented as belonging to incidents in traditional tales or biblical stories, as in the case of the songs about David and Jonathan quoted above. In speaking of strictly personal matters in *Tiga te pouli*, Ihaia is bringing into the communal dance of the *fatele* the more private world of the *mako*.

This private, hidden world is also referred to cryptically in a *mako* by Ihaia. The poet speaks of a house in which he has met his lover; the identity of the woman and the house remain concealed:

Ta toku nemu ta i te gasu e
 Te gasu e tautafa pito ki te ala e.
 Na vau o kisi mai e kisi faka loiloi
 Kisi lomilomi kisi faka mavae
 I au e ki, oi au, ke!

Write my name on that house,
 The house at the roadside.
 Give me a playful kiss
 More kisses, kiss goodbye.
 Oh my dear!

In a much more conventional mode is a *fatele* from 1970-71. Composed in collaboration with Dr. and Mrs. Simeona, this is a conventional celebration of the elders and the elected leaders (Faipule, Pulenuku) who provide a model for the community, a position maintained not without strain in the modern world. Although the sentiments are conventional, the *fatele* itself is a forthright statement and it is arresting in

performance; the dance movements, the melody, and the words are all powerfully dramatic. This outstanding *fatele* is a eulogy of traditional ways and an expression of support for the community.

E taku fatele
Tenei ka uhu o faka—
Fakamatala toku nuku fagahele.
Te Faipule, Pulenuku ma Toeaina
E he galo koe i toku loto.
E tu ve he ata ioku mua
I au faifaiga gali katoa.

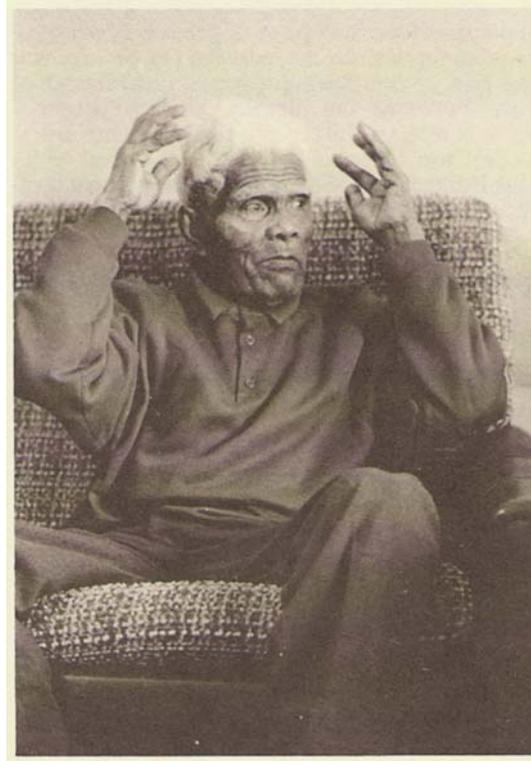
Look! My *fatele*
That I am singing you now,
Explains the beauty of my village.
My Faipule and Pulenuku and my elders
I'll never forget you in my heart.
You are like a reflection in a mirror
With your beautiful way of life.

Ownership and Anonymity

There are two features of the work of a *pulotu*, or composer, which are distinctively Tokelauan and need to be emphasized: the lack of “ownership” controls over the finished composition, and the composer’s “anonymity” at the time of performance. When a *fatele* is performed at a gathering it becomes common property, and anyone who hears it may perform it elsewhere. In doing so these others may make changes to the *fatele* either unintentionally or intentionally, and create a different version of it. The original composer and the performing group have no control over when the work will be performed, or over the versions of it which may be made.⁷ If a distorted version has been performed, all the *pulotu* can do is teach a correct version for a subsequent performance. Clearly “ownership” is not a feature of the Tokelau system—unlike in Samoa, for example, where a village commissions and pays for a song (Moyle 1988:14), and in Tonga, where the composer of a major commission is identified with the work and largely controls its performance.⁸ Ihaia says:

⁷ Changes to the dance actions and melody are accepted; it is changes to the text of a *fatele* that can cause concern. Such changes can easily occur when a word is spread over a number of notes of the melody and the syllables are perceived as separate words.

⁸ In Tonga, once a composition has been given to a village it remains their dance and whenever they revive it they will attempt to recreate the original, often by asking the original choreographer (*punake*) to prepare the performance (Wendy Pond, personal communication).



A lot of *fatele* that I have composed have been distorted. I feel unhappy because I directed and taught the *fatele*, but they changed it. At a dance practice I can stand up and say the tune is like this, the action like this. Then they must hold onto it, otherwise I wouldn't want to come back to the dancing practice again.

At the performance of his work the Tokelau *pulotu* is in a significant way “anonymous.” His name will never be announced at a performance, either beforehand or in the elder's remarks at the end of an event. Everyone will know who the *pulotu* is, especially if the song is a new one, but it will never be publicly mentioned (whereas in the Cook Islands, for example, a composer may be announced before a dance is performed).

This habit of strict anonymity for the Tokelau *pulotu* is not easily explained. When a new *fatele* is being rehearsed the *pulotu* is center stage; he drives the group, he makes them get the song right, he corrects the dancers. Then at the moment of the performance he “disappears;” as a member of the performing group or the audience, he will not in his demeanor indicate his earlier role. Tokelauans have not explained this feature of their music, but the situation could be likened to other cooperative enterprises (Thomas 1986:92):

When a group prepares food for a feast, or goes on a fishing expedition, in neither case is it appropriate for the individual to be acknowledged (who caught the most fish, or who cooked a special dish) though of course the participants are aware of the identity of such people. A public acknowledgement of their special contribution would diminish the collective achievement. This was brought home to me at a meal with the dancing group when I inadvertently asked a member of the group if the fish we were eating were those caught by him in a fishing expedition that he had been recounting. My remark caused embarrassment and unease. It was acceptable to talk about individual activities (fishing, shopping, cooking) but not to *individualize* the feast itself which was a group product.

In creating the songs which will be presented by the community, the *pulotu* is a contributor to a group effort. If the similarity with other co-operative enterprises is accepted, it can be seen as appropriate that the *pulotu* will be “anonymous” like other contributors. Indeed, at a celebration there will be a feast as well as music, with speeches, *fatele*, and food all included in the festivity, and members of the hosting group specializing in particular tasks—making the performers’ costumes, or gathering gifts for the visitors, or preparing food. None will be identified separately for their contribution.

The balancing of individual contributions against group cohesion is a particular feature of the small-scale Tokelau society. Leadership, apart from the authority exercised by the elders, customarily falls to the best person for the job, and is a temporary prerogative while that occupation lasts. A general social equality is emphasized; *maopopo*, unity of purpose and action, is a key cultural value. Yet although there are no gifts in payment for compositions, and the composer is not acknowledged at the time of performance, in the Tokelaus a talent for composition is recognized in individuals. Like a talent for fishing, weaving, or carving, skill in composition is acknowledged especially in a person’s later years, when skill and talent is matched with experience and achievement.

Conclusion

In these small-scale communities *pulotu* are *individually* known, and their works are enhanced by their public personality.⁹ This is strikingly so in the case of Ihaia. As we have endeavored to indicate, Ihaia at this stage of his life is a commanding presence, an engaging and humorous speaker, yet inclined to willful behavior. This image of him is most completely

⁹ We have used the term “individual” mindful of the cautions in Shore (1982:133-49) that European and non-European cultures have different views of the person, and in Clifford (1978) that “life-writers” should make more open-ended ethnic life studies rather than creating biographies in the European mode.

revealed in his speeches of admonition at community gatherings and in his recounting of humorous tales. Although this profile has not covered other aspects of his life such as his expertise as a fisherman, his talents as a woodcarver, his family relations and so on, all these probably have a bearing on his composition. They provide subjects for his compositions and are part of the social context in which the *fatele* are received and understood.

Fatele, as we have outlined, are an extremely abbreviated and allusive song form; they gain their significance and meaning from their text associations and their context at the time of performance. That meaning includes the community's familiarity with the composer himself. The resonances of the *fatele* are thus not only textual and contextual but include also the attitudes and personality of the *pulotu*, who has left his mark on his compositions in a way that the community who know him will identify.¹⁰

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¹⁰ The two authors have contributed complementary views: one as performer on many occasions, sometimes as group leader, and "nephew" of the composer, and the other as ethnomusicologist and researcher. Work on this profile was carried out in the early months of 1989 but has built on previous work, especially Thomas 1988, supported by UNESCO and the New Zealand Lottery Board; Thomas 1986; and a collaboration between Tuia and Thomas (forthcoming; supported by the Internal Research Committee, Victoria University of Wellington, and the Maori and South Pacific Arts Council). The authors would also like to acknowledge the hospitality and assistance of Ihaia's daughter Meli and her husband Avito, and the generous cooperation of Ihaia himself. The photographs are by John Casey, University Photographer, Victoria University of Wellington.

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