

**THE BANYAN TREE:
PERCEPTION OF PLACE, KINSHIP AND CHURCH IN TASIRIKI
ESPIRITU SANTO, VANUATU**

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at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland**

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Declaration by candidate

I hereby declare that this dissertation "The banyan tree: Perception of place, kinship and church in Tasiriki, Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu" is my own work and effort. It has not been submitted previously anywhere for any qualification or award. All the sources of information which have been used in the thesis have been acknowledged.

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Date: 23 October 2014

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SUMMARY

This thesis focuses on Tasiriki, a mission village in South West Santo, Vanuatu. As a mission village, Tasiriki has thus emerged through and for the church. The pre-eminence of the church in people's life prompts the question of how are we to understand the church as the expression of the *vanua*, (i.e. of the place) and vice-versa? This requires an examination of what it means for a place to grow around the church, and conversely to grow its church. Therefore, I consider two main themes in this work; one is growth and the other, tied to the first, is to consider the respective and entangled roles that the three main poles of people's lives (gardens, kinship and church), play in the growth of the *vanua*. This leads me to re-consider the interplay between church and *kastom* as emplaced practices.

The church is present in most villages of Vanuatu alongside *kastom*. Yet, the church is rarely considered as a foundational, definitional and generative element as much as *kastom* is despite their entanglement with one another. I suggest that by understanding the *vanua* as bound to the church and the church as bound to the *vanua*, we can achieve a holistic conception of contemporary Tasiriki.

The first chapter offers a general introduction to the place in its historical and geographical context. I present the conditions of fieldwork and the methodology. In the light of an emerging anthropology of Christianity, chapter 2 gives an overview of the main arguments that have been at stake in that field and which are relevant to this work. I present different approaches that have been laid out to account for the relation between *kastom* and church in Vanuatu and develop the respective arguments of Rio (2007) and Eriksen (2008) which offer a double, gendered perspective on the village of Ranon, Ambrym which, like Tasiriki, has grown around the Presbyterian Mission. This bi-polarisation of place, which operates through the respective gendered perspectives on *kastom* and church, might prevent achieving a grasp of how church and *kastom* actually articulate to fully express the logic of

place. I therefore attempt to bring into focus the logic operating in Tasiriki within a single perspective.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the description of the elements pre-constitutive and foundational to place; namely the extensive network of relations involving humans and non-humans alike, out of which the vanua is made to emerge, the fundamental principles of kinship expressed through the matrilineages and the paternal emplacement linked to a common male ancestor and land (*nasara*), as well as the foundation of Tasiriki as mission ground.

In chapters 4, 5 and 6, I am concerned with growth, cycles of reproduction, and the possibility of renewal. There I describe the constitution and growth of the three poles that make place, that is: gardens, kinship and church. In Chapter 4, I look at the growth of gardens and plantations which rely on God, and with the two-sided house as the main kin unit of production embodied in the minor (house) or greater (*nasara*) mobilization of yam-body (siblings) and its ramifications. In the chapters 5 and 6, I show how kinship and church are grown through work, and describe the forms of kinship and church that people aim to achieve. By looking at the different cycles organising people's lives, I show the importance of the idea of renewal; the cyclic periodicity of life is therefore inscribed in a wider trajectory of growth; realising Tasiriki as holy ground and being prepared for the Last Judgement.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I show that besides people's work, faith and *rispek* (respect), are both necessary to ensure growth as desired or expected. In the conclusion I bring together the argument of the thesis through reference to the metaphor of the banyan. The huge banyan trees around Tasiriki are the living traces of the emplacement of former vanua. Lulu Varkiki, known for bringing the Good News to Tasiriki, is said to have brought the seed of the word of God so that it could grow like a banyan tree. I borrow this image of the banyan as vanua which I further extend in order to show its potency in expressing the very processes at work in

Tasiriki as well as the on-going emergence of the vanua as rooted and connected. The image of the banyan allows me to articulate the relation between *kastom* and church in a manner different from the ethnographies of the archipelago developed to date.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND NOTES ON LANGUAGE transliteration

ABBREVIATIONS

KINSHIP TERMS:

F – father / M – mother/ Z – sister / B – brother / C – children/ S- son / D – daughter/ eB – elder brother / yB – younger brother / MB – mother’s brother / FZ – father’s sister/ ZC – sister’s children / FD – father’s daughter

CHURCH RELATED TERMS:

NTM – Neil Thomas Ministry
 PWMU – Presbyterian Women Mission Union
 TTI – Tangoa Training Institute
 SDA – Seventh Day Adventist

OTHER TERMS

ASAO – Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania
 VCC – Vanuatu Cultural Center (VKS in Bislama)

NOTES ON LANGUAGE

In the text:

Words in Bislama are italicized

Words in vernacular languages are italicized and underlined

Place names are neither italicised nor underlined

PRONUNCIATION AND transliteration

For the transliteration of Bislama, I have used as much as possible the spelling found in Tryon (1995) or Crowley (2004).

For the language spoken in Tasiriki, the pronunciation of the vowels is as below:

ae- as in “karae” is like the English “high”

ei- as in “avei” is like English “hey”

u- as in “bubu” is like English “bull”

e- as in “mere” is [e]

ou- as in “malou” is like English “grow”

au- as in “tau” is like English “cow”

“r” is slightly rolled and “b” is often nasalised becoming “mb”, I have usually added the “m” like in “Mbuvo”

“g” is always pronounced [g] like in the English “go” even before a vowel.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on the village of Tasiriki in South West Santo, Vanuatu. Tasiriki is a mission village and as such has emerged through and for the church.¹ The church is significant in many ways.² Indeed, its centrality in people's life and its pre-eminence prompts the question around which this thesis is organised, that is, how are we to understand the church as the expression of the *vanua*, (i.e. of the place) and vice-versa? Approaching this question requires an examination of what it means for a place to grow around the church, and conversely to grow its church. Therefore, I consider two main themes in this work. One theme is that of growth, while the other, tied to the first, is to understand the respective and entangled roles that the three main poles of people's lives (gardens, kinship and church), play in the growth of the *vanua*. This leads me to re-consider the interplay and connection, in a place like Tasiriki, between church and *kastom* which I define for now as non-Christian practices of place.

Today, the church is present in most villages of Vanuatu alongside *kastom*. Yet, the church, although increasingly regarded as part of the "ways of place", is rarely considered as a foundational, definitional and generative element as much as *kastom* is despite their entanglement with one another. In contrast, I suggest that by understanding the *vanua* as bound to the church and the church as bound to the *vanua*, we can achieve a holistic conception of contemporary Tasiriki that is relevant more widely to Vanuatu societies. Of central importance to the development of this thesis is to understand the *vanua* and the church as inseparable in Tasiriki. I choose to focus on growth as the key element.

¹ Although the village now hosts two denominations, it is the Presbyterian Church that is my main focus due to the fact that Tasiriki was born from the Presbyterian mission as will become clear. In the context of this work, the church, except when mentioned otherwise, thus refers to the Presbyterian Church in Tasiriki and neighbouring villages as an institution, but also as an embodiment of Christian values and practices, be they related to work or worship. The church is therefore the concept I use to objectify people's relation to the institution as well as the figure of God.

² I have been tempted to use the word "church" without the definite article, as this is the way it often figures in its pairing with *kastom*; i.e. *kastom* and church, locally. However, I will use the expression "the church" throughout for syntactic convenience. In the *kastom*/church pairing context, "church" refers mostly to Christianity as opposed to a "non-Christian" way of place.

Growth has been identified as an important concern throughout Melanesia, almost something of an obsession (Strathern 2014: 52) both for Melanesians and for anthropologists as its indigenous conceptualisation mobilises a number of metaphors that serve as points of entry into the description of sociality and its dynamic, creative, productive, and transformational relations. The cycle of growth, decay and regrowth is most apparent within the plant realm where bare slashed and burned gardens exhibit their green lushness within two months of planting, where coconut plantations left undisturbed for just three months between two harvests have already reverted to an apparent wilderness whose soil is littered with decaying matter, and where paths not walked for a few weeks disappear beneath tall grasses. Leach (2003: 99) notes that, “in fact the whole power of growth is such that in this rainforest environment burgeoning with life, it just occurs without anyone doing anything.” This “just happening” quality is not “enquired into” but is nonetheless subject to manipulation through work – physical, intentional, and by design (following specific protocols) – which ensures an expected, if not potent, outcome.³

The cyclical aspect of growth is most clearly manifest in gardening and the succession of the birth and death of people. In places such as Tasiriki where yam is cultivated, this food crop’s cycle remains the organisational reference in regard to other life cycles as well as to temporal and ritual human activities (Jolly 1994: 64; Mondragón 2004). As Jolly (1994: 167) notes, “this identity between [...] human life and nature is reinforced by the notion that both are never-ending cycles, [...], just as natural decay generated new growth and fertility so human death occurs in the context of the constant reproduction of new life.” Hence Mosko (2009: 680) notes that while, “the wide distribution of cognate plant metaphors across the Austronesian world has been amply demonstrated”, it is the recurrent spatial inferences of the

³ Growth remains a hidden process which should not be “seen”, i.e. observed or enquired into. As Leach (2003: 99) explains, it is the, “out-of-sight nature of things that gives it its potential for growth.” This property of growth as something that happens within enclosed spaces or when people have their eyes closed is something that is also pervasive in Vanuatu when any powerful process of “creation” are involved (Bolton 2003; Mondragón 2004; Rio 2007). It is also the case in Tasiriki as discussed herein.

pervasive base-body-tip forms that are emphasized. Mosko, not only, adds a temporal aspect to these botanical patterns where, “fractal recursions of base-body-tip unfold as life-stages culminating in death, fruit and new life sequences” (2009: 693) but also shows that while, “every action scenario of base-body-tip contains within itself the implication of temporal progression in that order, [...] every fruit generated by a particular tip has the potential for fractal extension either for reproduction or transformation in the base of some further form (2009: 696).” Mosko’s analysis suggests that these patterns are not just self-similar recursions in separate domains of life but that they can engender each other and thus reveal spheres of life which are co-extensive, and possibly, in the nature of the relations implied, commensurate in their effects and outcomes (Leach 2003: 102).

However, the different metaphors – or reified forms – that are related to ideas of growth in Vanuatu are not necessarily all taken from the botanical realm. The main forms which appear as important organizing metaphors throughout the archipelago are the tree and the canoe in Tanna (Bonnemaison 1994, 1996: 34-35), (which could be generalised as) the pervasive metaphor of place (emplacement) and roads (movement, see Bolton 2003: 71), the spiral (theorized in depth by Rio 2007), enclosing/revealing and layering (Mondragón 2004, 2009), and the recurrence of two-sidedness and its dynamic tension (Bolton 2003; Taylor 2008; Hess 2009). Mondragón (n.d.) notes that, “these reified forms are not a figment of the ethnographer’s modelling, but are often concretized in specific cultural phenomena which are idiosyncratic to the societies of Vanuatu.” To help understand this, I draw on Kohn (2013) who speaks of “form’s effortless efficacy.” According to him, the parallels the Runa establish between the sylvan and domestic requires an understanding of, “peculiar characteristics of regularities, habits and patterns [...] [and how] certain configurations propagate in the world in ways that result in [the] sort of patterns” which are morpho-dynamic “form” (Kohn 2013:

157-159).⁴ These forms exhibit a self-similarity – isomorphism – across scales (2013: 163). For Kohn, these forms, because of their likeness, somehow propagate in an effortless manner (2013: 187).

This idea of forms – living and non-living – propagating in the different spheres of life is very similar to the Ambrym case as developed by Knut Rio. Indeed, according to Rio, “Ambrym people create growth through working on analogies that they perceive in their experience with their socialised environment” (Rio 2007: 130). The spiral on Ambrym manifests as a pattern which indexes two important processes of growth in the traditional economy of the place; the yam vine and the pig’s tusk. It is then made, “the ideal form of all serial production which has the purpose of reproduction and growth (Rio 2007: 130), “the ultimate form that social growth must take (2007: 115).” Rio further notes, in his introduction, that such a metaphor of, “passing around and returning in an elevated form” could actually be the foundation of all “project” activities – business, travel, lending, fundraising and so forth (2007: 6).

This last point is important for the argument of this work. As I describe what people do and the forms upon which they rest, one gets a sense that all the activities geared towards growth follow similar patterns, be they gardens, raising children, education, monetary income and the church. Indeed, the latter two activities, which could be categorized as “project” activities (see Rio above), far from being secondary, take up a lot of people’s lives, further propagating forms as these domains are invested in building the potential for the growth of place.

Thus, I aim to show that growth is a very important aspect of people’s understandings of their place, both as a process and as a result. Two main aspects of growth are at stake. One is concerned with the reproduction of kin, the other with the achievement/establishment of

⁴ Kohn (2013), “How Forests Think?” – a monograph of the Runa Quichua of Ecuador

place as holy ground. Indeed, the very possibility of growth involves managing social relations adequately – following a straight road as a Christian does not exempt one to following the straight road defined by *kastom* – while attending to the stages of one's person's life, from birth to death, in specific manners that can ensure a generational, horticultural, monetary, and spiritual renewal.

As mentioned at the outset, the centrality of the church in Tasiriki and its pervasiveness in daily life has been decisive in orienting the argument of this work. Few ethnographies of Vanuatu are devoted to the role of the church alone despite the fact that the majority of people in the archipelago are Christians and that Christian values are, along with *kastom*, one of the pillars of the Republic of Vanuatu⁵. Indeed, speaking of the church immediately requires referring to its twin, *kastom*. The two terms constitute a recognized duality often expressed through the pervasive indigenous metaphors of two-sidedness, and this despite their entanglement and mutual encompassment on the ground. Yet the church is still very much in the background, or often introduced as an element of change and displacement of former understandings and ways of life. I do not wish to say that this is not the case, but it may be worth considering the church as a given as much as the other constitutive elements of people's lives are given, such as the principles organising kinship and thus people's relation to land.

This is quite straightforward and most pertinent in Tasiriki, a place born from the mission. For Tasiriki then the church is a fundamental element in understanding the place and its trajectory of growth not as an institution in the background or a set of practices and values that has displaced another mode of being but as something that integrates different aspects and activities. Hence, working with the entanglement of land, kinship and church and the way

⁵ Tonkinson (2004: 192) suggests that actually, the revival of *kastom* after the independence was understood as being framed by Christianity. He notes that in the political discourses what transpired was that, "only those continuities from the past that accorded with Christian values would be tolerated or encouraged. [...] The meta-message of *kastom* within Christianity was thus quickly absorbed (2004: 192)."

they are similarly grown, also reveals places of disjuncture at which people themselves describe the respective domains of *kastom* and church, as well as the relationship between these domains. Distinctions are emergent within the making of the *vanua*, they do not pre-exist it.

In the first chapter, I offer a general introduction to the place in its historical and geographical context. I present the conditions of fieldwork and the methodology.

The second chapter is focused on Christianity. This chapter weaves in both methodological and theoretical aspects of the research. Indeed, the generative aspect of the church in Tasiriki forces one to consider fully people's relation to Christianity so as to understand place. In the light of an emerging anthropology of Christianity, I give an overview of the main arguments that have been at stake in that field and which are relevant to this work. I also present different approaches that have been laid out to account for the relation between *kastom* and church in Vanuatu. I develop at length the respective arguments of Rio (2007) and Eriksen (2008) which offer a double, gendered perspective on the village of Ranon, Ambrym which, like Tasiriki, has grown around the Presbyterian Mission. Their respective works stand as background to the other; the church, in Eriksen's work obscures *kastom* while *kastom* in Rio's work pushes the church into the background. This bi-polarisation of place which operates through the respective gendered perspectives on *kastom* and church taken by the authors, though justified ethnographically, tends to prevent achieving a grasp of how church and *kastom* actually articulate to fully express the logic of place. In my thesis I therefore attempt to bring into focus the logic operating in Tasiriki within a single perspective.

Chapter 3 is concerned with 'the given'; the elements which are pre-constitutive and foundational to place. I present the extensive network of relations involving humans and non-humans alike, out of which the *vanua* is made to emerge. There, the concept of *vanua* is defined in the ethnographic context of Vanuatu and in Tasiriki in particular. In this chapter, the

fundamental principles of kinship are outlined and the history of the foundation of Tasiriki as mission ground is recounted. Kinship in Tasiriki rests upon two main strands of relations; the matrilineages which are extensive lineages traced through women connecting all people to an element of their environment from which a female ancestor emerged, and the *nasara*, a paternal and historical trajectory of emplacement linked to a common male named ancestor. The *nasara* defines people's connection to the land they can use.

In chapters 4, 5 and 6, I am concerned with growth, cycles of reproduction, and the possibility of renewal. These three chapters describe the constitution and growth of the three poles that make place, that is: gardens, kinship and church.

In Chapter 4, I am primarily concerned with the growth of gardens and plantations which rely on God, and with the two-sided house as the main unit of production. Here the two-sided house can be understood in a sense as the kin unit, be it the household or the *nasara* as the latter should be understood as an extension of the former, not a scaling up, but rather as the minor (house) or greater (*nasara*) mobilization of yam-body (siblings) and its ramifications.

In the chapters 5 and 6, I show how kinship and church are grown through work, and describe the forms of kinship and church that people aim to achieve. By looking at the different cycles organising people's lives, I show the importance of the idea of renewal; the cyclic periodicity of life is therefore inscribed in a wider trajectory of growth; realising Tasiriki as holy ground and being prepared for the Last Judgement and the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Finally, in chapter 7, I show that besides people's work, faith and *rispek* (respect), are both necessary to ensure growth as desired or expected. While it has become apparent by this point that the church lies at the centre of place, it also defines its own limits in managing

relations which people recognize as pertaining to the domain of *kastom*. Hence, besides faith, the place also needs *rispek* to grow.

In the conclusion I bring together the argument of the thesis through reference to the metaphor of the banyan. The huge banyan trees that intersperse the bush all around Tasiriki are the living traces of the emplacement of former vanua. Lulu Varkiki known for bringing the Good News to Tasiriki is said to have brought the seed of the word of God so that it could grow like a banyan tree. I therefore borrow this image of the banyan as vanua which I further extend in order to show its potency in expressing the very processes at work in Tasiriki as well as the on-going emergence of the vanua as rooted and connected. The image of the banyan allows me to articulate the relation between *kastom* and church in a manner different from the ethnographies of the archipelago developed to date.

This takes me back to the initial question, is the church in Tasiriki the embodiment of the vanua, and is the church, Tasiriki's banyan tree? Can the relation between *kastom* and church in Tasiriki be thought of organically, as a bi-polar system (roots and crown) yet completely intertwined and growing as an entity whose shape, strength and further possibility of growth depends as much on being rooted in place as on opening roads which operate a constant re-rooting (re-routing) of place?

PART I

CHAPTER 1 - PRESENTATION OF PLACE AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I begin with a general description of Vanuatu, Santo and the area of fieldwork, i.e. Tasiriki and the Anrua district (South West Santo), then I give an account of the reasons, circumstances and research conditions that brought me to Tasiriki. A brief history of Tasiriki and a short introduction to its social organization provide a context to present the main people with whom I worked during the ten months of fieldwork from April 2011 until February 2012.

Like many researchers in Vanuatu, and I believe in many parts of Melanesia, assuming both a position of “external enquirer”, and a gendered one, while being firmly and unconditionally emplaced in a kin network, played an important role in the way my fieldwork was conducted orienting what actually could be and was done during that time, how and from whom most of the data has been collected, and therefore its resulting qualities and limitations. I finish with an overview of what emerged as important aspects of the fieldwork; aspects to which I devote this thesis.

1.1 Brief geographical and historical context of Vanuatu with a focus on the Island of Espiritu Santo

1.1.1 Geography

Tasiriki and the neighbouring villages are coastal villages located on the south west coast of the island of Espiritu Santo. This island, whose surface area approximates 3959 km², belongs to the Republic of Vanuatu (Siméoni 2009: 26).⁶ The archipelago of Vanuatu, formerly the New Hebrides is located in the South Pacific and is c.1700 km distant from the eastern coast of Australia across the Coral Sea. The boundaries of the actual territory are directly inherited

⁶ The surface area given for Santo in different sources is dependent on the inclusion or exclusion of small islets. The location of the island is between 15° of latitude south and 166-167° of longitude east.

from the colonial delimitations defined in 1906 when the Condominium of the New Hebrides (a joint British-French administration) was established. They do not necessarily reflect the pre-colonial inter-island relations and networks, or the way people conceived of the idea of place, belonging and networking (see among others Bonnemaïson 1994; Mondragón 2009).⁷

Vanuatu, whose Austronesian etymology refers to *Vanua* [land]⁸ and *Tu* [to stand up] (Jolly 2009: 57), is part of a regional sub-area of Oceania which is known as “Melanesia”.⁹ Vanuatu is a Y-shaped chain of 13 principal islands (among which 8 of the largest constitute 87% of the land area) and many smaller ones, and extends over 850 km from north to south. The Torres and the Banks Islands form the northern tip of a double island chain, the upper part of the Y. The western link starting from the Torres continues south with the two biggest islands of Espiritu Santo and Malakula, while the eastern link is composed of Maewo, Ambae, Pentecost and Ambrym. From the island of Epi, the southern part of the archipelago then becomes a single chain of smaller islands, passing by Efate where Port-Vila, the national capital is located, followed by Erromango, Tanna and finally Aneityum at its southern tip (Mueller-Dombois & Fosberg 1998: 84).

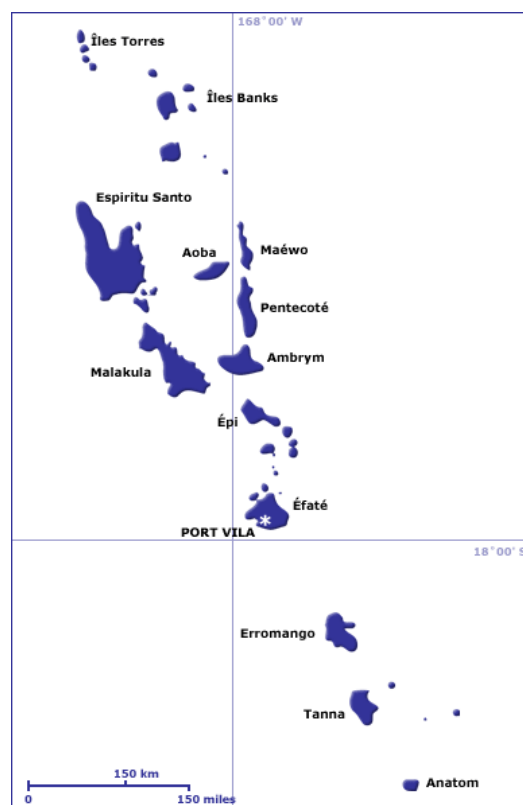
⁷ The Northern islands exchange and influence network differed from that of the south of the Archipelago. The island of Epi acts as a divide and border region between south and north (Bedford and Spriggs 2008: 106), defining two zones of influence with differing artefacts, use of textiles, clothing types, and political institutions.

⁸ “Land” here works as a general gloss. See Chapter 3 for a full and comparative definition of the *vanua*.

⁹ As distinct from the neighbouring Pacific islands known as “Polynesia” and “Micronesia”. Melanesia incorporates the whole island of New Guinea and dependences, all the islands to the East including, among others, the Bismarck archipelago, Solomon Islands, the archipelago of Vanuatu, the Loyalties, Kanaky/New Caledonia (south-western limit), Fiji as its most south-eastern limit, and finally the tiny island of Norfolk Is. as its southernmost boundary.



Map 1.1 - Melanesia



Map 1.2 – The archipelago of the Republic of Vanuatu

The islands of Vanuatu, located as they are along a volcanic ridge, are mountainous with a rugged relief, high plateaus, and more or less wide coastal terraces and plains.

Watersheds are often very deep and steep, rivers flowing through narrow gullies. Three stratigraphic belts, eastern, western, and central have been identified. Espiritu Santo and Malakula belong to the western belt (Mueller-Dombois & Fosberg 1998: 94-95). As such, Santo was mainly formed from sub-marine volcanic eruptive products and associated sediments, then limestone from coral reefs, and finally was recovered in some areas by alluvial terraces. The west coast of Santo, a product of the initial uplifting, counts the highest summits of the archipelago (Mount Tabwemasana 1879 m and Peak Santo 1704 m). The coastal plains are rare and narrow while the remnant of the coast is fringed with coral reefs. These small coastal plains with an elevation of 5 to 25 meters are the privileged places of human traditional settlements (Galipaud & Walter 1997: 11).



Photo 1.1– The limestone cliffs at the entrance of Tasiriki

Vanuatu's climate varies from wet tropical in the north to sub-tropical in the south (Agricultural Census (AC thereafter) 2007). Roughly, the archipelago exhibits a two-season climatic pattern; the trade-winds season, from May to October, resulting in the leeward side of the northern islands exhibiting a 3-month dry season from June to September, important for the planting of yam (*Dioscorea* sp.), a tuber found in many parts of the archipelago and culturally important (Jolly 1994 for South Pentecost; Lanouguère-Bruneau 2002 for Mota

Lava; Rio 2007 for Ambrym). The dry season is followed by a hurricane season, usually from November to April (Mueller-Dombois & Fosberg 1998: 94).

As noted by Regenvanu *et al.* (1997), forest regimes paralleled the human colonization of the archipelago. Evidence shows an extensive use of the primary forest resulting in a dramatic drop of tree cover. Afterwards, throughout the archipelago people developed a tradition of subsistence gardening with slash-and-burn type of clearing leading to the current secondary growth forest or thickets cover. Probably vast areas of secondary forests have been present since early times (Regenvanu *et al.* 1997). Fruit and nut trees are characteristics of the archipelago and still of importance today are present in most areas of current or former human settlement. They were probably introduced during the first wave of colonisation with more species were introduced along pathways of exchange (Regenvanu *et al.* 1997). Later, with the arrival in the early 20th century of the plantation economy with European colonization, a large part of the coastal plains and plateaus were covered with vast expanses of coconut plantations. Currently, most of the land in the archipelago is covered by 75% of natural vegetation, half of which is shade-loving forest, including 10% as primary forest (FAO and Forestry report 1990-1993). The remaining vegetation is composed of secondary tropical or subtropical types of forests, largely dominated by *Ficus* sp. (AC 2007; Tzérkiantz 1999, 2006) as well as discontinuous scrub and thickets. Vegetation types in Vanuatu though not very diverse vary with altitudes, and latitudes, soil types, and geophysical formations, micro-climatic effects as well as human influences. Endemic species are rare and the flora is relatively poor (less than 1500 species) (Walter 2000: 168).

Common to the whole archipelago is a lowland rainforest up to 500/600 m. Due to more intensive human activity in these areas, it is now largely replaced by a secondary growth forest where most tree and shrub species have been chosen in regards to their usefulness (Walter 2000: 169). At higher altitudes from 500 to 1000, as found on the western part of

Santo, the mountains are covered by a cloud forest of microphyllous species (Mueller-Dombois & Fosberg 1998: 97-98). Otherwise, the most common vegetation cover is one of medium-stature forest with lianas which usually denote disturbance, either human or due to hurricanes (Mueller-Dombois & Fosberg 1998: 97-98). The coastal vegetation around the archipelago is dominated by *Terminalia catappa*, *Casuarina Equisetifolium*, *Pandanus* sp., and *Coconus nucifera* among others (ibid.).

1.1.2 History

The earliest settlement found on Santo is on the islet of Malo, off the south-east coast just south to Luganville and is dated c. 2900~2550 B.P, while the west coast of Santo was probably colonized only 1000 years ago due to its difficult access, endowed as it is with a narrow coastal fringe. It is also a coast reputed for its insalubrity, a malarial area still today.

By the end of the first Millennium, the societies of Santo already exhibited many of their modern ecological characteristics. There is not only evidence of irrigated taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) gardening, but also in some areas of stone tables for pig ceremonies and wide pottery production (Galipaud & Walter 1997: 32, 36). In a later chapter when I come to describe the gardens, I will come back more extensively to taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) cultivation, its significance and importance in relation to yam (*Dioscorea* spp.) on the south west coast of Santo.¹⁰

“Linguistic chaining”, as described by Tryon (1996a, b), parallels and corroborates the archaeological findings about the peopling of the archipelago. In Vanuatu, all languages belong to the large Austronesian family, and are classified as the Oceanic branch, spoken by 2 million people and spread out over 500 languages at the end of the 20th century (Tryon 1996b). Multi-lingual hamlets are more the rule than the exception, and most language

¹⁰ See also works from Walter and Tzérkiantz (1997) for the West Coast of Santo, and specifically for the village of Elia and Wusi (see Tzérkiantz 1999, 2006).

circulation and changes are the result of the movement of women integrating into a village upon marrying. It can be also the result of the history of the settlement and local movement of populations (Tzérifiantz 2006).¹¹

In Tasiriki, the local language is called *Ivono*, a version of *Akei*, the linguistic group of the south west of Santo and one of the 4 linguistic groups that cover the 24 languages spoken on the west coast, and have been identified and classified by Tryon as the “West Santo Sub-group” out of the 29 spoken across the whole island (Tzérifiantz 1997: 57-58).¹² The island of Vao (coastal Malakula) links Santo languages to the eastern part of Vanuatu.

The Europeans were present in the Pacific by the 16th century and by the 17th century, the Pacific Ocean was a “Castilian lake” (Jolly 2009: 61). The island of Espiritu Santo was the first island of the archipelago to be landed on and christened. Pedro Ferdinand de Quiros named the island Tierra Austrialia del Espiritu Santo in 1606. He wished to establish the Kingdom of God (*La Nueva Hierusalem*) in Big Bay in the north of the island (Jolly 2009: 65). His attempt at establishing a Christian Kingdom was a failure. More than a century later, in 1760, Bougainville navigated through the archipelago and named it the Grandes-Cyclades. The name did not last long. Cook, in 1774, re-christened it the New Hebrides, a name that was to endure until independence in 1980 (Tzérifiantz 2006: 43-45; Jolly 2009: 57).

The middle of the 19th century saw a more pervasive presence of European traders in the Pacific and interactions with Islanders increased. The trades were mostly in sandalwood and sea-cucumber. An increase in the demand for copra gave the impulse to the starting of plantations and colonization of land from the mid-19th onward.

During this period, there was first an intensification of inter-island exchanges of foreign goods but also of local goods circulating extensively, especially pigs. This led to a

¹¹ See Tzérifiantz (2006: 60) for Elia on the West Coast of Santo, Eriksen, 2008 for the case of Ranon on Ambrym, and Tasiriki herein.

¹² For reference a language map of Santo can be found in Tzérifiantz (1997: 58), and also a more recent and re-designed a map of vernacular languages and their chaining can be found in the Atlas de Vanouatou (Siméoni 2009: 216).

peak of the grade-taking societies regimes (Tzérifiantz 2006: 57-58). By 1882 the French Compagnie de Nouvelle-Calédonie had acquired a large amount of land across the Archipelago, and started to lay claims over it, while the population started to be strongly decimated by imported epidemics, as well as by the start of the Labour Trade known as “Blackbirding” and the subsequent deportation to Queensland (Australia) of plantation work between 1863 to 1904 (Tzérifiantz 2006: 60).¹³

In the meantime, the Archipelago saw the arrival of missionaries. Presbyterians were initially mostly based in the South of the Archipelago while the Anglicans (known as Melanesian Church) established missions in the North (Bonnemaïson 1994: 65). The Presbyterians only reached Santo at the end of the 19th. In the south-west of Santo, after a failed attempt at Cape Lisburn by the Rev. Goodwill in 1870, a mission was later established on the islet of Tangoa (South Santo) that is still running today.¹⁴ It became an important teacher’s training centre for the whole archipelago.¹⁵

Despite the Anglicans being more tolerant than the Presbyterians, by the beginning of the 20th Century all church groups had condemned most customary practices. This signalled the end of the graded societies (in which pigs are killed en masse) (Bonnemaïson 1994: 64). The Seventh Day Adventist Church arrived on Santo around 1917 and settled on the islet of Aoré, South-East Santo. SDA missionaries were known to be even more radical in terms of eradication of customary practices. They engaged extensively in the building of school and hospitals (Bonnemaïson 1994: 78).

The conversion to Christianity was fast on some islands such as the northern outliers of the Torres and the Banks, while islands like Tanna or Santo showed the greatest resistance

¹³ “Blackbirding” refers to the period between 1863 and 1904 when many Melanesian islanders were “recruited” on 3-year contracts to work on plantations in Queensland Australia. See Mortensen 2000 for a discussion on the labour trade/slavery debate. For an account of women’s perspective in regards to the labour trade (see M. Jolly, *Oceania* 58:2, 1987).

¹⁴ Now established on Santo (mainland) at Talua (Talua Ministry Training Institute)

¹⁵ A Teacher is a person converted by a Protestant mission, quickly trained in the Christian doctrine and placed in a village to teach the inhabitants how to follow the life of a good Christian (Galipaud & Walter 1997: 16, fn.5).

towards conversion (Bonnemaison 1994: 53-66). In this context, *kastom*¹⁶ re-emerged regularly from already converted areas of the archipelago as people joined or left the newly established coastal mission settlements (Bonnemaison 1994: 65). As noted by Walter (2000: 170), the adhesion to the new religion was not straightforward resulting in a lot of movement back and forth from the forest to the coast and vice-versa.

Conversion led to the establishment of Christian settlements on the coast setting up an opposition between mountain people who largely kept their customary practices, thereafter known as *menbus* (bushman), and that of the converted coastal settlers (former forest people) (Guiart 1958). Guiart, during an ethnographic and demographic mission conducted for the Condominium administration on the populations of inland Santo in 1954, observed that most people inhabiting the coast by that time were Christian forest people as well as white settlers, having replaced the traditional coastal groups whose extinction was almost complete (Galipaud & Walter 1997: 19, see also Guiart 1955: 15).¹⁷ Currently, according to the 2009 Census, Vanuatu is a Christian country with 95% of the population belonging to a Christian Church and only 4% of the population claiming customary “beliefs”.

With European contacts, a new language emerged that would become the Pidgin Bislama, now the national language of the archipelago since the Independence in 1980.¹⁸ Bislama evolved along the trade routes, in the plantations in Queensland, and came back to the archipelago at the end of the Labour Trade. It was widely used during the time of the Condominium where it acquired its distinctive features that differentiate it from the Solomons Islands’ Pidgin and PNG’s Tok Pisin (Crowley 2004: 4-5).

¹⁶ The term *kastom* is here glossed rapidly as all pre-colonial customary practices that have been partly or completely banned by the different church missions in regard to their respective ideological statements and tolerance to non-Christian local practices.

¹⁷ Guiart’s fieldwork was done over 5 periods within the year 1954.

¹⁸ In the early development of this language, through its “association with the Sandalwood and Bêche-de-mer (sea cucumber) trades it progressively came to be known as Sandalwood English or Bêche-de-mer English. The name Bêche-de-mer was then shortened to Beach-la-mar (Crowley 2004, p.4-5). The term “Bichelamar” is still used by French speakers (ibid.).

As pointed out by Bonnemaïson (1994: 49), by the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th, the British were mostly present through trade and missionisation while the French possessed vast expanses of coastal lands transformed into coconut plantations. The basis for shared governance was already in place. The Condominium regime was established in 1906 and, until its end in 1980, was characterized by a regime of plantations and colonial administration known for its inefficacy (Jolly 1996: 176), leaving as its colonial heritage important problems of land tenure still in the process of being solved today.

Throughout its existence, the Condominium saw strong “syncretic” politico-religious movements such as the John Frum Movement on Tanna, the Naked Cult in the 1950s, and the *Nagriamel* Movement in the 1970s, both originating on Santo (Tabani 2001-2: 151), as well as other *kastom*-based resistance movements in other parts of the archipelago.¹⁹ By the 1970s, the resistance to the colonial rule had become stronger and divided itself along two main lines. The Anglicans, politically articulated through the *Vanua 'aku Pati*, advocated a fast move towards independence and a wish to build a unified nation-state. The opposition, most heterogeneous, was *kastom*-based and supported by the French favourable to a slow form of decolonisation.

In 1980, independence was proclaimed as the *Vanua 'aku Pati* took the lead at the head of the new State with Father Lini the first Prime Minister. The State of Vanuatu was born with both *kastom* and Christian values established as its state ideology. As a colonial legacy, both the Anglophone and Francophone heritage remain throughout the archipelago, expressed in the current education system – Anglophone or Francophone schools are found throughout

¹⁹ The *Nagriamel* named after the combination of two important customary plants in Vanuatu, the *nangaria* (*Cordyline fruticosa*) and the *namele* (*Cycas circinalis*), is a *Kastom*-based political movement starting on Santo in 1966 as people continued to be dispossessed from their customary land to be turned into plantations for the benefits, in the case of Santo, of the SFNH (Société Française des Nouvelles Hébrides). For more details on the nature of the *Nagriamel* and its role as a secessionist movement at the time of independence (see Tabani 2001-2002).

Vanuatu; English and French remained official languages alongside Bislama, the national language.

1.2 Human geography

The total population of the archipelago amounted to almost 234 000 in 2009 (Household Census 2009). This represents only a little more than half of the estimated pre-European population of the archipelago though (Bedford & Spriggs 2008, based on the 1999 census).²⁰ The sex ratio is currently slightly biased towards men, and the demographic distribution exhibits a wide based pyramid with 45% of the population under age 15 in 2007.

Vanuatu counts very few urban centres. The two most important, and probably only ones to qualify as such are Vanuatu's national capital Port-Vila (44 000 people) on Efate (Central Vanuatu) and the second biggest town, Luganville with a population of about 13 000, a third of the total inhabitants of Espiritu Santo (North Vanuatu) (Santo henceforth).

Census statistics shows that only 19% of the total population actually migrates definitively away from their place or province of origin (Caillon 2005). Yet, people moving to urban centres do so on a more or less long-term basis, most often keeping a residence in their home village and moving between town and island, usually having land and kin on the island of origin to whom they can always return; what Bonnemaïson called a "circular mobility" (in Greindl 1997: 119).

People do move and reside in different places, however except when work or education related, these movements tend to follow kinship networks. Inter-island mobility is not uncommon although probably much less intensive than in pre- and early colonial times (see the above section on history). The type of mobility seems therefore to be very much a movement back and forth between village and town rather than migration proper (see Taylor

²⁰ 1999 population of 186 678

2008: 27, 46). Yet Eriksen (2008: 57) notes that from a survey she conducted on Ambrymese urban dwellers in Port-Vila in 2000, “people coming from the villages to the capital have to a greater degree now become urban settlers rather than temporary visitors.”

Women represent an important part of the migrating population. Upon marrying, following the rule of patri-virilocality still prevalent in the archipelago, they move to the place of their husband, or rather “transplant”.²¹ In bigger villages, or in urban contexts, women’s mobility may only involve changing residence from one area of the village to another, from her kin to her husband kin, the significant unit actually not being the village or place of residence proper but rather that of the *nasara*, the “central embodiment of a land owing group” (Bolton 2003: 85).

Eriksen (2008: 56-57) again noted the role women play in these migrations. Women, in the case of the Ambrymese population, seem to form a major group of those relocating to town (Eriksen 2008: 57). She notes three main reasons to account for these migrations; wage labour on a long or short-term basis, marriage, or to help those already established in town such as a mother following her daughter to help in child-care (Eriksen 2008: 57). Eriksen (2008: 79) argues that permanent urban settlement has a consequence whereby kinship networks may become secondary to that of the nuclear family. The reason for this is that money in town is something indispensable to survive and thus people try to prevent the flowing out of cash and seek accumulation, while the reverse model is prevalent at the island and village level.

The census of 2009 still shows an increase in 21.5% in urban population compared to 1999, representing 24.4% of the total population, the rest of the population falling into the rural category. For the 75% or so remaining population living in rural areas, agriculture, fisheries and forestry are the main source of subsistence and income (AC 2007:18).

²¹ See Bolton (1999: 43) for a common metaphor used in Ambae whereby women are compared to *Nanggalat* (*Dendrocnide* sp.), a plant that takes root anywhere.

Subsistence agriculture, which occupies most of the rural population, is mostly crop gardens and livestock other than cattle (AC 2007: 20). Although the subsistence economy does provide for most daily needs, cash has now become a necessary condition to access schooling and for buying other food commodities (rice, oil, salt, tins of meat and fish), fuel, transport, tools, house and kitchen goods, as well as clothes and so forth (AC 2007: 18). Thus, cultivated lands are also devoted to sub-holdings of cash crops, including coconuts, *kava* (*Piper Methysticum* sp.), cocoa, coffee, vanilla, and pepper (AC 2007: 18).

In rural settings, though traditional settlement pattern used to be (and continue to be in many places) of dispersed hamlets organized around a cleared ritual ground (*nasara*) people tend to gather along transport and governmental infrastructures. These are most often in coastal areas or along bush roads. The former pattern was concomitant with the fact that the population used to be quite mobile within a delimited area of one's island (see Bonnemaïson 1994; Galipaud & Walter 1997; Tzérkiantz 2006; Mondragón 2009). This movement was largely correlated with a way of life that relied on horticultural practices of slash and burn with short-term rotations (the frequency of rotations depending on soil quality and weather). In some places, movement was also about leaving the dead behind, the former settlement becoming a burial ground. It was also the way people avoided or solved conflicts. The decrease of, or distance from arable lands, epidemics, risks of sorcery, insalubrity, natural disasters and a tendency to fragmentation are all factors that would have contributed to population displacement (Galipaud & Walter 1997: 12).²²

Before colonisation and the work of missionaries accelerated the formation of large coastal villages, there existed small coastal settlements (Galipaud & Walter 1997: 15, Caillon 2005: 60, Tzérkiantz 2006, Taylor 2008: 137). On Santo, as in most of the archipelago where

²² Miller (1948: 14, in Galipaud & Walter 1997:12) points out that, "[A]s the gardens get further and further from the village the people have to build auxiliary houses in their gardens." This is still true today in Tasiriki.

bush and coast settlements cohabited, an important and inter-dependent inter/intra-island network of exchanges was based on such division (Tzérkiantz 2006).

The arrival of traders and missionaries contributed to the eradication, mainly through diseases and forced labour, of most of these earlier settlements which were then replaced by new villages mostly populated by Christian converts who had come down from the bush (Guiart 1958). These villages were built around churches, close to missions and in areas accessible to ships. The people who joined these villages were all river people, originally living on upper plateaus within territories usually delimited by a watershed.

In the 1950s development policies further prompted such tendency (Taylor 2008: 137). On Santo, from the mid-1960s onward, these coastal villages have continued to grow and are synonymous with a much more sedentary way of life. Mountain population and village censuses show that people are still quite mobile within the bush (Galipaud & Walter 1997: 22). In some places, evidence shows a reverse process of inland migration whereby former inland gardens are being re-opened (Tzérkiantz 1999, 2006, Caillon 2005: 62).

Implied in such a process is the necessary re-investment of old but maintained paths, linking to new ones and thus the necessary (re-) activation of alliances by tracing back one's ancestors' paths (Tzérkiantz 1999: 218-219). This tendency however is not necessarily happening everywhere and is strongly dependent on the local situation regarding transport networks. As previously mentioned, people rely on roads and access to boats to sustain their wider social and economic networks.

It has also been noted that forced co-habitation with too many people is often associated with the breakdown of sociality (Mondragón 2009: 128). While in more crowded areas, invisible boundaries are made, this constriction of space and its unwanted consequence can be an important motivation for people to leave and establish new hamlets (Tzérkiantz 1999, 2006; Mondragón 2009: 116, 128). The “budding off” of some people from villages to

found new hamlets often follows conflicts and what people call “tumas toktok” (too much talk) and the correlated fear of sorcery (see Eriksen 2008: 77).

Such movements and dynamics of separation and boundary making are all present and at play in Tasiriki. They are often tied to kinship and places of origin as well as social strategies of separation and differentiation, currently conspicuously expressed in and channelled through the choice of, and change in, church affiliations (also noted by Curtis 1999: 65; Eriksen 2008: 109, and Hess 2009: 160 quoting Curtis 2002: 154).

1.3 General description of Tasiriki and South West Santo villages, historical perspective and social organisation

What is known as the Anrua District covers most of the coastal South West Santo. The boundaries of this district are inherited from the time of the mission. The main mission station of the area was established in 1900 in Tasiriki by the Reverend F. Bowie. The location was chosen so it could also be a point of access to West Santo left also under the supervision of Rev. Bowie. Tasiriki is the main harbour that allows access to the west coast by sea when one wants to avoid going through the bush.



Map 1.3 – Map of Santo (in the rectangle the Anrua district SW Santo)

Though the district counts many hamlets dispersed on the coast, along the dirt road or a bit further inland, the three major Presbyterian settlements are Tanovusvusi, Pelmoli-Vuna-Ur, and Tasiriki. Lovenue, located above the village of Pelmoli, is smaller in size than the others. The church in Lovenue has been built more recently. It is the fourth village participating in the network of the Presbyterian Church activities at the district level.

Apart from the Presbyterians, there are two Neil Thomas Ministry (NTM thereafter)²³ settlements; one within Tasiriki, on one side of the small stream passing through the village, therefore partly standing apart, and one very small settlement along the beach before arriving at the neighbouring village of Pelmoli. Two recent Seventh Day Adventist (SDA thereafter) settlements are also to be found in the district. One is an offshoot of Tanovusvusi and neighbours it, while the other is an offshoot of Vuna-Ur and is established by the dirt road on one of the former grounds used in the past by the people of Vuna-Ur.

The current geographical partition of villages and hamlets is itself the temporary result of many movements that took place during the 20th century. Pelmoli, for example, which is now quite a big settlement with 309 people (2009 Census) was only cleared and built in the 1970s. Retracing Vekaræ Kiki's²⁴ relatives' movement over the last 60 years bears witness to frequent changes in location over quite short distances alternating between more or less inland settlements and the coast until they finally settled by the coast in the mid-1960s in the same perimeter where Vuna-Ur is now established.²⁵

Hence, apart from villages like Tasiriki and most of the other main Presbyterian settlements cited above which are most likely to remain long-term settlements, people still settle in small hamlets in the periphery of these bigger villages. People seldom settle back inland, preferring to stay close to the road and governmental institutions such as the school, or the dispensary. These smaller settlements are sometimes abandoned while others sprout as new places are being cleared or former grounds reclaimed.

²³ Neil Thomas Ministry is a Christian organisation whose doctrine is heavily based on Methodism. Founded in Australia in 1971, it has been present in Tasiriki since the 1980s and this is same period that Eriksen (2008: 104) accounts for their presence in the area of Ranon on Ambrym. Eriksen mentions that they are also known as the Church of Holiness.

²⁴ Ve Karæ Kiki is the wife of Thomas Jimmy who belongs to the Kererara Nasara from Tasiriki. Thomas Jimmy is a fieldworker and my adoptive father (see below).

²⁵ Between ViAnan, the current main garden area now used by the Kererara, Mbul Mamara, now SDA settlement by the truck road, and Vuna-Ur, opposite Pelmoli on the left bank of the Tira river just south of the Mbuvo (all within walking distances from half-an-hour to two hours).

Already in 1954, Guiart (1958: 20) witnessed that the local people who had converted to Christianity shared, with the planters and the missionaries, quite a narrow band of land along the coast. During the colonial era, movements towards the coast were often related to a curiosity about the mission, sometimes resulting in conversion. People were also attracted by the potential work offered on plantations, while movement back to the bush was often the outcome of a rejection of the new religion, the fear of being taken away by labour traders, or conflicts either with the planters or between and amongst the newly established settlements. Newly converted Christians usually settled where the missionaries had been most active and where people could take refuge from attacks from the non-Christians that is in the southern part of the coastal area of Cape Lisburn.



Photo 1.2 – View towards Cape Lisburn from Lamanro (uphill)

The area of Cape Lisburn is also where the plantations were first cleared by the Reverend Frederic G. Bowie and his brother the Dr. John T. Bowie in the early 20th Century. The plantation of the latter was bought in 1936 by a Welsh planter named Lewis married to a local woman from Erevulai (Guiart 1958: 133). According to Guiart who met him, Lewis was quite averse to the missionaries' activities thus contributing to the diverse tensions between

all the protagonists, i.e. coastal people, bush people, missionaries, planters and the colonial administration. This plantation played an important role both in the local history and in the current relations between Tasiriki and Pelmoli (see Chapter 7).



Map 1.4 – South West Santo (Anrua district), Tasiriki and Pelmoli, their garden and plantations area

The south-western area of Cape Lisburn is also known as Vulua (Guiart 1958: 133). It is the name that can still be found on the official map from the Ministry of Land and it is found on the frontispiece of the church in Pelmoli which reads as “Vulua Goodwill Memorial Church”. According to Bubu Rara Tosusu²⁶, the current people in Pelmoli are not Vulua, these people no longer exist and the language is no longer spoken. The current people living in Pelmoli are of mixed origin, mostly from the village of Tanovusvusi and from the Navaka River. A traditional song from the west coast of Santo mentions the Vulua people and their involvement in pig trading with the people from Elia on the west coast (Tzérkiantz 2006: 69).

²⁶ Thomas’s Jimmy father’s brother (see below).

Guiart (1958: 133) mentions that at the time he visited the area, there were only 83 native people inhabiting the Vulua district who claimed to be of Vulua descent.

1.3.1 Presbyterian villages in South West Santo

Guiart (1958: 24-25) describes the Presbyterian villages as being organised around a well-tended grass field. The houses were usually elevated. The walls were made of opened and flattened bamboo woven together. The roof was made of *natangora* leaves, *ato* in vernacular (*Metroxylon* sp.). The houses are usually built with a veranda in front. Currently, most of the Presbyterian villages are still very much organised that way. The central field usually is home to the *nakamal* (defined for now as the communal house, it is also known as the chief's house). In some places, like in Tanovusvusi, it bears the two crossed *namele* leaves (*Cycas rumphii*) above the main door symbolizing customary power. The church is not usually located in the same area (except in Lovenue where space is scarce and thus the *nakamal* and church are very close by).²⁷ As for architecture, the former model of houses with no walls has almost completely faded in Christian villages. Sometimes the kitchen might have retained a closer form to that of the original dwellings, with no windows and the roof extending almost to the ground, while for the sleeping houses, elevation or a concrete base, walls and windows are the prevalent model.

Some houses in the village are now even built in concrete which indicates a much more settled and immobile concept of the living place than people used to have (see also Rodman 1995: 275). Also these concrete houses follow closely a western style of architecture and can be quite elaborate if the person has enough money. In all cases, the kitchen building

²⁷ Taylor (2008: 150) notes that in North Pentecost, the church does not belong to the hamlet or *vanua* in the same way as the *imwa* [houses] and *gamali* [men's house] do. Taylor suggests that this is due to the fact that the church is opened to anybody in contrast to the private nature of hamlets. This might be indeed the case. In Tasiriki, the church is also slightly "apart" from the village but fully belongs to the *vanua* per se. The "sacred" character of the church may also be considered as a reason for the fact that the church is not amidst the houses.

remains separate from the sleeping house and of traditional manufacture (see also Rodman 1995: 276).²⁸

1.3.2 Tasiriki

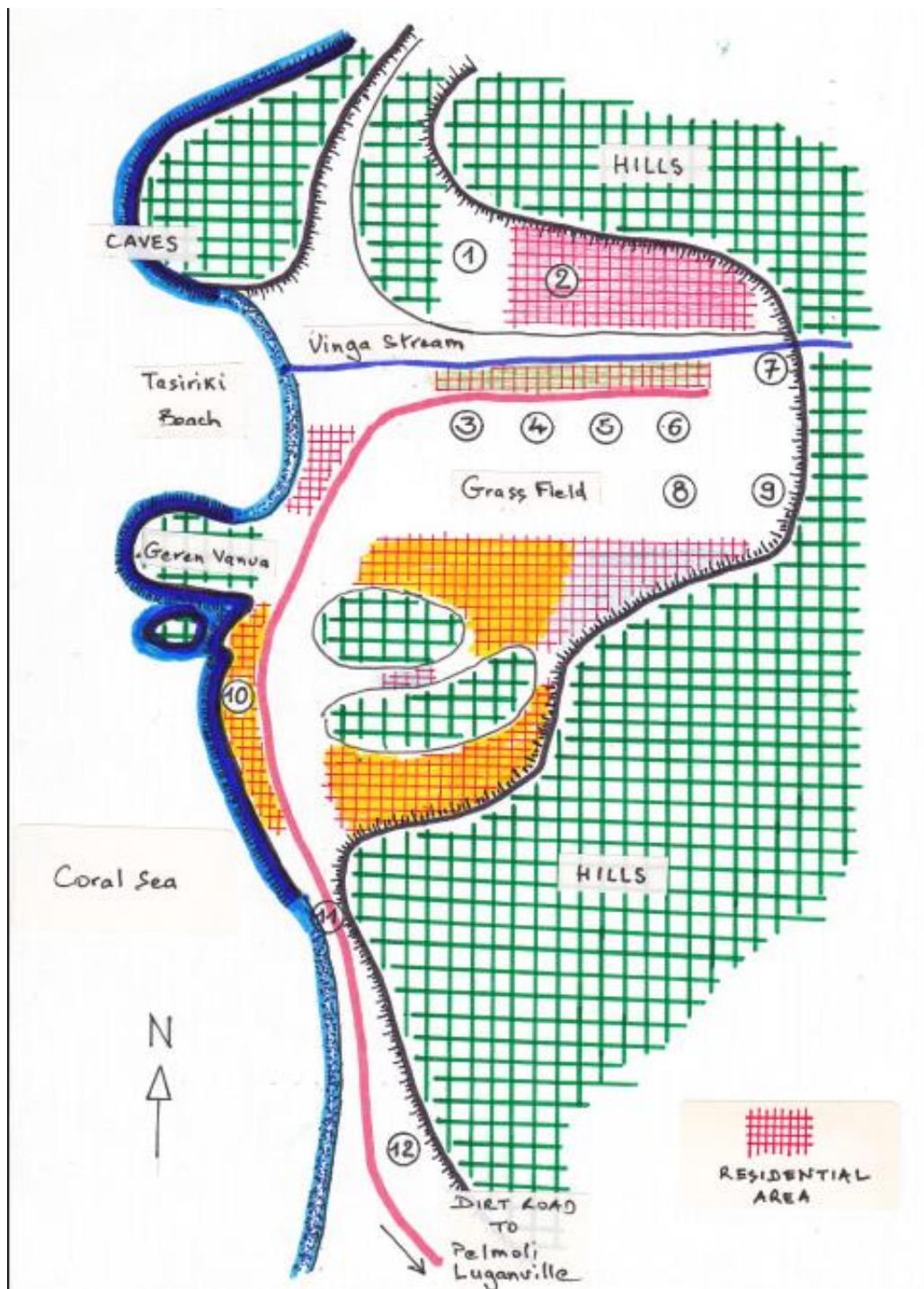
Tasiriki,²⁹ literally “small sea”, as it is known now, is a place born from the encounter of two men: the Rev. Fred Bowie from the Presbyterian Church and Lulu Varkiki, a man Mbuvo, at the turn of the 20th century. Reverend Frederic Bowie took Lulu Varkiki into his service and converted him. Later, he sent him to the shore of Tasiriki, the station he had established, and the two men started to propagate the Good News, attracting Lulu’s own people down from the bush at upstream Mbuvo (see Chapter 3 for the full story of Tasiriki). They were followed by the Navaka people, and finally a woman Kererara with her children. Later on, in the 1920s the Bayalo people also joined the village.

Tasiriki is now a big village; it was not always so. A picture from 1949 (Miller 1990: 141) shows sparse housing. In the 1950s, Tasiriki was known for being a heat trap where yaws and tuberculosis were common (Guiart 1958: 23), and the census of 1950 mentions 81 inhabitants in the village (Guiart 1955:10).³⁰ Since then, the village has grown quite dramatically, the last census (2009) gives a number of 406 people spread over 89 households.

²⁸For a description of the kitchen and its importance in people's life, see Chapter 4.

²⁹ *Tasi* [sea], *rihi* [small]

³⁰ Guiart (1955: 14) mentions that in 1922, there was a dramatic epidemic of meningitis in the village killing many, though no figures are given.



Map 1.5 – Map of Tasiriki

1. Presbyterian Church, 2. NTM Church, 3. Chief's Nasara, 4. Nakamal, 5. PWMU house, 6. Guest house, 7. Shower place, 8. Kindergarten, 9. Dispensary, 10. Thomas Jimmy's house, 11. Cattle gate, 12. School

A group of coastal people initially inhabited the place. They were settled on a rocky peninsula currently named Geren Vanua (literally, the end of the inhabited place) located at the south end of Tasiriki's beach. None of their descendants now live in the village (see also Guiart 1955: 15). The new-comers who joined the mission also initially settled on Geren Vanua. After an incident involving a fire set by a villager in the late 1940s, people left the peninsula and settled on the coastal terrace, now the main body of land upon which most of Tasiriki is built. The small rocky peninsula which can only be accessed through climbing has now been chosen to be the dwelling place for the to-be-chief's pigs; this is also one of the few spots in the village where one can catch the cell phone network.



Photo 1.3 – One end of Tasiriki's beach and the peninsula of Geren Vanua

The coastal terrace was a former swamp, hemmed within hills arranged in horseshoe shape, whose open side is Tasiriki's small beach. Houses are arranged in rows on each side of a field all quite close to each other and with all houses facing the sea, a position related to the way wind blows during hurricanes.



Photo 1.4 – Tasiriki grass field view towards the eastern hills (left) and towards the sea (right)

Two third of the hills are high and steep, while the southern side subsides into a small hill which parts the village in two; houses are built on both its slopes and on its top. Space has become scarce especially as each household is usually composed of two buildings, the kitchen and the sleeping house. The main terrace is further divided on its northern side by a small stream called Vinga which flows into the sea by the beach.

The geophysical partitioning of the landscape is put to use to a certain extent by the people to set themselves apart. Tasiriki, being a composite village, the Mbuvo, Navaka, Kererara people are more or less spatially organized around the central field while some of the Bayalo people have settled on the north bank of the Vinga (see map of Tasiriki above).

The NTM and the Presbyterian Church are both on the northern side of the Vinga. The NTM main settlement is built in the vicinity of the NTM Church made of bamboo and thatch. The NTM followers are for most part Bayalo people who changed to this denomination in the early 1980s. A few other people from other *nasara* have started to join the NTM Church but they still represent a minority.

The Presbyterian Church, a concrete building still under construction, is built on the initial location where Reverend Bowie established the station when he first bought the land.³¹



Photo 1.5 – The Presbyterian Church. Photo taken during Jaklyn and Ae Nalin *blesin mared*.

**On the right, the commemorative plaque to Rev. Bowie
and the former emplacement of the mission station.**

Just above the church, the place is called Vare (work place); as the name indicates it is a former garden area. Gardens have moved through time. Their increasing distance from the village denotes the historical evolution of the place, its development as a bigger settlement generation after generation, as well as the extensive planting of coconut plantations which

³¹ In Miller (1990: 140), there is mention of Rev. Bowie buying the land but there is no record of the people involved in the transaction. Guiart (1955: 15) notes that the former owners of the land in Tasiriki have disappeared without leaving any traces. Thomas said that the land had been bought from a woman originally from Tasiriki.

“eats” most of the *level graon* (coastal narrow plain) as well as the closest hills and hilltops, hence pushing the gardens beyond these areas, further into the bush.

This situation is peculiar to the geophysical position of Tasiriki. People in Pelmoli, although facing a similar situation and having to walk quite a long way to their gardens, do not (mostly) have to climb hills. People around Pelmoli also tend to bud more into new smaller settlements with their gardens kept close to newly cleared hamlets. In Tasiriki however, the lack of space combined to the constant grazing and roaming of cows in the village area does not allow for growing small gardens attendant to the house.



Photo 1.6 – View of the village from the northern side of the Vinga – grass field and houses

The Vinga comes into the village from the eastern hills. It rushes down the steep slope and is canalised with a long big bamboo which is used as a pipe and is the communal shower place. The water just flows from the bamboo, forming a shallow pool just under a huge

mango tree. When used as a showering place, women and men go separately. One can tell which group is taking their turn by looking at who is waiting to go down. It becomes quite crowded in the early evening when everybody comes back from the gardens and needs to bathe; this is even more so when the piped water system that runs across the whole village is out of order. Then it is a waltz of buckets, of soap and laundry basins, of children carrying kettles up and down the slippery path... The kettles and buckets for the kitchen water are filled from a pipe which brings water from a stream further up; the water is clean and cool and can be drunk without being boiled.

While the Navaka people occupy the southern side of the Vinga, the Mbuvo people occupy the upper part of the terrace just by the eastern hills. In this same area are located the dispensary (a provincial institution),³² the kindergarten or *kindi* (a village-run institution), the Guest House (also called the Project House), the Presbyterian Women Mission Union (PWMU) house (the women's meeting house, men usually meet in the church), and the open *nakamal* located on the left side of the terrace.



Photo 1.7 – (from left to right) The *nakamal*, the PWMU house, the Guest House, and the Kindergarten

³² The local dispensary is located on the north-eastern side of the field. It employs two nurses, one male, one female, and is used by the people of Tasiriki and Pelmoli, Lovenue and all the other small hamlets of the area.

The Kererara people are the most numerous. Their *nasara* occupies the southern side of the terrace, the small hill which cuts the village in two, and then the other side of it, another small space hemmed between cliffs, just by the south entrance of the village.

Further down, on the cliffs directly overlooking the sea, three households are built on the rock, an area cleared a decade ago. The place is called Mbwa Kore (Hole – Tamtam/Echo) because of the sound of the waves pounding with an echo against the porous coralline rock; it is on these cliffs that Thomas Jimmy and his family's sleeping house and kitchen are built, and where I lived during the time of my stay.

Apart from these positions, there are other aspects of Tasiriki's spatial organization worth mentioning. One such aspect is due to the herd of cows left roaming freely throughout the village. Originally, these cows were, I have been told, mission cows. The cows were introduced by the missionaries and these cows belonged to the church that is to the whole village. They belonged to the village as a whole. However, now some are still mission while others belong to families. Their usual spot is on the large open field. However, every day they will start their migration through the village, sometimes even down to the beach. They are kept from leaving the village by the dogs and if not the cattle gate is there to stop them in last resort. During their daily roaming, they graze whatever they find palatable. This has consequences in the overall aspect of the village and the marking of spatial delimitations. In neighbouring villages where cows are absent, a house may be surrounded by a row of small trees (also found around gardens) such as nangaria (*Cordyline* sp.) ceremonial and ornamental trees with colourful leaves or peipei (*Polyscias* sp.) fragrant shrubs used in cooking. In Tasiriki, delimitative lines of shrubs are scarcely found due to the presence of the herbivores. As such, within the village, the *nasara* are not delimited in a visible fashion. Of

course people do know where the boundaries are and therefore it is not likely to be a problem except maybe for the anthropologist who is trying to decipher what is going on.

Ornamental and fruit trees as well as small gardens are to be found though in areas of the village that the cows cannot reach or when the houses have been fenced, fencing being rarely seen in any other villages of the area. Thus on the other side of the Vinga, one looks at a totally different picture, most houses being hidden behind rows of shrubs. Likewise in Pelmoli, where there are no roaming cows, the configuration is different. This is especially the case in Vuna-Ur, the *nasara* cleared by Vekarae Kiki's father. There, houses are disposed in a somewhat circular fashion, with an open space in the middle for people to gather. Ornamental trees are planted around groups of houses, as well as fruit trees (esp. *Citrus* spp. and mango trees). People used to plant a mango tree on the site of their house or *nasara* as a mark of their settlement and thereafter to identify the place when they had settled elsewhere. Indeed, knowing which trees are planted where and their configuration as well as the enumeration of all former settlements, in the case of land disputes, is the only way to claim land or to prove that one's claim of belonging to one particular *nasara*, thus to be entitled to settle or use the land of that particular place.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Pre-fieldwork research interest

The initial object of my research was to comprehend people's relationship to the forest and the kind of knowledge produced through this relation. I knew beforehand from the ethnographic data and related literature that in Vanuatu "the forest" which allows human settlements meant to a large extent an anthropic area of gardens, plantations, secondary growth from former gardens left in fallow, uncultivated places where specific tree species are

planted or replanted for particular uses, and places that people do not tread because they are “taboo” namely forbidden or restricted for various reasons (see Chapters 3 and 4).³³

In most parts of Vanuatu, however, people tend to live with the forest rather than in the forest. This is especially the case for the majority of rural people now settled in the bigger coastal villages that nucleated and organised around churches during the mission era in the 19th and early 20th Centuries, establishing a pattern of long-term, if not definitive, settlements, with education and health facilities further implemented during the colonial era.

An important aspect of the initial research proposal was to understand the relation/s people entertained with the forested milieu and whether or not this relation was analogous to relations governing/organising kinship or vice-versa. Following that, I was interested in understanding the nature of knowledge; that is, what was meaningful and relevant to know for people, and how in turn this knowledge was organized.

There are different reasons that led me to the choice of Espiritu Santo, as a place to conduct fieldwork. First, Santo, being the biggest island of the whole archipelago, it is extensively covered by forests. And, in the south and west of Santo, despite their migration to coastal villages, people continue to be “river and forest” oriented, these being the arteries towards the gardens and the places where these are found. The little knowledge of Santo I had at the time when deciding upon the location of my field-site was mainly informed by F. Tzérikiantz’s thesis (2006) who conducted fieldwork on the central west coast of Santo, mainly in the villages of Elia and Wusi.

In that work, Tzérikiantz emphasises the ethno-history of the central-west coast and retraces people’s comings and goings from bush to coast since the first contacts with European traders in the 19th century. When analysing the tensions between movement and settlement over the century leading to the current configuration of the two aforementioned

³³ See Tzérikiantz (1999, 2006), Lanouguère-Bruneau (2002) and Caillon (2005) among others.

villages, Tzèrikiantz identified two socio-political aspects governing these tensions; on one hand the relational dynamics between *kastom* and the church, which in their great diversity and idiosyncrasies pervade the whole archipelago, and on the other hand, the articulation of these tensions through an “individual vs. community” sociological framework whereby individual concerns always threaten the unity of the community people strive to create or maintain.

Tzèrikiantz’s work pointed to a form of knowledge which is produced from and concerned with people’s relation to land, kin, the play of power that one inherits from places and people, as well as a where one stands in regards to *kastom* and Church.

Another important source I had at the time to inform my knowledge on Santo was the first reports of the naturalist expedition Santo 2006 led by the Museum Of Natural History in Paris. The main goal was to conduct an exhaustive survey of the island’s Biodiversity. The controversies that emerged around this expedition (Bouchet et al. 2008; Tzèrikiantz 2008; Robillard 2008 and Tzèrikiantz and Broto 2009³⁴) evinced the differential relational perspectives of western and ni-Vanuatu’s perceptions of their life-world.

The south-west coast of Santo has seldom been researched. The most extensive work that can be found on this particular area is “Espiritu Santo” written by Jean Guiart (1958); a political more than ethnographic account of the fieldwork he conducted in 1954 for the Condominium administration (Guiart 1958: 7-8). The book is mainly concerned with bush people living in the mountainous inland and accounts for the tense political situation prompted at the time by conflicts between planters, locals converted to Presbyterianism and settled on the coast, the Presbyterian Mission on Tangoa and the people who had decided to remain in mountainous hamlets, weary of both the church and the colonial administration.

³⁴ « Sevrpek City »; un film de Emmanuel Broto, Fabienne Tzerikiantz 2009 - France - 55 minutes - DV Cam @ Film-documentaire.fr (http://www.film-documentaire.fr/Sevrpek_City.html,film,24774).

Guiart's monograph provides interesting historical insights in regard to the region and some general, though limited, ethnographic data regarding kinship, horticulture, descriptions of settlements, customs, myths as well as people's diverse understandings of Christian concepts and values as conveyed by missionaries and the local converts. Noticeably, reading his field reports, one can see that through the rejection, adoption, or as a basis for inspiration in implementing new modes of sociality, Christianity had already become by that time a significant presence in the relational, ideological, conceptual and spiritual landscape of the place.

Other sources for South West Santo come from missionaries. The Reverend Graham Miller wrote an extensive history of the mission in the New Hebrides. In the 7th volume of his book, "Live: A history of church planting in Vanuatu, vol.7" (1990), the Reverend devotes one chapter to Tasiriki and the establishment of the mission there.³⁵

1.4.2 VCC and Entry

The researcher who wishes to conduct fieldwork in Vanuatu must follow a protocol set by the Vanuatu National Cultural Council (VNCC thereafter) and the Vanuatu Cultural Centre known as *Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta* in Bislama (hence VCC or VKS respectively thereafter). Therefore the to-be researcher has to hand-in a proposal whose relevance to the country and its people conditions the acceptance by the Cultural Council. Usually, before the researcher submits his/her proposition, he/she has to indicate the community where the fieldwork would take place and the fieldworker with whom the researcher wish to work. The research is understood as being a collaborative project involving both the researcher and the fieldworker

³⁵ Graham Miller and his wife arrived in the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) in 1941 as missionaries of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand. From 1947-1952 Graham became the principal of the Teachers' Training Institute on Tangoa Island, Santo. In the 1970s, he started to write the 'Live' books, a seven volume history of the church in Vanuatu.

to whom he/she is attached;³⁶ the male or female researcher should preferably work with a man or woman fieldworker respectively.³⁷

Fieldworkers are ni-Vanuatu men and women who are attached to the VCC on a voluntary basis. While the fieldworkers' personal motivations to join the national team may differ, their mission as stated by the VCC is to document customary practices, vernacular languages, and to promote an understanding of local *kastom* across the archipelago through national annual meetings bringing them together. As noted by Bolton (2007: 24), in 2007, there were, "approximately one hundred male and female volunteer extension workers based in their own villages throughout the country, work[ing] to document and research *kastom* in their own areas, meeting annually to discuss their findings, their achievements and their problems." The fieldworkers' training workshops were until 2010 held annually at the VCC in Vila, led by both late Professor Darrell Tryon, involved since 1981 with the men's team as their chairman, and Dr. Lissant Bolton, leading the women's team.

Prior to submitting my project to the VCC, I therefore contacted Dr. Bolton and Professor Tryon for guidance in regards to possible field-sites on Santo and fieldworkers with whom I could work. It turned out that there were only a couple of women fieldworkers on Santo. One, based on the west coast had worked with F. Tzérifiantz, and the other had just been suspended from her function by the VCC. Pr. Tryon suggested that I could be attached to a man fieldworker whose wife could then act as a woman fieldworker.

In the light of my project, since no extensive nor intensive research had been undertaken in the south west of the island, he further proposed that I worked with Thomas

³⁶ "[There was] a long pause during the moratorium on most foreign research from 1984-1994, and [...] when it recommenced it did so with an exemplary set of research guidelines. These emphasize the importance of considering the aims of research in the context of the needs and priorities of communities and the importance of collaboration with ni-Vanuatu and with local fieldworkers where possible". For more, see VKS website on Feb 13th 2013 @ <http://www.vanuatuculture.org/component/content/article/16-fieldworkers/84-collaborative-research-in-vanuatu-since-independence-fw> or <http://epress.anu.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/epilogue3.pdf> for the PDF version (written by Margaret Jolly 2006).

³⁷ The woman fieldworkers' team was initiated by Lissant Bolton and Jean Tarisesei. It started in 1994 (Bolton 2003: 193) following on the Women's Culture Project which started in 1991 on the premises that "women have *kastom* too (Bolton 2007: 23)."

Jimmy based in Tasiriki. During the 2010 workshop, Pr. Tryon talked with Thomas Jimmy about the possibility of having a researcher come to work with him. Since the latter agreed, it was then decided that my research would be conducted there. The proposal was submitted in October 2010 and finally accepted in March 2011 after a three months delay in processing the demands that year.

I arrived in Vanuatu on the 1st of April 2011. After the research visa and contract had been signed, I left for Tasiriki where I arrived in the afternoon of the 20th of April 2011. The fieldwork was thus conducted from the 20th of April 2011 to the 13th February 2012. I stayed in Tasiriki for almost 10 full months. I took a field break during the whole month of November which I spent mostly in Port Vila. The break was initially planned so as to attend the fieldworkers' workshop. This latter having been cancelled, I instead took the time to rest, write, spend time at the National library to consult church archives and relevant literature and consult with my supervisor.³⁸

In February, I left the village just after cyclone Jasmine had swept across the archipelago. The cyclone isolated us for more than a week, the state of rivers and the sea cutting the village from the rest of the island. I left Tasiriki a couple of weeks earlier than the date we had decided with Thomas. The uncertainty of the weather and the possibility to be trapped in the village if another depression or cyclone was to follow prompted the common decision that as soon as a truck could get through, I would go.

1.4.3 My location and connections: who is who and how related

Upon my arrival in Tasiriki, I had no body, I was nobody. Like any person who cannot claim any kin relations in the village, I had to stay at first in the Guest House and wait upon Tasiriki's *jif* (chief) decision so as to know whether I could stay, and under which

³⁸ The 2011 meeting was cancelled, for funding reasons, while I was on fieldwork and thus neither I nor Thomas Jimmy, the fieldworker with whom I worked in Tasiriki, were able to attend. There were no meeting held in 2012 either, but a meeting was held in Port Vila in August 2013.

conditions.³⁹ After finally meeting both with *Moli* (Chief) Sara Noso and Thomas Jimmy and having given them the letter from the VCC justifying my presence and stay in the village for research, Thomas told me that I was to move to his place on the next day. So, the next morning I was taken to Thomas Jimmy's house, I was adopted; I was given a room in the sleeping house, initially that of Ae Niki, my brother, and was left in Vekarae Kiki's (Thomas's wife) care. She became my mother.

Leaving the Guest House meant that I had to become part of what was on the other side of its fence, that is an extensive kin network and, then through kinship, a member of the Presbyterian Church. A couple of hours later, on the way to church for the Good Friday office, all dressed in *aelan dres*⁴⁰ (island dress) Kiki gave me a *kastom* name. She told me that from then on I would be called Ve Ae, like all the girls born of a paternal grand-mother whose matriline is *Ae* (Water/*Kava*), hence my sisters thereafter.

This made not only Thomas, but also his brothers and some of my cousins (FZS), my fathers.⁴¹ After being given a name, I was introduced to the whole congregation during the service, and by the end of it, I had to stand at the church door and shake hands with everyone present in the church that day. Then we went home and I shared my first meal eating what Kiki had prepared and what other kin had sent for me to eat.

I was thus placed amidst kin and by the same token emplaced in the land, defining at once the paths and the directions that would orient and direct my daily life for the months to come. It established whom, what and where would become familiar, the places that we would work and the places that we would just pass by or only work when asked. It conditioned

³⁹ Chief (*Moli* in Ivono/ *Jif* in Bislama) is the title given to the man who has customary authority over a *nasara* and, in the case of Tasiriki which is a composite village grouping four *nasara* over the village as a whole (see Chapter 7 for a discussion of what the term chief encompasses in Vanuatu in general and in Tasiriki in particular).

⁴⁰ Island dresses are missionary dresses, the outfit of most women especially in rural areas. These are large and long cotton dresses which tend to be very colorful and flowery. In Melanesia, each country has developed its particular style of dresses; thus women talk of Vanuatu style, New Caledonia style, PNG style etc... Sometimes they sew dresses inspired by these other styles.

⁴¹ See kinship system and matrilineages in Chapter 3.

which part of the village and the bush would become familiar. I got to know first and foremost our own neighbourhood and the area of the village occupied by the Kererara *Nasara*, the paternal ancestral ground, as well as their gardens and plantations located in the nearby bush. As the days went by, being fed, walking paths, working in the gardens and the plantations, carrying food down to the house, I darkened, *ta virvir* (vern. for: she blackens) was what they would often say about me; or *yu fatfat nao* (Bisl. for: you are fat now) that is I had taken on substance. I was dressed in flowers and colours on the days of worship; thus I became somebody, I got thicker, or rather my body appeared thicker to people, and so did the world to me. It grew as a second skin, as though I had been grafted, or trans-planted even, and growing out of it with the taste and texture of this particular place and its constituting relations; kinship, gardens and the church. These three poles and the relations that tied or untied them continuously wove Tasiriki's daily life; this is what constitutes the backbone of this work.

1.4.4 Relatives as main interlocutors during the research

Thomas Jimmy is fieldworker since 1998. Although avowedly Christian and involved in the Presbyterian Church as an Elder, he is also deeply attached to *kastom* and presents himself as a revivalist, hence his engagement with the VCC. He belongs to the Kererara *Nasara* (emplaced paternal group), a *nasara* involved with both the church and *kastom* leadership since the time of his grandfather, *Moli Sara*, second chief of the village in the early days of Tasiriki. Thomas has three brothers and six sisters. All except two of his sisters live in Tasiriki.

Thomas Jimmy is married to VeKarae Kiki, from the Vuna-Ur *Nasara*. Kiki was brought up in an initially non-Christian family. Her father never converted while some of his brothers did. The *nasara* is now Christian. Because of her background, she has a better

knowledge of *kastom* than her husband. Kiki and Thomas have been married for more than 25 years and have 3 children, one elder boy and two girls.

Rara Tosusu Tapor, whom I knew as Bubu Tosusu is Thomas's father's brother. Now retired and elderly, he has been a Teacher all his life.⁴² He studied at the Tangoa Training Institute (TTI thereafter) in 1942 and then in 1949. Although he took the exam to become a Pastor within the Presbyterian Church, he never managed to pass. He is the second of five brothers, including *Moli Noso*, the third chief of Tasiriki and second chief coming from the Kererara. He is now the elder of the three of them still alive. He has 4 sons and 3 daughters. Among the 4 sons, three are working in government or administrative jobs. The eldest, late Pasa Tosusu, former head of Vanuatu's Ombudsman, passed away suddenly during summer 2012. His three daughters all live in Tasiriki, only one married and thus is now part of the *Mbuvo Nasara*.

Vevojivoro Tosusu is one of Bubu Tosusu's daughters and was, apart from Thomas and Kiki, my main interlocutor. She taught me the local language. To do so, we worked on a collection of Church Hymns⁴³ mostly translated over the years, from Lulu Varkiki and Reverend Bowie up to the 1980s, in the vernacular languages of Tasiriki and Pelmoli/Tanovusvusi, and edited by Bubu Tosusu. I therefore learned some vocabulary and some basic syntax of the language thus allowing me to further understand the conversations held in vernacular rather than Bislama.

On Kiki's side, Bubu Ambuluran, one of her father's brothers, and his daughter, Jarrett, were my main story tellers. Eliane, Kiki's niece (BD), was also an important interlocutor in all matters regarding gardens.

⁴² See footnote 16 above.

⁴³ The title in the local language is *Hapai To-lui Susuhi Vete*, it was printed in 1988. It gathers quite free translations of most of the hymns found in the Book 3 of the Presbyterian Church in Bislama and used throughout Vanuatu, also including original texts (like the hymn recounting the foundation of Tasiriki) written on the given musical themes attached to specific hymns.

The people mentioned above are the relatives who have acted as my main interlocutors during fieldwork and thus are the ones who have most contributed to my understanding of the place. Of course, during the 9 months that I stayed in Tasiriki, I engaged with many other people but in a less formal manner in regards to the collection of data. As I said earlier, most of the people I used to talk to or spend time with belonged to the Kererara *Nasara* and thus were close relatives to my father Thomas. Otherwise, I spend much time with the women of the PWMU group.

1.4.5 What I did and how I gathered data

A typical week in Tasiriki with my family would roughly have the schedule given below. Of course, things are very flexible and a lot of unplanned activities made for different weeks: going to a wedding, or devoting a week to *kava* or other plantation work to pay school fees for example. The work was also seasonal, with the month of September (for example) devoted to yam planting and December/January working mostly on plantations to make money for Christmas and the school fees for the new term.

Throughout my stay, the daily schedule was made almost at the last minute. Thomas and Kiki would usually have their own program, or work together depending on what needed to be done, whether other kin joined or if we were joining others for a specific task. It was not unusual though that men and women would work on different things, and go to different places. I rarely worked with my brother. He was always on errands with other young men doing work for their youth association. It was often Kiki and I who were sent to fetch food from the garden or to gather firewood. Nevertheless the schedule below is a good indication.

Monday/Tuesday – School (teaching English to year 4, Maths to year 7, and French to year 6), otherwise in the gardens with Kiki. Mondays and Tuesdays were spent with my mother whenever there was no school, which happened to be more often than it should have been.

Wednesday/Friday – Group work with women for the church (PWMU). The work is taking place either on coconut plantations or on *kava* plantations. Once a month on Friday, all the PWMU women from the area joined in *Kombaen* in one of the 4 villages.⁴⁴ Thursday garden or collecting firewood or anything else scheduled.

Saturday usually garden mostly to gather food for the Sunday lunch, and light work.

Sunday is the day of Sabbath (I usually took some of the Sunday afternoon to prepare for school and also to visit my aunt for “language lessons” or collect stories as people were more available than during the week days). On Sunday morning, people cook before the church service, then around 9am it is time to go to church, then lunch and then in the afternoon people will walk around from house to house to chat, meet for church or just rest. (The Neil Thomas Ministry followers sung all day).

1.4.6 Work Sessions and participant observation

Thomas, being fieldworker and my father, and because I was living with him, became my main informant in terms of prepared work sessions. We usually sat together in the mornings before going to the garden or in the evenings depending on the day’s schedule. I would usually go through a series of questions that I had prepared. I did also a few work sessions with Kiki, especially in regards to gardens, yams, plants, these were topics on which she was quite knowledgeable, or about some *kastom* practices which she knew better than Thomas. She also knew many more stories than Thomas did.

Otherwise, a lot of the knowledge I gathered arose unexpectedly when just being with my relatives. By being with relatives I mean that I followed them in their daily life, or participated with the women’s church group. On Sundays, I went to the Presbyterian Church with the family.

I also always followed Kiki when she went to Pelmoli, the closest village and to Vuna-Ur, her own *nasara*, thus getting acquainted with my relatives on my mother’s side. When in Vuna-Ur, I spent most of the time with Eliane, one of my mother’s brothers’ daughter, and thus my sister. Her father is one of the mother’s brothers (MB thereafter) I came to know best. Kiki’s other brother, after becoming a Seventh Day Adventist, had move out of the *nasara*.

⁴⁴ I will come back on the way work is organized and the different activities I took part in when I address work in sections dealing with the gardens, plantations and the church.

We seldom saw him. I got along well with Eliane too and accompanied her a few times to her gardens.

In general, Kiki and Thomas often reminded me that I had come under the hand of Thomas and that he was the one responsible for me during my stay. I sometimes resented that and at the same time I decided that the last thing I wanted was to upset my family or do something that could hurt them. After a while, relations fell into place as it were and when I asked things of other people, I was often told that Thomas was there to answer my questions and thus I should ask him not them.

This however did not prevent me from having discussions and learning from other people other than Thomas. This knowledge arose from more informal conversations, or in the context of discussions with my grandfathers. Since their age and experience prevailed it was not felt that I was bypassing Thomas or Kiki. One task left to my Aunt Vevojivoro Tosusu was the translation of the hymns. She was my second family and my refuge when I felt lonely. I spent a lot of time in her kitchen, cooking with her, I followed her to the garden and spent long afternoons by her side under the veranda while she was sewing or weaving mats. I sometimes felt that had Thomas' house been located in the main body of the village (see map of Tasiriki above) instead of its location along the truck road on the other side of the small hill, I would have maybe felt less isolated at times. I would have been right in the middle of everyone, knowing who was doing what and I may have had other opportunities to talk with a wider range of my kin. I may also not have so easily forgotten the people on the other side of the Vinga since I would have contemplated their side every day.

The other sphere with which I came to be very familiar is the school. Indeed, not long after my arrival I felt that my presence had to contribute to the community as a whole not only to Thomas' family. In regard to the competence I could offer, helping with the teaching at the school was the most straightforward. It was decided that I would volunteer at the school two

days a week. It was a great experience and very nice way to know the children. I will briefly touch on the topic of the school later in this work. Mamara Primary School encountered a number of problems, dysfunctions and mismanagement during the year I spent there, especially during the second and third term.

1.4.7 Limitation and quality of the data

As described above, during my stay there were two main aspects which defined what would be the field for me, i.e. kinship and church affiliation. Sabine Hess (2011), in a note she gave at a Conference on Collaborative Research held at the VCC in Port-Vila, recounts her experience of working with a male fieldworker, her adoptive father, Eli Field. In Vanua-Lava (Banks) where she conducted fieldwork, relations between kin are much more rigidly codified than in Tasiriki, and thus added tensions in the relation between her and Eli Field. In contrast, I was quite free to discuss with Thomas.

Hess points to the fact that in general working with a fieldworker does put a constraint on the research as the fieldworker comes to act both as a key informant and a gatekeeper. Hess first discusses the fact that the relation father-daughter and by extension the people with whom you are most likely to spend time, that is your close kin, can prevent the anthropologist from accessing the knowledge that he/she is looking for. While in the first part of her note Hess recognizes that she was, “biased in putting research first before kinship and rules of sociality (2011: 220)” considering that the fieldworker, “[being] more than an ordinary member of society”, he or she [then] is (or should be?) a mediator also enabling access to knowledge (Hess 2011: 219),” in the second part Hess still reckons that the researcher should, “respect the limits of people [one] work[s] with (2011: 220).” She concludes that all in all the end product of a year of work with Eli Field was mutual respect between a father and a daughter and as fieldworker and anthropologist; both Hess and Eli Field had learned how to

ask and answer questions respectively so that the questions and answers suited and adapted to the different roles they had taken on (2011: 221-222). Hess also advises the anthropologist to work with the people he/she feels comfortable with and likes.

While I would agree in many respects with Hess's position, during my time in Tasiriki, I let the father-daughter relation prevail in most cases. Maybe this choice imposed itself as evidence. In contrast to Hess, I was living with Thomas and Kiki while she had chosen to live on her own. This may have allowed her to navigate between positions more easily. Moreover, in my case, it was not seen as problematic or inappropriate to have long conversations with Thomas. It was quite the reverse actually; the daughter-father relationship allowed me to relax in the relation and I always felt comfortable talking to Thomas, while I could be less at ease when conversing with other men. As we lived in the same house, I quite naturally endorsed my role as a daughter.

Except during the working sessions I had with Thomas, or my grandfathers, I spent most of my time with women. Apart from kinship ties, the church was the other important pole that oriented my relations. Presbyterians had very few contacts with most NTM except if these NTM were also very close relatives or held other positions outside the church that brought them in contact with the Presbyterians. The two churches kept separate. I never insisted to attend a NTM service because I felt this would not be respectful, and I did not know how it would be perceived by the congregation of both churches.

The women with whom I spent most of my time were middle aged. I spent very little time with the youth, and the least time of all with male youth. My contact with my brother Ae Niki was almost that of avoidance. This is due to the fact that both being adults, it was already not very proper to live under the same roof in regard to the relations of avoidance adult brothers and sisters have to maintain. So we seldom addressed each other except when necessary, or for daily trivial matters.

I have to admit then that I have let the relation father-daughter and all the resulting extended relations take prominence over the relation fieldworker-anthropologist (whatever this is meant to be). Though this may be considered as having restricted the scope of understanding of my field-site, I would argue that it was more important for me to build a close and deep relationship based on respect and mutual trust. The kinship ties that were a-priori as I stepped into Tasiriki for a long-term stay grew in substance during the year I spent with Thomas and Kiki. And these ties did often prevail over the necessity of “gathering knowledge” from a wider network. The point of view and perspective which I will develop then will be mostly that of the Presbyterian Kererara in Tasiriki and of the Vuna-ur *Nasara* in Pelmoli.

1.5 Overview: what that emerges as important through fieldwork

During fieldwork, while concerned with my initial questions regarding “knowledge” and thus documenting what I could identify as such, i.e. aspects of kinship as well as horticultural and customary practices, stories, I attempted in the meantime to grasp what was really at stake in people’s lives, what made Tasiriki the place it is as well as striving to become. Soon, it appeared quite evident to me that the church was an element that I could not bypass, central and pervasive as it was in daily life.

Church and *kastom* are categories that touch upon morality (the regulation of relations). They bring meaning and direction, as much as tending to integrate all aspects of life, channelling and transforming these aspects. The church in Tasiriki has become the framework through which the vanua is constituted as well as possibly becoming the vanua itself. It acts as the channel pulling all aspects of life together while being a kind of matrix through which people envision their future. It is also through the church and change in affiliations that fragmentation of the vanua occurs, giving birth to smaller vanua-s, like the

more or less recently founded settlements around the NTM or SDA Churches throughout the Anrua district.

In Tasiriki, people claim that *kastom* is not strong. Yet *kastom*, as emplaced kinship and a certain morality attached to that, is fundamental to Tasiriki. *Kastom* and the church then constitute the base for sociality. *Kastom* is sensed as quite fluid, possibly being lost as though standing on loose-ground, yet its efficacy is not questioned. In the way by which it is rendered visible, acted upon/through in very specific contexts or, simply, by its assumed all-pervasiveness, its loss, presence or practice always have tangible consequences and organisational efficacy.

Thus, both the church and *kastom* constitute the given of Tasiriki's sociality. While the church is what gives its visibility and purpose to the vanua, it rests very much upon the work of an emplaced kinship. In most aspects of social life *kastom* and church do perform their respective tasks with their respective power, capacity and efficacy. They may act in tandem or separately, sometimes sharing the same temporality sometimes not, but most often they are very much entangled being both geared towards the growth of the vanua.

CHAPTER 2 - PROBLEMS ADDRESSED IN THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHRISTIANITY, ESPECIALLY IN RELATION TO MELANESIA AND THE WIDER PACIFIC

2.1 Issues in the anthropology of Christianity and theoretical propositions

2.1.1 Introduction: Stumbling into Christianity

“The personal and intellectual history of the ethnographer deserves consideration, not just as an exercise in narcissistic reflection, but because the knowledge produced depends on the particular historical relation s/he constructs with those people s/he strives to understand and write about.” (Jolly 1994: 1)

In “The anthropology of Christianity: Situation and critics”, Jenkins notes that, “there are a good many anthropological studies that engage with Christianity as something encountered in the field” (2012: 459-460). If I consider the verb “encounter” here as to mean “to stumble into”, something somewhat “incidental” (Barker in Reply to Douglas 2001: 632) then it is not too exaggerated to say that this is a case in point in regard to my own fieldwork.

Prior to arriving in the field, I was aware of the fact that most ni-Vanuatu people were indeed Christians but I had quite bluntly left this fact aside, assuming somehow that this aspect of their lives might not have much bearing on my research. From most of the ethnographic material I had read to prepare the research proposal, I could not really expect that the church and Christianity would be at the centre stage of fieldwork. Concerned as I was about people’s relation to land, I tended to focus on what I figured was my primary interest, that is the *kastom* aspect of people’s lives. I surely must have understood *kastom* then as the pre-Christian understanding of one’s relation to the world and others; in a nutshell something fundamentally different than what I assumed Christianity might have brought into the situation.

In a way the topic I had chosen to research, that is the nature of people’s relation to their environment and the kind of knowledge that people produce through these relations,

tended to draw me towards what I considered to be the “non-Westernized” aspect of people’s life and concerns. Thus, what I could decipher from the ethnographies to which I referred to prepare for fieldwork was that if there were consequences from people being Christian in regard to their relation to the land, these were probably implicated in the severance of some ties and/or loss of previous understandings. I almost comprehended Christianity and the church as being a kind of impediment in case people, in retrospect, had wanted to reclaim these forgotten ties and understandings. This conclusion was one I had drawn too rapidly from my reading of Tzerikiantz’s thesis (2006), a very precise ethnographic account of the coastal village of Elia on the western coast of Santo.⁴⁵ Indeed, to think of Christianity in this way failed to grasp the multi-threaded reality of people’s relationships to land, kin, ancestors, spirits as well as God and had consequences for my methodology in the field. For this reason, I give an account of my own positioning as an anthropologist towards the church and Christianity as their centrality became increasingly apparent.

This is not intended as a self-centred approach but rather to show how this position is not idiosyncratic and illustrates the difficulties that an anthropologist, and one who is not specialising in the Anthropology of Religion, can face. This also allows me to develop through my own experience some of the methodological problems that other anthropologists have pointed to in regards to the study of societies which claim to be Christian and where Christianity lies at the heart of people’s lives.

As I mentioned though I knew I was going to be in a Christian environment and I had prepared minimally by including a Bible in the field materials I brought. I was not sure what the fact that people were self-identified Christians would mean practically, and thus had not thought about it adequately in terms of methodology. From my own rather secular upbringing, I had very little contact with Christianity and the little contact I have had with religion, being

⁴⁵ A village located around 20kms north of Tasiriki, and like Tasiriki, the product of the history of the mission.

French, had mainly been within a Catholic context. Thus, apart from a very “cultural” approach to Christianity through art, history, music, and architecture, my knowledge of it was quite limited.

The fact that I was to spend some time with people who were Christians began to seep into my brain upon my arrival in Port Vila. Hosted by Catholic nuns at the Cathedral, I was expected to attend mass. It was Palm Sunday and (to say the least) the place was crowded. After this first experience, my non-Christian background became the first ethical issue I confronted; it became a source of anxiety upon departing for the field.

What would my position be there? And what should I tell the people with whom I was to spend a whole year about my religious, or rather non-religious, background? Upon arriving in the field, the question almost dissolved. The church was one of the first things with which I became acquainted. The day after my arrival was Good Friday and before I really knew anybody I was standing in the Presbyterian Church. Hence on the first day of being part of the village, it was in the context of the church that I was presented as Thomas Jimmy’s daughter and a VCC researcher. The congregation was composed of a large part of Tasiriki’s inhabitants. To the recurrent question concerning my religious affiliation, that is “*Yu blong wanem joj?*” (Bisl. for: to which church do you belong?), I told them that I was from a Catholic background, though not practicing much.

However, in conformity to the fact that I was adopted in a Presbyterian home, I followed and respected the Presbyterian way of being Christian. Not so much in its spiritual aspect, since I did not any have solid grasp of what this meant or what distinguished a Presbyterian from a Catholic in terms of theology, but rather I took on the Presbyterian “habitus”. At first, though the church was everywhere in our life, I did not really direct my

attention towards this phenomenon. I experienced it as an aspect of life, but not an object of study. The meaning I looked for was elsewhere (see Barker 1990: 8).⁴⁶

I persevered in that direction despite the fact that the first book Thomas gave me to read was the history of the mission in Vanuatu by Rev. Miller. I started to read it but again I did not pay it due attention. It is only later that I realised the importance of the book. It was after I left the field that I come to an understanding that this may have been a very significant act from Thomas. If I wanted to know about the history of the place, that I should read that book was part of his message.

Likewise when I asked my Aunt Vevojivoro whether Tasiriki had some myths telling the Origin, she replied that it was all written in the Bible and that it was indeed an odd question to ask. Had I not read the Bible myself? Thus, by the second month of fieldwork, it was clear that I could not ignore the church and Christianity anymore. People kept saying that in Tasiriki *kastom* was being lost. Thomas himself professed not having a deep knowledge in this latter domain and referred me to my Mother Kiki who, coming from a non-convert background, was much more knowledgeable in that respect.

It was by joining in with people's activities, much of which were centred on the church that I found myself feeling comfortable and integrated into the place. Far from avoiding Christian practice, it was by embracing what people were doing that this integration occurred. There are many things that cannot be grasped within nine months; people's understanding and experience of Christianity is no exception to say the least. Although my attitude towards the church and Christianity changed during fieldwork becoming an important area of focus, I can almost say that this happened by default. I had to surrender to the field and leave behind an ingrained resistance towards the Christian aspect of people's lives.

⁴⁶ "Scholars, including anthropologists, focus most of their attention on the early period of missionary contact and on conversion and although we frequently deal with national church organizations, local clergy, and worshippers, *our attention seems to be elsewhere* (my emphasis) (Barker 1990, p.8)."

2.1.2 “Invisible Christians” – Methodological choices and obstacles to an Anthropology of Christianity⁴⁷

The experience described above, while indeed denoting quite a deep ignorance of the reality of my field-site prior departure, is not necessarily idiosyncratic. Rather the literature indicates that anthropologists’ relationship with Christianity is far from being straightforward. This state of affairs has been identified by the anthropologists who deliberately set out to work on this phenomenon as a topic per-se. Their analyses tend to show that in many instances this has been the result of the researcher’s conscious or unconscious attitude towards the Christian phenomenon.

Barker (1990, 1992) has pointed to the long-lasting habit in anthropology of ignoring the Christian aspects of people lives in the Pacific. This is again pointed out by Kolshus in 1999 in a monograph dedicated to a study of the religious traditions in Mota Lava, Vanuatu. He observes that the importance of the church is still omitted in many ethnographic accounts of the area (1999: 176) and notes that, “to omit from a study something that is deemed important by the people with whom an anthropologist is staying because it is regarded to be inauthentic is [...] neither particularly unbiased nor proficient inductive science. [...] The Motese call themselves Christians and that is a social fact of great importance (Kolshus 1999: 176).”⁴⁸

According to Barker, in Melanesia, Christianity should be regarded as the norm rather than the exception (1992: 162). Hence in many places, like Vanuatu, Fiji, the Solomon Islands, and PNG as well as the whole French Polynesia (Barker 1992: 145; Douglas 2001: 618; Fer and Malogne-Fer 2009) to cite just a few, Christianity is one of the two fundamental values upon which the Nation stands; the other element being *kastom*, its twin – for now glossed as the “way of the place” (Taylor 2008).

⁴⁷ Referring to Douglas’s article “From invisible Christians to Gothic theatre”, in *Current Anthropology* 42:5, 2001.

⁴⁸ See also Curtis (1999: 65).

Jenkins, in his overview and historiography of the anthropology of Christianity (2012), remarks that as a legitimate topic per-se in anthropological writing, it is only in the late 1980s that it started to move to centre-stage (2012: 462). According to the same author, Christianity, although present in the field, was often discarded as a research topic because it was considered an addition to a pre-contact indigenous culture which was regarded as the “proper” object of study (see also Barker 1990: 5). Jenkins goes as far as to affirm that in some early anthropological perspectives where Christianity was already considered a set of “obsolete” beliefs, it was even thought to be bound to disappear once the people concerned had been completely integrated within the modern world, discarding religion in the face of modern positivism and materialism. Following Barker and others, Jenkins reiterates that anthropologists had a tendency to consider these adoptions of Christianity as mere imitations or as the result of misunderstandings, but never something that should be considered seriously as authentic indigenous forms of Christianity (Jenkins 2012: 461, see also Barker 1992: 145).

Indeed, in a 1990s ASAO monograph, a number of articles dealing with Pacific Christianity were brought together. In the introduction, Barker identified four main themes or analytical frameworks that had run through the study of Christianity in the Pacific. I am concerned with two of these frameworks. It is interesting to note, reading this summary, that Christianity seems to crystallise most of the theoretical dualities and conceptual categories with which anthropology has been dealing for quite a long time. To a certain extent the analysis of Christianity seems to follow a trajectory parallel to that of the analysis of modernity, thus raising similar concerns. With Christianity, anthropologists are again caught in arguments over universalism vs. particularism, global phenomenon vs. local forms, furthered into arguments concerned with modernity vs. tradition, orthodoxy vs. heterodoxy, continuity vs. change, and so on.

From these follow a series of concepts such as indigenization/syncretism, beliefs, traditional religious forms vs. new religious forms and questions of authenticity. The utility of such concepts is questionable (Douaire-Marsaudon & Geishart, 2010: 19), and thus they deserve reflexive attention in their shaping of our understanding of Christianity and the church in other societies.

The first framework identified by Barker (1990) in the literature of Christianity is primarily concerned with the historical accounts of encounters with the missionaries, the diffusion of the different denominations, and the progression of missionisation across the area, as well as people's understandings of the imported religion. The sources for these writings are varied, mostly drawing on things written by Europeans of various backgrounds, including missionaries themselves.

For Barker, these texts, apart from their sometimes doubtful or unreliable content, offer a valuable perspective on historical events, and are important to further our understanding of European perception of indigenous people at the time.⁴⁹ But they are for most part Euro-centric. Europeans are presented as the main historical agents in the propagation and adoption of the religion, native people's attitude being in contrast either passive or reactive (Barker 1990: 2, 8, and see also Jeudy-Ballini 2002: 60 for similar critique).

Within these writings, a commonly discussed theme is conversion. I come back to the phenomenon of conversion when I explore Robbins's approach to Christianity, and his analysis of the Urapmin's conversion. The emphasis that Robbins put on conversion is crucial to his argument in favour of rupture and cultural displacement.

The second framework deals with local manifestations of Christianity. Indeed, the outer forms of institutionalised local Christian practices often resemble their Western-

⁴⁹ See Jolly (2007) and Jolly et al. (2009) for an extensive historical approach of the Western-Pacific encounters; however in their study, the authors try to provide an "indigenous" perspective on these events.

counterparts from which they initially originated (Barker 1990: 2). This can lead to two different conclusions. One analytical framework widely adopted by anthropologists considers Christianity as being only a thin layer coating a deeper original structure (Barker 1990: 8), i.e. the outer form is not indexical of content and what lies hidden under the Christian surface is a continuous (indigenous) cultural order. The other is an assumption of a complete displacement that is Christianity in the Pacific is the same as Christianity in the West, and the outer form is the index of such cultural displacement.

The former argument has been in large part reformulated by Robbins through the concept of “crypto-religion” which he sees as being the manifestation of a tendency in anthropology for “continuity thinking” (2011 and 2007 respectively, see below). Barker however does not concede to one or the other analysis since he is convinced that, “local popular religions consist of both indigenous and Christian ideas and forms (Barker 1990: 11).” According to Barker, they then tell us, “little about Christianity within popular religion: as part of the general orientation towards the problem of morality and practice in daily life (Barker 1990: 5).” Hence, what Barker would like to see emerging in the anthropology of Christianity in the Pacific is ethnographies which reveal the “why and how Christianity remains vital [...]” in this area of the world (Barker 1990: 5).

Barker admits that he may have exaggerated his criticisms in order to call for a move of anthropological research in the domain of Christianity which goes beyond these frameworks, however valuable they are, and which would at last take seriously the way Christianity manifests in people’s lives (Barker 1990: 8).⁵⁰

⁵⁰ In regard to Island Melanesia, and I believe for many other places in the Pacific, although the accounts left by Missionaries might have been of varied quality, some have been invaluable. Of course, among them is Leenhardt who, as an anthropologist, left a work with considerable insights. And for Vanuatu, Codrington remains a reference for his ethnographic work in the Northern part of the archipelago, the Banks in particular. However, they seem to have left much less information regarding the converts’ approach to the Church as an institution but also the way people understood their conversion to Christianity.

Still according to Barker, now followed by many other anthropologists who are engaged in the anthropology of Christianity, the lack of attention to Christianity is further rooted in the anthropologist attitude towards the introduced religion.⁵¹ This attitude is often ambiguous, or ambivalent, or elusive, avoiding the topic, if not side-lining it entirely.

Douglas whose research is also mainly based in Vanuatu, notes that although the ethnographic price for ignoring local manifestations of Christianity in most Island Melanesia would result in being irrelevant, the author still reckons that habits die hard and that the topic is usually a segregated, dangling category (Douglas 2001: 617-618). However, Douglas does recognise an increase of interest in the topic. What she further deplores though is the lack of attention given to the more traditional forms of Christianity in the Pacific in comparison to the large body of literature devoted to the Pentecostal, Millennial and Charismatic movements (Douglas 2001: 615, 618, see also Fer and Malogne-Fer 2009: 18).

Fer and Malogne-Fer (2009) trace the anthropologist's ambivalence towards Christianity in the paradox of its duality, being both familiar and un-familiar, its unappealing triviality and a reluctance to take the matter seriously because it is not "from the place".

Considering the familiarity, they quote Albert Piette (1999: 11) who argued that, "[Christianity] sticks to the anthropologist's skin so to speak as part of one's own cultural background (Fer & al, 2009: 23)."⁵² For Fer and Malogne-Fer this creates for the anthropologist not only an impression of "déjà-vu", maybe coupled with a strange "feeling [of being] out of place". The unfamiliarity, in contrast, leads to, "an implicit comparison that induces the anthropologist to conclude to a kind of irreducible form of heterodoxy" (Fer & Malogne-Fer 2009: 23).

⁵¹ Arguments criticising the attitude of anthropologists towards Christianity have been most strongly voiced by Robbins in these recent years (2004, 2007 and 2011 among others).

⁵² Similarly, Jenkins (2012: 466-468) brings the issue even closer in showing that the very methodological and epistemological, if not ontological stand-point of the anthropologist, is "the product of the history of Christian thought or strongly marked by it."

While, for Cannell (2007), the fact that the anthropologist is actually in too familiar a position or susceptible to “really” convert deny him the ability of being objective in its observations. Thus, Cannell to consider that “Christianity is the “repressed” of anthropology, where the religion acts as an “anxiety”-provoking object whose potential ethnographers are stigmatized by a suspected belonging, or at least a susceptibility to conversion (2007:4).”

2.1.3 Robbins and “Continuity thinking” (2007, 2011)

Robbins stands as the most critical towards anthropologists’ attitude in regard to their treatment, or rather non-treatment of Christianity. While he acknowledges all the critiques described above, in his opinion, the main culprit for the invisibility of Christianity, or its sidelining in ethnographic accounts, is the recurrent refusal of anthropology to be concerned with change; a “deep structure” of anthropological thinking which is characterized by its commitment to “continuity thinking”, “the kind of thinking that sees change as slow and conservative of the past and rewards those who claim to be examining the complexities of people’s enduring cultures (2007: 16).” Thus, he advocates a methodology focused on discontinuity and change.

The problem with this approach is that it focuses on certain forms of Christianity – evangelical Protestantism – which indeed a fortiori call for radical change and rupture, upon conversion, with aspects of the past. Robbins himself recognizes that his argument is based upon a specific kind of Christianity and that these radical ruptures may not be so dramatic within other denominations (2007: 17).

Furthermore, Barker, in his reply to the 2007 article, notes that, “Robbins’ call for a focus on change comes at a time when most mainline churches have embraced the idea that Christianity is compatible with most local cultural expressions, [...] that they are mutually supportive (2007: 18). ”

In addition, concentrating on what people consider pre-Christian aspects of their lives is what the discipline is “supposed to do”. In the research context of Vanuatu, the researcher works for an institution whose concern is mainly *kastom*. In this case, one can sense that there is a connotation quite exclusive of any aspects that relate to the “white man’s ways”, including Christianity.

Christianity foregrounded *kastom* politically as a resistance to any of the forms colonisation took (Tonkinson 1982), while also becoming the conceptual locus for an indigenous expression of place and lived practice (Jolly 1982). On the part of the anthropologists, *kastom* then, in many instances, became what needed to be understood and described in the face of cultural changes brought by the introduction of a foreign religion, colonial institutions and a capitalist economy categorised as avatars of an overarching concept known as “Modernity”.

In the current nation state, *kastom* is the epitome of the “unity in diversity” slogan whereby the country is united in *kastom* whose manifestations are as varied as there are places (Winch-Dummet 2010: 81). Thus from the point of view of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, “a statutory body working for the preservation, the protection and the promotion of the various aspects of the knowledge and the culture of Vanuatu”,⁵³ the work of the researcher, in association with a local fieldworker, is then often targeted towards the goal of documenting *kastom* in its different contexts – from place to the national arena; a commitment which justifies the researcher’s presence.

However, once in the field, working with a fieldworker with a more or less strong commitment to *kastom* will direct the researcher’s focus. As an example, I can compare again my experience of fieldwork with Thomas Jimmy as that of Sabine Hess with Eli Field on Vanua Lava. According to Hess, Eli Field has been a very important actor in his village in

⁵³ <http://vanuatuculturalcentre.vu/>, retrieved on 21/03/2014. Also in Douglas (2002: 19) where she notes that, “Public responsibility for the guardianship, revival and promotion of Kastom, defined as a place specific knowledge and practices attributed to the pre-colonial past, rests with the consciously secular VCC.”

promoting *kastom*. During Hess's fieldwork, Eli was very active in trying to make Hess experience what was "correct" or "typical" *kastom* (Hess 2009: 85). Yet, her participation in many different events of daily life which involved both *kastom* and the church led people to think that she was now more interested in the church rather than *kastom*. She notes that people recurrently tried to assign her to one side or the other (Hess 2009: 8).

With Thomas, things were a bit different. Although he is convinced that *kastom* should be an important aspect of village life, and promotes a "revival" of *kastom*, he is not so concerned about its external manifestations. Instead he seems to be more focused on the moral values that *kastom* can convey, as well as its importance in relation to land and as a counterpoint to the Western education and influence on children. But Thomas' main activities remain within the church. The difference in the two fieldworkers' attitude may lie in their differing background, as well as the very nature of the place to which they belong.

Tasiriki has long "lost" its *kastom* for the simple reason that as a mission station it never had any. It was one condition for people to be allowed to stay in that place that they renounce non-Christian practices. This was a place where people with different *kastom* had to live together, be as "one", so to speak. The result is that in Hess' research, Christianity is very much perceived as an agent of change which has contributed to shift fundamental ways of relating, while in Tasiriki, church and, thus Christianity, has become the very basis on which the village grows.

It is important not to assume though that because the church is so important in people's lives, it evicts all other aspects which one could consider as the very grounding of their sociality and which can be described outside of their relation to church, that is kinship, land, customary values and understandings. In a way then, it is important to try to understand where the church lies in regard to this very grounding.

2.1.4 Some methodological suggestions: opposite directions

Fer and Malogne-Fer (2009) have suggested a “schizophrenic aspect” of anthropology in dealing with Christianity in contemporary Oceania. The solution proposed by the Fers is to return to, and focus on, a Durkheimian approach to religion whereby Christianity is understood purely in its social function, i.e. the collective Idea of society. By adopting a Durkheimian approach anthropologists may return to their primary task, i.e. dealing with the social, thus locating research on Christianity within the social and leaving aside questions of “content” (Fer & Malogne-Fer 2009: 22).

Robbins is interested less in the church as an institution than in Christianity as a system of ideas (Douaire-Marsaudon & Geishart, 2010: 24) and thus conversely takes quite seriously the issue of content (2007: 19). For him, the “content” is the cultural logic which is articulated around a set of categories or concepts, and the values which organize the relations between them (Robbins 2011: 415). In his view, Christianity does not lend itself to be approached piecemeal; it comes as a block of organized concepts and hierarchies of values that can only be taken as a whole (Scott 2005: 105, Mosko 2010: 232). So did the Urapmin according to his account, endorsing a system which swept away their “relationalist” sociality for an “individualistic” one (Robbins 2004: 13).

Scott’s approach is what would seem to be the antipode of what the Fers propose while it also distances itself from Robbins’s conception of “the content”, or Christianity as an over-determined cultural logic (Scott 2005: 118) that reduces it to a set of categories and values that forces complete rupture with the previous form of culture. Scott argues that one must start on the ground with an ethnography which pays attention to how Christians continually select and re-interpret the content of Christianity. It is, “via this selecting and re-interpreting that people embark and re-embark on the diverse logical trajectories that constitute Christianity (Scott 2005: 118).” Hence, according to Scott, it would be more interesting for

anthropologists to thoroughly engage in ethno-theologies. Scott in fact identifies the current difficulties faced by anthropology with Christianity not only in regards to the epistemological tools the discipline possesses but also the fact that most ethnographers' lack understanding or knowledge of the very epistemology/ontology of the religion in question and its theology (see Scott 2005).⁵⁴ Therefore, Scott (2005: 120) advocates a more, "biblically literate and theologically astute ethnography of why and how ordinary Christians take notice of, overlook, reframe, reject, or revise the content of Christianity." For Scott, it is important to pay attention to "reflexive ethno-theologies". By these latter, he implies that the ethnographer should endeavour to explore indigenous theological speculations from both lay and clergy individuals (2005: 102).

A more holistic approach would be one which is concerned with both the form and the content, the church and Christianity, institutions and theology. However, the institutional approach still remains the most straightforward for the researcher. Through its focus on the church as an institution, the researcher is more amenable to observe and grasp what is going on and does not need to engage so much with the multifarious elaborations that people can develop in their spiritual life. However, Scott's propositions seems to be quite crucial in deepening one's understanding of what the church is and what being Christian does in relation to the wider field of relations that constitute their lives. The church as institution may well just be the manifestation of a broader understanding in which ethno-theologies do play a crucial role; these are the locus that justify the presence of the church institution altogether and ties it to the other aspects which ground people's lives. In my case, that is land and kinship. This is also where the church intersects with *kastom*. In fact, an understanding of ethno-theologies seems especially important when one wishes to understand how the church, Christianity,

⁵⁴ See Jenkins 2012 for the difficulties arising from Christianity's own conceptual and categorical apparatus and its on-going dialog with the positivist tradition of anthropology.

kastom, kinship and land are brought together, where they connect and where they disjoint and why.

2.1.5 Discussion

The approaches described above have been critical towards the lack of attention given by anthropologists to Christianity, especially in its more “classical” manifestations, yet there have also been many, “incidental” accounts of Christianity that are invaluable in fostering an understanding of the phenomenon. To start by laying out the methodological and theoretical problems has allowed me to come to three kinds of conclusion.

First, in regards to the methodology, it points to the difficulty that anthropology has had to take on board the Christian aspect of people’s lives for all the reasons exposed above. These evince the subtler and ambiguous aspects of one’s position in the field which in turn does have a real bearing in orientating our methodological undertakings. Indeed, it is with this embodied position, i.e. a constituted field of relations, conceptions, and expectations that we come to the field. This position, of course, does evolve as one finds oneself placed amidst another field of relations, conceptions and expectations. However, as these fields of relations and conceptions rub, bend, shift in the process of fieldwork and beyond, so does the methodological apparatus; hence the whole methodology is necessarily underpinned by the limitations of one’s ability to embody it.

Second, it shows that indeed Christianity has to be taken seriously and that many anthropologists actually do so. They are looking not only for methods but also for theoretical frameworks that could understand the role of Christianity and church without reducing them to, “the status of a foreign import or an indigenous innovation (Barker 1990: 17).” People’s practices have to be taken as a complex process tightly woven. This tight entanglement might suggest then that one would do better not try to disentangle, but rather work with the

entanglement. To study Christianity for itself, as an object, will tend to re-inscribe it within dichotomies, either isolating it as an external phenomenon, an added category alongside the other categories that make social life, or conversely, make it into a “cultural displacer”.

Third, I do think that form, embodied in the church, is indexical of meaning and thus that Christianity is not just epiphenomenal. For a religion to be meaningful it has to be tied to worldly concerns as well as metaphysical interrogations, a concern to bring about a certain order of things. It is tied to expectations and hopes as well as to managing human and non/beyond-human relationships. When anthropologists are dealing with people claiming to be Christian for more than a century, and where there is little known of the pre-Christian context, one’s task is to work with what is there and what people say or do.

Contrasts between past and present in Vanuatu are expressed in terms of *kastom* vs. the current state of affairs where *kastom* practices are more or less present alongside church institutions and Christian practices. The idiosyncratic forms that *kastom* and Christianity take in different places show that the relation between the two is always dynamic. This could imply phases of discontinuity and of rupture. However, one cannot jump to the conclusion that these changes are what we think they are because they take on familiar forms (see Englund and Leach 2000 and Scott 2005 again for this important point). Things keep changing; people themselves talk about change and perceive it; however they may not locate change where we do. Most of all, while the paradigm within which change operates might have shifted, again we cannot assume that this shift is homologous to the shifts we assume these factors of change would bring.

2.2 Working with metaphors of society: some conceptions of *kastom* and church in Vanuatu

2.2.1 *Kastom* and church

The fact that Christianity is now completely entangled with other threads of people's life is not questioned anymore, and most anthropologists might not want to affirm otherwise (Tonkinson 1993: 601; Douglas 2002: 5; Hess 2009: 190). The question remains about the nature of this entanglement and I do not wish to use the word "entanglement" here as an easy substitute for the word syncretism. The way entanglement is thought about has been expressed in various metaphors of sociality. Some metaphors are directly used by the people themselves while others have been deciphered by the ethnographer in his/her analysis as recurrent motifs that emerge from practices following a specific aesthetic, themselves grounded in organisational processes of life and understanding of sociality.

In Vanuatu, it is difficult to consider Christianity and the church without its counterpart, *kastom*. Historically, the term *kastom* emerged with 19th century encounter to contrast pre-Christian ways to the mission project (see Bolton 2003 for a thorough review). The term further gained importance in the 1970s -1980s as a political claim and ideology and researchers started to pay closer attention to its content and dynamic when studying the formation of the newly independent nation-states. At the moment of independence, these emergent nation-states claimed a double ideological base, that of *kastom* and Christianity (Douglas 2002: 13-14; see also Tonkinson (1982, 1993) as well as Douglas 2001: 618; Winch-Dummet 2010).⁵⁵

⁵⁵ In most cases, *kastom* has not been reduced to "religion". Most often, it bears the connotation of tradition. In studies conducted since Independence and the subsequent establishment of *kastom* as one of the pillars of the Nation, it has often been considered akin to a politico-legal system, the seat of power or the manifestation of "local cultures" (Hess 2009: 159). I do not disentangle the multi-faceted aspects of *kastom* here because it is a chapter mainly devoted to Christianity; although each can hardly be studied or understood without referring to the other. I come back in more details on *kastom* by itself when I deal with the aspects of people's lives in Tasiriki that they themselves think of as belonging to this category (see Chapter 7).

Kastom, as a concept has a long history and is therefore characterised by its polysemy (Bolton 2003: 24, after Jolly 1992) which renders its use complex. *Kastom* cannot but refer to different things at different geographical scales and the practices associated with *Kastom* have also taken on different meanings as they appear in specific contexts (Bolton 2003; Rousseau 2004; Taylor 2010). Hence, *kastom* may either be defined within an evaluative dualism (Rousseau 2004: 37-39), by what it is opposed to, what Taylor has named “*Kastom* and its significant Others” (Taylor 2010: 281), i.e. Christianity, “Modernity” and Western-style institutions, or it may also be negatively defined, i.e. whatever it is not. It can also be taken, as mentioned above, in its full definitional and dynamical sense, i.e. the “way of the place” (Taylor 2008: 77)⁵⁶, or all practices associated with place (Bolton 2003).

That there exist expressions such as “*kastom*” and “church” denotes the fact that there is expressed a duality, that people do separate these two domains. Indeed their entanglement does not mean that they have become blurred and indistinct. The use of the two concepts actually stresses, in different contexts, their opposite, identical or complementary nature (Kolshus 1999: 141; Hess 2009: 156, 190,197; Taylor 2010: 281-284). Thus, different people in different contexts, situations, places, and from different sectarian affiliations may claim that *kastom* and *joj*⁵⁷ (church) are “*sem mak*” (the same) , a married couple – functioning as a complementary pair (Hess 2009: 156, 159; Taylor 2008 and 2010), two indigenous forms united in their opposition to the “white man’s ways” (Hess 2009: 160), the two different forms that social relationships can take (Eriksen 2008: 3), or two incompatible and antagonistic

⁵⁶ Taylor notes that people consider *kastom* as being *aleñan vanua* – the way of place as opposed to *aleñan tuturani* – the way of the “White”.

⁵⁷ Hess (2009: 156) notes that the term church is used in Vanuatu to mean Christianity so she uses the two terms interchangeably. Below, I define “church” as it is used in this thesis.

thought systems, or, finally, all at once depending on the connotation attached to the concept in a specific context.⁵⁸

The duality is still very much present and visible when, for example, two places identify themselves through this opposition, one claiming to be *kastom*, while the other claims to be Christian (see below Douglas 2002; also Eriksen 2008: 93-94; Taylor 2008: 78). The dual opposition becomes much less straightforward when one is concerned with its emplaced and daily articulation.

The entanglement of *kastom* and church indeed leads one to think in terms of mutual transformation and encompassment (Hess 2009: 197). Yet, the polysemy of both terms also renders it arduous to define which one is encompassing the other.⁵⁹ The framing and pervasive presence of the church in daily life, even during events people regard as *kastom*, seem to point to the fact that Christianity has encompassed and transformed *kastom*, while sometimes people consider that Christian beliefs are now part of *kastom*, if not considering that they have always been Christian (Kolshus 1999: 148; Hess 2009: 190; Taylor 2008: 11).

The *kastom*/church pair has very much been inscribed within a tradition/modernity framework (Tzérifiantz 2006; Hess 2009). While *kastom* can in some contexts be understood as the “ways of the past”, i.e. pre-Christian ways, excluding Christian practices, yet people do not necessarily associate Christianity with Modernity and its meta-narratives of individualism, possessiveness, and rupture (see Englund and Leach 2000). Even the monetary aspect that is much present in the church is not necessarily associated in people’s mind with the promotion of a capitalist commodity economy. Rather the church becomes the place where the pervasiveness of money, with its deleterious effects, is brought under control, or at least re-

⁵⁸ To consider *kastom* and church as exclusive opposites was much more pregnant in the early days of the missionisation than it is today, yet it can subsist as when people claim to be “*Kastom*” as opposed to the Christian converts.

⁵⁹ This polysemy is the result of the long historical development of the two terms added to their current contextual uses, from the village to the national level, and their multiple referents – ways of the place, magical practices, forms of leadership and so forth.

inscribed within the logic of exchange based on the gift. This is an argument I develop in this thesis, on the basis of the workings of the church in Tasiriki.

While Douglas (2002) showed that these dichotomies do not necessarily hold, others have shown that the tense and entangled relation between *kastom* and the church follow the indigenous understandings of productive duality similar to that of gender (Taylor 2008: 78; 2010: 284). In that regard, Hess's argument is interesting because she compares *kastom* and the church as a married couple, thus integrating ideas of gender and subsequently the productive aspect of a male and female "two-sided house" (2009: 190-191). Yet, in her approach, *kastom* is very much associated with tradition and Christianity with modernity (2009: 191). Moreover, Hess is mainly concerned with personhood, and the way Christianity, alongside Modernity, might have changed a "dividual" personhood into that of an "individual" (2009: 194).

Douglas in an article entitled "Christian citizens: Women and negotiations of Modernity in Vanuatu" looks at women groups' organizations in Port Vila and on the island of Aneityum in the south of Vanuatu. In Uje on Aneityum where she conducted fieldwork, a river split the village in two. The two sides have taken different orientations. On one side, the leader is a Presbyterian pastor "engaged in business" while on the other side the leader is a man expert on *kastom* (2002: 8). Douglas points out that a-priori one could almost see the two parts of the village as the embodiment of the usual dichotomies associated with *kastom* and the church respectively; i.e. community : individual, sharing : possession/consumption, tradition : modernity, Melanesia : the West (Douglas 2002: 8). Yet according to Douglas, the alignment of Christianity and Modernity with its own tropes of individualism and possession/consumption becomes problematic when Christianity is "naturalized", i.e. when it is claimed that Christian values are primordially that of sharing and communalism (Douglas

2002: 8-9).⁶⁰ Furthermore, according to this author, a binary approach elides a long-term engagement of *Kastom* people and Christians alike with commerce and migrations. It also fails to take into account actualities whereby, for example, Christian women groups are more engaged in communal work than *Kastom* women. Douglas thus notes that, “[...] slippery intersections of *kastom*, Christianity, community and modernity again elude simplistic binary categorization (Douglas 2002: 13).”

There have also been some interesting propositions attempting to use indigenous metaphors to come to term with these categories and their interplay. Taylor (2010), in an article concerned with *kava* and gender within the problematic of modernity, relates the discourses by Sia Raga people on these things to their conceptions on the relationship between Christianity and *kastom*. Taylor notes that modernity in Vanuatu, glossed as “lived engagement with temporal rupture” (2010: 283), must be viewed within an, “entanglement of indigenous and exogenous epistemological modes and ontological schemes (2010: 283).” The arrival of white people is seen by the Sia Raga as initiating a new era or new cosmological zone called *tauva* (Taylor 2010: 283). According to Taylor, the temporality of the *tauva* does not suggest a linearity punctuated by successive ruptures but a linearity which encompasses the notions of *tavalui* (sides), “thus opening up the possibility of a dynamic spatial dimension of temporality. An arboreal imagery of roots, trunk, and branches provides a defining metaphor for such space-time reckoning (2010:283).” Taylor (ibid.) notes that, despite existing discourses on rupture due to the arrival of the church, such as the Christian trope of moving out from a time darkness to enter that of light (see also Jolly 1996: 177; Winch-Dummett 2010: 12), there is also emphasis put on the fact that *kastom* and the church can represent, “the coeval branches of a single tree and thus be equated with ostensibly oppositional, yet, also co-dependent and intimate, relations of man and woman, day and night,

⁶⁰ The naturalisation of Christianity has long been expressed through narratives of national identity like that promoted by Father Walter Lini, the father of Vanuatu’s Independence (Douglas 2002).

rain and sun, war and peace (Taylor 2010: 283).” If there is a dichotomy, it is fully re-inscribed within a cosmological understanding where the notion of modernity and individualism is not necessarily relevant.

The possibly gendered aspect of *kastom* and the church (Hess 2009, Taylor 2010), thus inscribing it within an indigenous epistemology and ontology, as well as the communal and sharing aspects of Christian values noted by Douglas (2002), are very much in line with, and at the core of, the main argument developed by Eriksen (2008); an argument to which I pay particular attention herein. Indeed, Eriksen has developed a perspective on the church in Ambrym which to a certain extent reverses the usual dichotomies associated with *kastom* and church, integrating them within her framework as a gendered duality which governs the different forms relations can take in Rano. In her analysis, the church is female as opposed to a male gendered *kastom*. Female-gendered means movement, connections, communal, sharing, while male-gendered signifies emplacement and personification that eludes the collective. Thus, in Rano, Ambrym, if Christianity has brought changes and a reversal in values, it is not through an opposition between an indigenous *kastom* and an exogenous church, but rather a transfer and embodiment of a given set of relational values onto *kastom* and the church respectively. The main change appears to be foregrounding a female-form of relations to the detriment of the male-form of relations that used to prevail (Eriksen 2008: 162).

While *kastom* can definitively refer to pre-Christian practices, it is not limited to them. Maybe it is the understanding of *kastom* and church as standing with a temporal linearity of a before and an after which is confusing. There is no doubt that people in Vanuatu do work with this temporality, yet this may not necessarily refer to “our” temporality. As Taylor observed, through the indigenous temporality as expressed by the Sia Raga, *kastom* is reframed in terms where the linearity implied in the idea of “revival” or “retention from the past” is less relevant

than the vision of *kastom* and the church as being part of a productive pairing (Taylor 2010: 283). Moreover, there is a much broader aspect to *kastom* which stands as the expression of a certain way of understanding and dealing with relationships, human and otherwise, grounded in place and thus emerging from place as much as being a-priori there. This interplay between the inscription of *kastom* into a linear temporality and yet bearing a quality of immanence making it almost a-temporal, it's poesis so to speak, renders it a very slippery concept. These last statements point to the crucial relationship between *kastom*, Christianity and the church which seem to lie as much at the heart of people's lives and the way they do conceptualize them as it does at the centre of the theoretical arguments developed in the anthropology of the Pacific.

2.2.2 Metaphors of sociality: Rio (2007) and Eriksen (2008)

The interest in and originality of Rio and Eriksen's ethnographies of the village of Ranon, Ambrym, where the authors conducted fieldwork together between 1999 and 2001, arises from the fact that these are descriptions of the same place yet it seems as though they describe two very different places.

Rio (2007) is mainly concerned with social ontology and therefore with the principles and agencies which underlie Ambrym's sociality. To make these principles appear, "to answer the question "what is going on" in Ranon", Rio argues that one has to go beyond the mere appearance of people's daily practices, projects, group meetings and so forth (Rio 2007: 8) to find an answer to this question. On the other hand, Eriksen focuses on many of those practices and their relationship to the church as a social institution. So while Rio seldom mentions what the church does in Ranon, Eriksen's analysis is centred on it. The authors' approaches thus provide two very different, yet not necessarily exclusive, perspectives on the same place, as though people's lives were organised along different metaphors. The striking aspect of their

respective works is that they may reflect the twin-like expression of place in Vanuatu, i.e. *kastom* and the church.

Eriksen's argues that the church has become the female expression of relationships and nowadays dominates Ranon's sociality, while Rio shows that male forms, expressed mostly through practices associated with *kastom*, always end up eclipsing female ones. Interestingly, Rio's work itself tends to eclipse the female form of relations as expressed through the church.

First, I expose and examine Rio's perspective. Throughout his monograph, building on ethnographic descriptions of kinship, ceremonies, gardens, and grade-taking, Rio recurrently explores two analogies; the spiral, and the *buluim*. This latter is the metonymic metaphor of the ideal self-contained father-son relationship 'freed' from the mother's influence (Rio 2007: 99) where the *buluim*'s seeming immobility is nonetheless constituted by transformation and motion happening elsewhere through women as sisters, wives, and daughters (ibid.). In this it is like the vine of the yam that indexes what is going on underground (2007: 119), or the paths that women follow which index interconnectedness with elsewhere (2007: 117). The spiral for Rio is a "social form", and, "the ideal form of all social production which has the purpose of reproduction and growth", while, "the power of this form is revealed in its effects: big yams, the male child, and high men" (2007: 130).

Rio argues that all objectifications of productive activity in Ranon take on male forms, be them yams, sons, or fern effigies related to the *mage* (a system of grade-taking producing powerful men). Rio is also concerned with the problem of the gift and argues that the ideology of the *buluim* is based upon a transformation of a relationship of a priceless indebtedness for the "gift of life" coming from affines into that of a reciprocal exchange, thus expressing a denial of this initial gift.

Eriksen's analytical framework stands yet from another perspective. The author is mostly concerned by the institutional aspect of the church and its relation to gender; how the church, historically, has been key in reworking the customary hierarchies of gender present in Ranon's sociality. Eriksen, as an analytical tool, resorts to Dumont's theoretical framework⁶¹ to account for the workings of the church/*kastom* pair in Ranon (Eriksen 2008: 162-164). In this, she is similar to Robbins when analysing the Urapmin's radical change of values upon conversion (Robbins 2004: 13-14, Robbins 2011: 415). However, there are major differences between their respective approaches. While Robbins is interested in Christianity as a system of ideas and values, Eriksen is interested in the church as an institution and its place in Ranon's sociality. The other difference lies in the way Robbins and Eriksen understand the place, role, and implication of the church and Christianity in people's sociality. Robbins, assuming that Christianity is tied to "individualism", argues that Urapmin's conversion to Pentecostalism has triggered the promotion of "individualist" values at the cost of their pre-Christian "relational" understanding and practice of sociality, therefore triggering a deep rupture with the pre-Christian state. For Eriksen however, the reversal of values does not come from the confrontation of two worldviews. Instead she sees Christianity as, "an alternating and contrasting logic in relation to a pre-Christian cosmology (Eriksen 2008: 2)." Thus although the church brought changes, "these changes were more a matter of foregrounding something which has been there in the background all along (Eriksen 2008:175)." In contrast to Robbins, not only does Eriksen claim that change is inscribed in the continuity of a certain pre-Christian gendered logic, but also that Christianity in its institutional guise (the church) brought into the foreground communal and integrative values,

⁶¹ Eriksen relies on the Dumontian framework which postulates that, "in every cultural system there is one value sacred more than other values: an ultimate value. [...] This ultimate value is absolute and thus encompasses its counterpart. This is the nature of the hierarchy [...]. A hierarchical system works by continually submitting opposite values to encompassment (Eriksen 2008: 192)."

not pre-Christian individual and competitive ones. The church in Ranon thus works horizontally rather than vertically (2008: 159).

According to Eriksen, Ranon's sociality is articulated around the two complementary gendered forms – male, hierarchical, and rooted personifications on the one hand, and a female, communal, egalitarian “relationalism” on the other hand (Eriksen 2008: 144). These two forms work together. The contrast of these male and female forms of relationships constitutes the two faces which underlies the logics of kinship and place, i.e. the male immobility vs. the female movement and flexibility. Nowadays, according to Eriksen, the church has become the new superior form, but the use of the Dumontian framework allows her to account for the fact that different conceptions of relations and valuation co-exist (2008: 164).

The fact that the church has become the place of expression of the female form of society is rooted in the history of the church in Ambrym and is the result of early conflicts where men wanted to bring the logic of the *mage* into the church, a move opposed by the missionaries. This resulted in the men finally abandoning the church to women and low-ranking men. The church thus became inclusive and communal (Eriksen 2000: 168).

Yet the reversal of the hierarchy of values in favour of the church is not necessarily definitive, and can be contextual. There are still ceremonies being performed in Ambrym whereby the whole is eclipsed by a personified form; this Rio discusses at length in his analysis on Ranon's sociality, one that is more concerned with the male form of relations as formerly epitomized in the *mage*, and the way it tends to eclipse the generative circling of women, their capacity for connection and communality (Eriksen 2008: 166).

As much as Eriksen argues against the fact that there is no room in the church for personification because it entails an objectification (2008: 119), it seems to me that the church, for one, might be the very objectification of relations. In fact, Eriksen notes that, “on

Ambrym the church is a substitution for unmediated relationships; it stands for the total social whole (2008: 161).” This echoes with Rio’s description of the *mage* where in the end the personification of the highest graded man stands for society. They were men of great power; not only according to Rio were they, in the end, a representation of the society as a whole, but also their power was such that they could not belong to society anymore and had to live on their own. Thus, it was not necessarily mere personal or individual prestige that these men embodied but the power of the society as a whole (Rio 2007: 128). Could it not be said then that, in fact, the church is actually reclaiming both forms; male and female? Maybe the female form, so apparent in the church, is there to foreground a specific kind of personification? One that is not incarnate in men of power but rather in God further objectified as the wealth of its church? As Rio points out, it is this concrete manifestation of society in its material form that ultimately confers their power to persons, acts and performances (2007: 214).

If we maintain the hierarchy argument developed by Eriksen we are forced to recognise that we are facing multiple imbricated hierarchies here, and we would expect to find the two complementary forms of relationships within each of them, namely the dual aspect of place which is the generative matrix of Ambrym society (Eriksen 2008: 33). The first hierarchy is that of the female form as church overriding the male form as *kastom*. In Eriksen’s argument these two forms refer to two different domains of life. While indeed the church is now, according to Eriksen, the most important social institution in Ambrym, this does not pre-empt the male form to be performed in most Ranon’s ceremonies related to kinship.

Then, while we indeed find the female form of relationships within the context of the latter ceremonies in a background, we should also find this male/female hierarchy within the church itself. Eriksen briefly mentions the church internal hierarchies of pastor, elders, deacon

etc... and this could indeed be one manifestation of the male form within the church (Eriksen 2008: 160).

Eriksen makes clear that the church is not exclusively female, and Rio does not claim that *kastom* was exclusively male. Both the church and *kastom* embody a duality in gender, but the gender foregrounded in one is back-grounded in the other. So if they were to be treated together one would have the complete image of a dually gendered place. The duality is recursive, in Eriksen's perspective the church backgrounds *kastom*, and within the church the female form background the male form, yet in Rio's perspective, *kastom* backgrounds the church, and within *kastom*, male forms background female forms.

I have outlined Eriksen's argument at some length because it is insightful in many respects. She asks questions which are relevant for the present work. Ranon shares a number of characteristics with Tasiriki; it is a Presbyterian village established on the coast at the beginning of the 20th century. It is also composed of different populations who came to join the mission from the bush. Yet they differ historically, and in Tasiriki, the gendered disjunction between a female church and a male *kastom* does not seem to hold as I will elaborate below. Nor does the gendered opposition between a dominant communality vs. a dominant personification respectively capture the ethos of Tasiriki's sociality.

In the case of Tasiriki, the church could be regarded as an embodiment of the productive duality of place, paralleling the duality of the house, while also being its end result, a dually gendered body. So in Tasiriki *kastom* and church do not foreground or background each other. They may do different things, but they do so in tandem and in a generative way.

Hence, while Rio and Eriksen introduced two perspectives on Ranon, complementary, yet seemingly divorced, what I aim to do in the following chapters is to show how in Tasiriki, these different aspects can be brought within a single perspective that reconciles the multiple

aspects of people's daily life – kinship, gardens and the church. That *kastom* and the church may sometimes operate in their own domains, or on separate planes, does not mean that they are not very much entangled and mutually conditioned, underpinned by similar principles of emergence, as indeed is suggested by Rio and Eriksen's work.

While the pre-eminence of the church in Tasiriki is striking, a recurrent concern about "kastom loss" may foreground some of the limits of the church in organising relations. In Tasiriki, these dynamics are very much inscribed within a paradigm of growth and renewal, and it is within this perspective that I attempt to account for the emergence of place.

CHAPTER 3 - IMPLANTING THE *VANUA*: THE WORLD AS A FOUNDATIONAL COMMUNITY OF BEINGS, MATRILINEAGES, PATERNAL TRAJECTORIES AND CHURCH

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the elements that I consider to be the fundamental givens of Tasiriki's daily life. These are the elements or threads that are pre-constitutive of the place, that which makes the emergence of a place possible. These elements could be defined as cosmological and ontological in that they define the world and the beings inhabiting this world as much as they delineate the contours of people's existence.

The different elements described in this chapter present the extensive network of relations which constitute people's world, i.e. lineages, community of ancestors, spirits, and their emplacement. These different elements provide a picture of an "uncut" network as it were, its extension and depth (Strathern 1996 and Weiner 1993: 292); the relational ground, not its background.⁶² What the continuous activity of people, in all the important domains of their lives (kinship, gardens, the church) does is to cut and re-define these networks of influences, by opening and closing roads thereby carving a specific place out of contiguous and shifting places, following a trajectory of growth underlain by principles of recursive, oppositional, yet complementary dualities. This is what people call the *vanua* that is the place where (or inside which) people live and that emerges as an idiosyncratic realisation of specific relations.⁶³

I thus start by giving a description of the world as conceived by people in Tasiriki and the beings inhabiting that world. In order to do so I introduce the concept of *vanua* as it has been described in the ethnographic literature of the northern part of the archipelago. The *vanua* emerges within an extensive network of relations of which the manifest *vanua* is but

⁶² "In a world which is relationally based, the task confronting humans is not to sustain human relationships but to place a limit on relationship, on this form-enhancing force, they must restrict its extension (Weiner, 1993: 292)."

⁶³ "*Vanua hemi ples blong ol man we i liv insaed*" (The *vanua* is the place inside which people live)

one configuration; the condensation of specific relations in a particular form. The network of relations that prefigure the vanua is thus larger than the vanua while not separate from it.

Vanua is therefore the place of organized sociality where human beings have defined their boundaries and the form of their relations. Not a fixed entity, it is continually made to emerge through people's work, making relations take on a specific shape. Ancestors and spirits are kept out. They do not come into the vanua except as intruders within specific loci and at specific times. If they manifest in the vanua, it is within people, as sickness. The other way they manifest is through dreams. There, in dreams, people can converse, inform, fight and negotiate with the spirits. Hence, while in the bush the spirits and ancestors are present externally and interact with people by playing tricks or, if not respected, by making people sick, when they are present in the village, it is within the human body or in dreams that they will manifest to people.

The second section focuses on the constitutive elements of kinship. I am particularly concerned with matrilineages and with the *nasara* as paternal emplacement. I then move on to give a historical overview of the arrival of the church and its implantation in South West Santo. The church is foundational to Tasiriki and the neighbouring villages of the Anrua district as known today.⁶⁴ The church is not only a condition of Tasiriki's very existence but configures, to a large extent, its relational, conceptual and practical daily life. Indeed, its centrality in people's life prompts my conception that the church stands as *the expression of* the Tasiriki vanua. To understand this requires examination of what it means for a place to grow around the church, and to grow its church. I will show that the church has had a structural effect on the institutional organisation of the vanua, while it seems to have also grown drawing upon actions and metaphors that constitute people's conception of what vanua is. Hence, the church in a way re-articulates all the elements and threads that constitute the

⁶⁴ The district of Anrua starts at the village of Tanovusvusi up to Tasiriki, it is the south-west corner of Santo and it refers mostly to the coastal and near coastal bush areas (see Chapter 1).

vanua as much as it is grown along similar principles. It is almost like a system of resonance, where metaphors echo each other; like analogous domains constantly echoing and building on each other to finally constitute the vanua as it appears in its contemporary form.

3.2 The world as a community and trajectories of beings

3.2.1 Contextualising the concept of vanua

That I attach so much importance to the concept of vanua should not come as much as a surprise in the context of Vanuatu.⁶⁵ First, one can note the plurality of scales to which the term vanua refers; from the island(s) to someone's piece of land. Second, the concept is present in most of the ethnographic literature of the archipelago, especially from its northern part. The name of the Republic itself refers to the concept, meaning in this particular case "People's land (vanua) stands-up (tu)".⁶⁶ As a place of belonging, dwelling, and to a certain extent of people's very definition, it is necessarily a relative term. From the political entity that the Republic of Vanuatu circumscribes to the term vanuaku which can be translated as "my vanua" its reference can be as contained as to define one's own house.⁶⁷ Thus what is encompassed by this term seems to be scale and context specific.

In the ethnographic literature of the archipelago, the concept of vanua has been most discussed in Vienne's "Gens de Motlav" (1984), in Rodman (1985), in Jolly (1994), and summed up in Bolton (2003: 86). Hence, Bolton (ibid.) citing Rodman (1987) notes the parallel between the different place-derived designations people use for themselves and the way places are designated. The term vanue with different prefixes can refer to the island up to one's piece of land. In any case, vanue is not tano (land). It is lived space in which people and place are part of each other. For Sia Raga people in North Pentecost, the term carries a

⁶⁵ And also beyond Vanuatu to Island Melanesia and Polynesia (see Jolly 2009)

⁶⁶ Jolly (1996:175) translates Vanuatu as "land standing up."

⁶⁷ Vanua with the marker -ku - first person possessive (the marker -ku is used for aspects that are directly related to one's body or position in a larger body, that which is part of oneself or one's definition/position; i.e. all body parts (lima-ku – my hand), kin relations (tasi-ku – my sister).

profound sense of identity in relation to place as lived social place while also being used, “loosely to refer to any area of land, village or whole islands (Taylor 2006: 301).” Rodman (1992: 648) indeed defines vanue as “place” that implicates one’s dwelling, hamlet, district, island and the country.

However, if one thinks of the vanua not so much as a spatial entity but as a manifestation of a more or less condensed network of relations, then these relative scales can be thought as co-extensive. It is the reference point or the degree of condensation and specification of these relations which delineate the contour while it is the severance of relations or a claim to difference which become the marker of boundaries.

More recently, Taylor, in his monograph “The Other Side” (2008) on the *Sia Raga* people in North Pentecost, yet deals with the concept of vanua mostly in its translation as a way of life referred to as aleñan vanua; an expression that Taylor translates by the “way of the place”. By defining what aleñan vanua is Taylor provides us with a thorough description of what makes the hamlet of Avatvotu an emerging place through people’s practices and understandings of the ways of their place which they often oppose and contrast to the ways of the white people, known as aleñan tuturani, introduced at the time of the Mission and the colonisation (see also Taylor 2006: 300).

In Hess's work, “Person and Place: ideas, ideals and the practice of sociality on Vanua Lava” (2009), and in Mondragón's article “A Weft of Nexus” (2009), the concept of vanua is also discussed (though it appears in its vernacular forms, respectively vonno in Vanua Lava (Hess 2009) and vanue, in the Torres Islands (Mondragón 2009)), offering a comparative perspective with the ethnographic material as found in Tasiriki.

Although the vanua can almost be equated to the village space – it is indeed sometimes translated as *vilej* (village) – still it cannot be reduced to a geographical locale a-priori there, but rather as a place emerging from productive and generative relationships

between land and persons. The physical village boundaries then are only a very poor or maybe gross approximation of what the vanua encompasses. As Curtis (1999: 60) notes, “*Ples* (place) is not just a locale or a physical situation, but a powerful idiom and a moral value that validates group affiliation.” Maybe the difficulty in defining the vanua lies in the fact that it is not an object per se, rather it is both a point of departure and emergence; an on-going process and its continually changing manifestation. Thus there is a necessity to start the description from the very components that participate in the process of bringing the vanua about, making the vanua and its organisation possible as well as transforming it all the time.

The emergence of people and their place is tied to the very ground of the extensive network of places and beings. Sabine Hess when referring to the background/foreground approach to landscape and place developed by Hirsch (1995) notes for Vanua Lava that, “people were very much in the picture not as foreground but as engaging with place, [...] [this] engagement with place is evinced primarily in their concern about connections, that is, how a person stands in relation to specific places (Hess 2009: 105-106).” She shows how by tracing the same kind of connections, people relate to places or kin in an analogous manner (Hess 2009: 106). As noted by Mondragón too, place is not so much “a self-standing medium that is invested with meaning through human acts of perception or habitation, but a lived-world [...] inseparable from the creation, reproduction and flow of persons and things (2009: 115-116).”

In regards to the terms used to express the different spatial categories, it is interesting to note that the vernacular languages of the northern archipelago have many roots in common. One can thus observe semantic continuities but also shifts from one place to another. Homonyms may thus partially overlap or refer to another category altogether, the space thus carved or outlined may then be quite a different “reality”. In many instances, the categories

are more diverse and precise in the so-called “outer islands” than in a place like Tasiriki where a Christian vision and conception of the world is now well implanted.

Vienne (1984: 69) first notes that the people from Mota Lava define the vanua as the island, i.e. what floats on the surface of the ocean.⁶⁸ The tano is not only the physical aspect of the vanua but a toponym, what the Bislama would call *ples*. The tuka is what encapsulates all there is like a basket or a mat (Vienne 1984: 69). However, later in the text, vanua is defined as the relative locale in respect to the speaker's point of view.⁶⁹

Hence, in Mota Lava, the vanua is defined as the district, the island or a group of islands, but also the piece of land where the houses are built, the hamlets or the village (Vienne 1984: 121). The vanua is inscribed within the mot, non-cultivated place, where spirits and enemies reside. Within the vanua, one can find the places named as vurea/varea or more generally tano ima (place where the houses are) and the utag, the cultivated place (Vienne 1984: 121). Between the vanua and the tuka, there is space maea, an opening between two limits, an immaterial container of space and time (Vienne 1984: 70). It is within the maea that meteorological phenomena manifest. These phenomena manifest as part of the “order of things”⁷⁰ which springs from the action of Qat, “the civilizing Hero” (Vienne 1984: 66) or can result from a human act of magic through the manipulation of the vui, i.e. spirits which have never been human (Vienne 1984: 79). Vienne notes that although the categories of vanua, mot and utag seemed to be structured along “ecological” contrasts, they become meaningful only through people’s practices of their “natural milieu”, thus the space as structured by these categories is not a given but emerges as such through people’s investment or non-investment in it (Vienne 1984: 126). What is given then is what the category does or does not encompass,

⁶⁸ Mota Lava is one of the islands part of the group of the Banks Isl. in the north-eastern part of Vanuatu

⁶⁹ According to Vienne (1984: 121) “The concept [vanua] segments itself according to the point of view/perspective to which the speaker is referring.”

⁷⁰ Translation from Vienne (1984: 70) of “l’ordre des choses”.

it suffices that one place be transformed and emerges as a particular category to re-define what has been left “out” so to speak.

In most discussions regarding vanua, the term is indeed defined against tano, not necessarily as an opposition but rather as background/foreground kind of relationship. Allen’s definition expresses the difference between the two concepts quite clearly: “Land when thought of as a substance, i.e. earth (or ground) is called Tano, but land as a social reality, i.e. in relationship to an individual or a group, is called Vanua (1969: 132).”

Somehow, it is partly through tano that the vanua can emerge, it is the substance that allows the vanua to exist. These two categories are also discussed by Hess (2009: 105-106). The Vanua Lavan terms as expressed in the local language Vurës are respectively tan and vono. Tan is the essence of livelihood and it is a-temporal in that people, ancestors and future generations alike are cyclically generated by it, while vono, which is the local form of the term vanua, is the island or the settled place, roughly equivalent to the village. It can also be used when referring to inhabited areas or places of earlier but now abandoned settlements (Hess 2009: 115). While the term tuqe is the word used for gardens in general, rot, the irrigated taro garden is set apart, being considered a “special place of life” (Hess 2009: 115-116). It is actually considered a place in-between the inhabited and the uninhabited (Hess 2009: 118-119). But the mot, though uninhabited by humans is nonetheless not devoid of inhabitants. These are for most a variety of spirits and the ancestors; they are usually emplaced, that is people know where to find them or where they might encounter them as long as they are on known terrain (Hess 2009: 162). The overall surroundings are thus imbued with agency which when expressed is usually detrimental to humans except if one knows how to deal with this power. One important thing that can be noted from Hess’s documentation of places in Vanua Lava is that similarly to persons, places exhibit a permeable quality (Hess 2009: 61). It is because of this porosity and permeability as well as the shifting nature of

places that there is a need to establish boundaries, to define relationships that pertain to certain places and not to others. Some places are more permeable than others, and the porosity of the vanua, while necessary maintained, is the one that may be the most regulated.

In the different definitions of the vanua and its correlates that I have summed up above, vanua appears as a term which expresses a relative locale, i.e. dependent upon the point of view of the speaker. Thus one can say that the vanua exists only in relation and is mainly about a certain configuration of relations, an “investment” as Vienne notes (1984: 126).⁷¹

The other important spatial categories are, in Mota Lava, the utag and the mot. The utag is the cultivated place and is usually understood as belonging to the vanua; so the contrastive space opposed to the vanua is the mot, i.e. place of non-investment by people and of residence of all kinds of other-than-human beings. The vanua however is inscribed in the mot, so it is part of the mot. It is the place which through investment has been carved out of it. The mot can be seen either as a saturation of qualities and relations, the vanua being one of the singular expressions of a plenitude, once specific qualities and relations have been chosen as constitutive (see Mosko 1985 and his description of the opposition made by the Bush Mekeo of a Village as the Outside of an Inside Bush). Conversely, the mot could be the expression of a lack (non-investment) and the vanua the expression of qualities and relations transformed by an investment.

Yet another way of looking at things would be to think the vanua in terms of a condensation and articulation of this extensive network, its growth being conditioned by the management of the relations, expressed as opened (and opening) as well as closed (and closing) pathways. It is true that metaphors of roads and flow are widely used and that movement is important, so too emplacement and crystallisation as well as the constant

⁷¹ See also Mondragón (2009: 118). There the author defines the vanue (vanua) in the Torres as, “land made meaningful through productive human efforts.”

interplay of opposite and encompassing dualities, and the necessity of keeping things bounded or separate.

3.2.2 Vanua in context

The way one elicits categories of place can be artificial, and indeed during fieldwork it was often done a-posteriori. People did not explicitly name these domains nor clearly delineate their boundaries, rather it was through daily activities, daily routines or occasional outings, prescriptions of movements, specifically emplaced events and the narratives that accompanied these events, as well as the expectations of specific behaviours in peculiar circumstances that a newcomer can slowly apprehend her surroundings.

While the category of vanua as expressed in the other islands of the archipelago seem to be similar to that of Tasiriki, an observation is necessary regarding the term tano. Where the pair vanua/mot is mostly about relations and a definition of sociality, tano seems to pertain to the very substance, the ground whereby the vanua can emerge. In Tasiriki, however, the vanua is not so much contrasted with tano, understood in Tasiriki as “the world”, but with the term lovtau – the bush (forest), and that of the vun, all the places and things in the bush related to work, i.e. gardens, plantations, and the bullocks. The term vun is most commonly used within the phrase matavun, “*mi go lo bus*” (I’m going to the bush) which expresses the action of moving out or going to the bush to work. The fact that Tasiriki is too small a place to have its gardens within the perimeter of the village or within its very close vicinity might explain this trans-location of the gardens further away in a place which is not usually associated with that of the people.

The word tan-vanua which designates the place of the ancestors, “*ples blong ol bubu bifo*”, is interesting because the word tano is attached to it. In this particular case, tano may be understood as the ground rather than the world, in much the same way as in the other parts of

the archipelago. The *tan-vanua* is a former *vanua*.⁷² The emplacement of a former *vanua* which has reverted to bush can be recognized by the presence of a banyan tree. A former *tan-vanua* can be a taboo place that is a place where people don't go because of the presence of spirits. There are different sorts of taboo places: *jara tambu* (place taboo), which is a forbidden place because inhabited by spirits and *jara tei* (place bad), a place where people die of disease.

I come back to this aspect later on when I describe the gardens, but I note for now that, up in the bush, most people have a garden house called *vale*. Usually these houses are built next to the garden; the complex house-garden could almost be thought then as an annexe of the *vanua* in the middle of the bush obeying to the same kind of principles in the sense that this complex constitutes a place invested by people cleared out of the bush.



Photo 3.1 - The garden house (*vale*) in Vi-Anan

⁷² See Taylor (2006: 302) where he notes that, “*Bwatun vanua* represents the specific origin places of descent groups.” It is interesting to note that *bwatun* means ‘head’, ‘root’, ‘origin’ etc... The word *bwatun* in this regards is very close to the word *patun* in Tasiriki which means “head”. However, I do not know whether *tan* and *patun* are related in any manner.

In Tasiriki, the bush has thus become a place of work and activities while still retaining its quality of not being people's place; people are tolerated there but it's not their home. This is suggested by the fact that someone who stays in the bush late at night might be questioned by creatures about the reasons of their lingering so late in a place where they should not be found after the sun has set.⁷³ The ambiguity is increased at the time of death when it is said that spirits tend to appear and occupy the bush while waiting for the dead person's spirit to join their world.

In Tasiriki, one is the ground, the equivalent of what elsewhere is known or referred as tano. One is opposed to tasi, the sea. Rivers are called ae which is also the word for water. The combination of one and tasi with koko, the sky and meae, the space, makes up what is called tano, the whole encompassing world. Tano is opposed to tuka which, in Tasiriki, designates the world of the dead.

Nowadays tuka is translated as "Heaven" or "Sky".⁷⁴ However, tuka, as the place of the dead, originally referred to a place located underground.⁷⁵ Tuka thus belongs to the underworld and as such is not part of tano⁷⁶ and yet it is not separate from it. It works almost like a two-way mirror. The dead can see the living, they surround them and they can even venture in their world but the reverse is not true. There is thus a separation between these two worlds though the world of the dead can permeate that of the living.

⁷³ There is one insect which makes a "tsshhh tsshhh" noise in the evening when it is getting quite late and the sun is setting. According to Thomas, it can be heard when one comes across a burial ground. It is thus the ancestors' way to address a person who should not be hanging around in the bush at such late hours.

⁷⁴ There are two other words given for sky; one is koko, the other is eje which is also the colour "blue".

⁷⁵ In addition to the fact that many semantic shifts are a common result of language travelling these may also be partly traced to the translations operated by the missionaries. Many of these words/concepts have been used to translate the spatial categories as found in the Holy Scriptures and then further equated to the words as used in Bislama. Thus tano is *wol*, tuka is *heaven*, vanua is used to refer to *vilej* or *taon* etc... These translations and semantic shifts have moreover acquired a fixed quality through the written medium.

⁷⁶ Rather it is often opposed to it especially in the church hymns where expressions such as "on earth and in heaven" are translated in the vernacular as "na Tano na Tuka".

The porous separation between *tano* and *tuka* generates a continuum of relations with that of the dead and the living.⁷⁷ This, in a way, creates a spatial and a temporal coincidence between these two worlds. This continuum between the living and the dead is organized along two axes, spatial and temporal. As I have just described, the spatial axis distributes the living and the dead in two worlds. The latter have a direct access to the world of people while people can only reach the other world upon their death when they leave their body. This passage from one world to the other happens along a temporal axis.

Upon death, one moves from a position defined by the intersection of two matrilineages to an undifferentiated whole which is designated by the expression “*ol Bubu bifo*”, all the former ancestors. *Bubu* is also used to designate all the kin to come, all the as yet undifferentiated descendants. One’s identity is thus clearly defined within a life span which extends relationally over three or four generations. The world of the dead is usually located in the underground, as much sub-spatial as a sub-temporal place. It is the world of the non-visible, non-cyclic, undifferentiated and yet latent to the visible, cyclic and differentiated world of the living. Its incursion in the world of people takes many forms, from signs incarnated in animals to being the causes of sickness and death.

Now, there is also a synchronic aspect of this permeability between the world of the dead and spirits and that of the living which again manifests in time and space. The bush, i.e. all that is not the *vanua* – people’s place, is where all this potential of relations can manifest most blatantly. It is a shared place.

Spirits do not actually represent a homogeneous category. When people use Bislama they use two different words to refer to other-than-human beings. One is *spirit* and the other is

⁷⁷ Taylor (2008: 85, 86), notes that the Sia Raga cosmography is made up of mainly three interrelated “spaces”, one, *ureure*, refers to the lived world of human experience, *ute amare* is what people refer to as the place above and is used in a Christian context so as to signify “Heaven” and the last is *abanoi* which “envelops, punctuates, and is threaded through the lived human world, [...] it is “timeless” and “every time”.”

devel. In the vernacular language, there are also two different words in use, that of *talume* and *tamate*. They often overlap but can be distinguished in their usage.

Talume is employed to describe that which leaves the body after death, leaving a corpse behind called *tarapene*. *Talume* is also the word used in the expression for the Holy Spirit called in vernacular *Talume Vurea* (Good Spirit), and *Tambu Spirit* in Bislama. The word *vurea* has a connotation of what is intrinsically good, i.e. holy in a Christian sense; thus the Bible is called *Mbuk Vurea*. The word *tambu* is polysemous. In the context of the church, it refers to what is sacred and holy. In other contexts it belongs to the domain of the forbidden. The word *tamate* literally means “he is dead” or “a dead person.”

Since people often spoke of *devel*, I asked for clarification as to what this referred. I was told that people usually distinguish three kinds of *devel*; all malevolent. The first type, simply called *talmate*, refers to a person dead “by blood”, i.e. by accident. These *talmate* tend to hang around in the area where they have died and their blood keeps dripping. In case a drop touches a person, the person becomes crazy.⁷⁸ Another kind, called *matemburu*, refers to a person dead of sickness thus usually found in places associated with sickness. The last type that Thomas and Kiki described is what they simply call *mate*. This refers to a person who has been bewitched by another person through magic.⁷⁹

While a *devel* can manifest anywhere, spirits do not dwell anywhere and do not move around much. The underground is not their only residence. According to Thomas, spirits, referring to ancestors or else, also dwell in stone holes and among the snake rope vines. Snake rope vines are considered as signs of their presence; if an old big banyan tree is covered with snake rope vines, it is usually recognised as their house. Damaging their house by cutting the

⁷⁸ One can use the leaf of the tree called *natavo* (*Terminalia catappa* sp.) as a remedy. This wood is also used to make *rove*, a *nalot* plate.

⁷⁹ The way a person is made *mate* consists of the action of someone who uses stones and magical spells to kill her. This always happens in the bush and when the person is alone. The victim is stoned and put to sleep. While sleeping her innards are removed and eaten by the bewitcher. The latter then stuffs the belly with plants and the victim wakes up without remembering anything, after five days the person dies. Similar things have been said to happen all over Santo and across the archipelago (see Rio 2010: 7 for an archetypical form of these “sorcery” acts).

vine exposes the person to sickness. The visit of spirits at night in dreams usually confirms to the person that she has been dis-respectful thus the sickness.

Therefore, people going to the bush must be attentive to what they do. They move amidst an embodied semiotic network whereby animals and things tell and foretell. The kingfisher flying in one direction or another tells of the possibility of a bad or a good omen. Some animals are always ambivalent. This is the case of reptiles or eels. They dwell in holes and are therefore often associated with the spirits of the dead. There is an acute consciousness of the presence of others; hence wearing a *tuela* leaf (species not identified) to signal one's presence to the ancestors when going to a new place, or using *ouou*, wild *kava* (*Piper spp.*), to protect oneself from these other selves with whom one shares the place.⁸⁰ A green coconut left on a bench of a garden house, so tempting when one has been working all day and is thirsty, can be just a coconut indeed but it can also be “*wan difren samting*” (a different something), as Kiki often says. Drinking it could have the effect of making the person crazy, especially when the desire to drink it is so strong; covetousness, being the primary source of acts of sorcery, can indeed be dangerous for the person and for others. The possibility that someone – here to be understood as an intentional being – could have anticipated the fact that another person would fall for the coconut is never to be excluded.

If night is the temporal equivalent of the bush, in that night brings closer these other beings, then the entry of a bat in the kitchen, again an extra-ordinary situation, is immediately taken seriously. Bats can be three different things; a bat, a sorcerer in the guise of a bat or a bad omen announcing that something happened to kinsmen. In the second case, the bat, as a blind animal, will be used by the sorcerer to bring blindness to the people whose home he has entered. When there is a doubt, usually people choose the most radical action to cut short the possibility of any of these events.

⁸⁰ *Ouou* is said to be “heavy”, i.e. it is a powerful plant which can be used to “*blokem rod blong ol spirit*” (block the paths of the spirits).

Therefore, be it in the bush or in some cases within the *vanua* itself, people are constantly confronted with what Kohn has defined as “an ecology of selves” (Kohn 2013) which far from being secondary in people’s life are of vital importance. What is vital is to be able to decipher and comprehend these other selves so as to prevent oneself from being their victim by attracting upon one’s kin or gardens the possibility of sickness, death or non-growth.

In that regard the whole environment stands as a signifying web. In specific contexts, the wind, the sea, the rain can all be read as foretelling signs or the coextension of events happening in people’s lives. The translation/extension of what is happening in people’s lives to environmental phenomena is most of the time a result of people’s actions, i.e. magical (will-driven) or unintentionally offensive to spirits which are all-pervading. As Thomas explained, “*evri samting i gat spirit long hem*” (everything has its own spirit). For example, throwing *kava* outside the door when there is a *kastom* dance might bring rain. This is so because by throwing the *kava* at the face of the spirit of the dance, and thus offending it, this latter won’t do any efforts to keep the rain from falling, water (*kava*) not contained calls for more water (see Chapter 7 on containment of power).

Positive actions, i.e. actions which are deliberate, are usually traced to people who are known to have the knowledge to manipulate environmental phenomena, especially meteorological. Hence, for example, a man who just lost his wife and who happens to be a weather magician may be the source of pouring rain. Likewise unstable weather is attributed to a battle between God and a person who has been asked to keep the weather fine for a ceremony, or it may be two weather workers battling and showing their respective power.

The environment, like some animals, also foretells. This is especially so when its manifestations can be linked with a simultaneously happening event, when things deviate from the usual pattern or appear to be disproportionate, misplaced etc... Intricate connections

between people, beings and phenomena are constantly made apparent. These connections allow a multiplicity of readings and deciphering of events which are most of the time out of one's control. However God is considered as having the last word over people's magical power.

So far, one can say that the Tasiriki vanua is defined spatially by the relations and processes it contains and expresses. Although the vanua might appear at first as a limitation and delimitation on relations, a bounding as well as a differentiation which makes relations to appear in a specific form, this enclosed vision is only one side of the vanua. The vanua is also roads; the roads created through women in marriage as well as through exogenous institutions such as the church and the school.

The house is first and foremost the coming together of the maternal and the paternal. The two sides inscribe themselves in lineages of different kinds. One bears the continuity of the matrilineage, a connection which inscribes people as children of elements of their "living" environment, of what makes the world as it is, while the other bears the paternal transmission of land as ground for further growth and nurture. It is these two threads, expressed as vanuaku – the house, the gardens and the children – once joined, that I describe below.

3.2.3 Matrilineages and *nasara*: respective expression of maternal and paternal connections and paths

3.2.3.1 Matrilines

Matrilines are one of the conditions for kinship or maybe the very condition for it. It establishes the rule of exogamy. One must marry outside one's matriline to another matriline or a person who has none (the consequence of a more recent phenomenon whereby people tend to marry further away geographically). Matrilines in Tasiriki are called yun in vernacular, or *laen* in Bislama. The yun is transmitted to the children through the mother's blood called nga. The matriline is of primary importance. It is something that, "you don't let go" unlike, to

a certain extent, that of the generational and nurturing ties which are transmitted through the father's side. People in Tasiriki say "*blad blo tata i no mekem wan samting*", i.e. the father's blood does not "do" anything.

As I explain, in Chapter 5, when I discuss the making of kinship as constitutive of person and place, the paternal side appears to be strongly connected to promoting and enhancing growth through work and nurture. This is expressed and symbolised, for example, in the growth of one's hair.⁸¹ However, in the same chapter, I also discuss practices of adoption and cases where the "genealogical" father is absent. These principles show that this "paternal" nurture can also be ensured by the mother's side through the mother's brother(s). Moreover, the matriline of the paternal side still plays an important role in one's positioning within the network of kin, and it allows flexibility in the orientation one wants to give to these relations.

As my Aunt Vevojivoro told me, "*yun hemi hevi, olsem yu save famili blong yu*", thus matrilineal connection is something heavy that is something that one cannot ignore in regards to one's relation to others, and that one must respect.⁸² The matrilineal connection thus defines who you are and who your kin are beyond one's place, i.e. the paternal or maternal *nasara*. This Vevojivoro further explained by saying that people who have the same line as yours are your "family", wherever you go. If you are in trouble, you can seek refuge with them. Matrilineages thus extend way beyond one's place.

Matrilineages, as found in Tasiriki, are not an institution common to the whole of Vanuatu. This institution only exists in the central and northern parts of the archipelago. The island of Epi marks a boundary between the northern and southern part of the country in this respect. They are present mostly in the Banks and the Torres Islands, on the island of Santo

⁸¹ See chapter 5 for a description of the ceremonies of "cutting facial hair" performed on teenage or young adult boys as they grow facial hair.

⁸² The term "heavy" (*hevi* in Bislama) is also translated by Mondragón (2006: 7) as "to exhibit high esteem and respect".

and the islet of Malo, as well as on the islands of Malakula, Pentecost, Paama, Ambae and Maewo. The Ambrym case seems to be quite different.⁸³

Although the matrilineal systems found across the northern and central parts of the archipelago are homologous, they are far from being homogeneous. In Tasiriki, in contrast to the west coast of Santo, there has developed a system of strict exogamy which functions at the level of the “individual” matriline therefore critically opening the possibilities of “straight”⁸⁴ unions. On the West Coast, in places like Wusi which are closely related to Tasiriki, the system further divides the “individual” matriline in two strictly exogamous moieties.⁸⁵

People in Tasiriki do not recognize overarching dual moieties and it is difficult to know whether this was always so in any of the kinship systems of the different people who have come to compose Tasiriki. We do not have any missionary records of these and Guiart (1958) describing the system of the west coast of Santo, does not mention any system of dual moieties and only notes the existence of matrilineages referred as *vunuk*,⁸⁶ (literally: my matriline) (Guiart 1958: 152) and which seemed to be very similar to the system still practiced in Tasiriki.

Tzèrikiantz (2006: 160) notes that in Wusi, there are moieties and they still exist although not named; so the “matrilines” are still classified under two overarching moieties.⁸⁷ There, the rule of exogamy is defined by the alignment of the groups within these two sides. In the Torres and the Banks, the moieties are still clearly named and the myths which tell of their birth are still remembered clearly (see among others Mondragón for Loh in the Torres (n.d.), Hess for Vanua Lava in the Banks (2009), Lanouguère-Bruneau for Mota Lava in the

⁸³ See also Rio (2007: 99-100) and Eriksen (2008: 19-20).

⁸⁴ “Straight” here refers to the word “*stret*” in Bislama which means that the union conforms to the ideal norm of marriage.

⁸⁵ For example Thomas’s mother is from Wusi.

⁸⁶ There is no mention of which language it is, it might well be *Akei*, spoken in South West Santo. *Ivono* comes from *Akei*. *Vun* is also the term used nowadays and *uk* comes from *ku* the first person possessive, thus *vunuku* and then *vunuk*.

⁸⁷ Mondragón (n.d.) notes that, “[...] the binary opposition between two foundational moieties tend to be the norm in every kinship system that has been described to date across Northern and Central Vanuatu.”

Banks (2002), and also Taylor for Sia Raga (North Pentecost)) (Taylor 2006: 312-313).

Bolton (1999: 49) mentions that in East Ambae, kinship is organized through matrilineal moieties establishing a person's social location as a maternal inheritance.

In both the cases of Vanua Lava and the Torres, the relation between the matriline and places of emergence is very strong. This is quite different from the situation in Tasiriki, where matrilineages are generally “u-topic”; they are not explicitly attached to a particular place.⁸⁸ It is the *nasara*, the paternal core, which is usually attached to a place of origin. What is certain is that in any of the stories collected in Tasiriki about matriline, none referred to a specific “geographical” place of emergence.

One important aspect regarding matriline is that, despite the systemic differences, the principle of patri- virilocality – women moving to their husband's place – has the consequence that matriline are distributed over a large area in many places. Thus they can be considered as the index of the “roads” opened by the women through marriage (see among others Guiart 1958: 153, Eriksen 2008: 27).

3.2.3.2 The origin of matriline

The origin of the matriline, or *Vun*, is always related to an encounter between a human and an animal, a plant, or an element of the environment. The way people emerge from this encounter and the nature of the encounter are diverse. I have collected only a few stories recounting the origin of these lineages. Many stories of the matrilineages found in Tasiriki are not known. In the stories I have recorded, two tell the emergence of the matriline Taro (*Vun Pete*), one tells of the beginning of the matriline Banana (*Vun Tavui*). The last story is more

⁸⁸ The term is borrowed from Scott (2007: 349) whose description of matriline on Makira in the Solomon Islands is quite instructive when taken in a comparative endeavour. While the utopic nature of matriline on Makira is something that the author has identified as their ultimate primordality, when they come into being they emerge as associated to a place which Scott terms the “topogenic primordality” (ibid.). After the coast has been rendered “utopic” by the demographic effects of the colonization, people are trying to re-inscribe matrilineage in place.

like an account of how two already existing matriline, Hawknigh (*Vun Lulu*) and Island Cabbage (*Vun Matua*) became *aruana* (friends), a term I explain below.

Since the set of stories is very limited, it is difficult to know whether they have any representative quality. They often imply an unexpected finding of an “incongruous” object at an odd place by a person, either an elderly person or a widow. The story then describes the process by which the encounter of the human and this incongruous object contributed to generate a lineage. Hence the matriline *Tavui* (Banana) originates from a baby girl found sleeping on a banana tree by an elderly man. The girl grows up, marries and gives birth to the many children who then propagate the matriline *Tavui*. For the Taro matriline, in one story, an old woman sees a taro which she recognizes as being at the origin of her lineage. In the other story, it is a widow who by ingestion of a taro growing on a tree gives birth to the lineage. All the circumstances presented above have an extraordinary aspect to them. In all cases they exclude male agency in the production or reproduction of these lineages.

As the word “matriline” makes explicit, the continuation of the lineage is through the mother. As Bubu Tosusu says, when one is born as a boy, the matriline finishes there. It is only marrying one’s son to a woman from one’s matriline that will allow a man to continue his own matriline, and this is possible only over a span of two-generations. To maintain one’s matriline throughout one’s descent has implications with regards to kinship principles and the former ideal form of marriage.

Another point that people made clear was that the lineage continues through children’s blood thus compensating the blood that the mother had lost when giving birth; the matriline’s blood is thus transferred and contained in the child despite the mother losing blood at the time of delivery. This blood is further replenished in the growing child thus allowing girls to then

give birth to another generation of children of the same lineage whose future growth and fecundity will again compensate the loss of her blood.⁸⁹

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, one very important aspect of these matriline is that they are ideally strictly exogamous; one cannot marry within one's own lineage.

3.2.3.3 Principles

*“My father, he is line Rara, one tree that grows everywhere (*Cordia subcordata* sp.). We call it Rara. Ok, my father is line Rara, my name is Rara. But I'm line Lulu (Hawk-night). I did not take the line from my father, my father named me Rara because he is line Rara. But me, I'm line Lulu, I must follow my mother.”*

“All my children carry the line of their mother. That's the way line goes, it goes like this, when they all grow up and marry, they do not follow my line, they follow their line but as fathers too then they will say that their line is gone.”

Rara Tosusu, Tasiriki, 29th of May 2011

Bubu Tosusu's account of the two friend matriline, that of Hawknight (a night bird – species not identified) and Island Cabbage (*Abelmoschus manihot*), gives further precision in regards to the way matriline work in their definition of a person. It shows how the matriline inscribes the person within a generational and geographical logic which not only gives the person her position in the kinship network but also creates an extensive connection across space and time. Each person carries two matriline but not in a symmetric fashion in regards to its definitional weight. The matriline that one must follow is the mother's which flows in one's blood. The father's matriline is present however in one's surname. The surname given by the father to his children is the word which designates his own matriline. When the child is a girl, the surname starts with the prefix “*Ve-*”.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ “Blad long bodi blong hem hemi kamaot be tru boe mo gel hemi stap” that is woman's blood leaves her body but through the children, boys and girls it endures/remains.

⁹⁰ See also Hess 2009, p.27. Hess notes “the relationship to one's father's matriline is acknowledged through the expression wot – born of.” It can be seen as the opposite, or better, the complement to venem, as it refers to the father's venem.

The matriline Lulu, as he explains, is paired with the matriline Matua or Island Cabbage. These two lines are called aruana, or “*fren blong hem*” (friend/paired line),⁹¹ because they have the same root, in this particular case the two matrilineal lines originate from an equal sharing of sugarcane between them by the ancestors. The reason why the sugarcane was divided specifically to these two lineages is not known. However, as a matter of fact, these two matrilineal lines function together, as a pair. In a way, one can say that they are “one”. As a consequence, the exogamous rule is therefore extended to the aruana. All matrilineal lines have a friend, but in many cases the second half of the pair is not known. When the two friend matrilineal lines are known, they work in tandem and this tandem comes to be significant in a number of situations.

One is related to marriage rules. One cannot marry someone of the same matriline or someone of the friend matriline. The first thing to ask, when one wants to marry another person, is her matriline. If however, two people are of the same matriline and decide to go on and marry, each family must sacrifice a pig whose tusks have completed a full circle; the blood of the pig has the power to erase the inappropriateness of such an alliance.

The second situation where the aruana of one's matriline is of importance and is put to use is in the case two children are lost consecutively (first and second born both die). In such cases, the next child will be given, as surname, the name of the ‘friend matriline’. Hence, if two children born Lulu die consecutively, it is considered that something is wrong with the line Lulu and the next child who is born will be named Maliu which is the male term used in the friend matriline Matua. If it is a girl, she will be named VeMatua. The change in name is understood to lift away the calamity with which the other matriline seems to be afflicted. One interesting point here is that the calamity is thought to be carried by the paternal matriline

⁹¹ The term aruana (which comes from rua [two]) is also used to denote the married couple. It indexes, in that case, the coupling of two exogamous matrilineal lines to form one house. In the case of the friend matrilineal lines, from one they have become two but they are interchangeable while in the case of husband and wife, two distinct matrilineal lines have come together to constitute one house with two sides.

rather than the mother's one. Indeed, one cannot change one's mother's matriline even for the friend one because the only change possible is in the name, thus the paternal heritage. Naming is not something light, it is meaningful and in the case just exposed changing the name is seen to be effective. The reason given to me by Thomas to explain why one should not marry in one's own matriline is also related to naming. According to him, if one marries in the same matriline then there would be an impossibility of naming the child.

Sometimes some taboos are associated with one's matriline. In this regard, Guiart noted that if matrilineages could be considered as totemic, there were very few restrictions associated with them. Guiart even considered that the affirmation from *Moli Valivu* that as a *Karae* (Flying fox) there was a taboo for his lineage to eat this animal was an isolated fact, and probably a self-imposed taboo (Guiart 1958: 187).⁹² In Tasiriki there are not many taboos associated with the element of one's matriline. However, some connections were still established between the person and its element, as though some of the qualities of the element could occur or manifest in or through the person because of their original connection. Sometimes, this connection also manifests through a very strong affinity between the person and their element. Of this, I have been given only three examples.

In Tasiriki, people enumerated 13 matrilineages. These are the most common. There may be more since some isolated ones might have been omitted. The more girls are born from one matriline, the more it will be widespread and thrive. On the other hand, a *vun* can become extinct in a place if very few girls are born and marry out. This can be a more common situation nowadays where there is less and less constraint for young men to marry a woman of the same *vun* as their father. In this case, there is a loss of reciprocity and the matriline may not come back, this has of course consequences in regards to land transmission. Sometimes

⁹² Guiart (1958) notes that Moli Valivu justified the taboo by saying, "mi no save kakae stamba blong mi" (I cannot eat my origin).

new matriline are reintroduced to a place through marriage. The arrival of a woman with a matriline which did not exist in that place before or had gone extinct brings it back.

To sum up, one can see that matriline in Tasiriki are not tied to a specific place. It is difficult to know whether this has always been the case or whether this is only a consequence of people's displacement from the bush to the coast with the result that many of the stories about the origins of matriline have been forgotten. What one can note though is that unlike in the Banks described by Hess (2009: 24) where many of the matriline are named from places *per se* (the places of origin), matriline in Tasiriki are named after animals, plants and elements of the environment. If the connection to place is made, it is through the tracing of the origin place of a peculiar story – hence, for a same matriline, different stories are available as shown by the two different stories of the emergence of the matriline Taro.

This disconnection from place has two consequences. One consequence is that while it opens the network of one's matrilineage over a greater geographical area, relating people across the island and beyond. It also disconnects the matrilineages from any emplaced anchorage. Second, following on this, it strongly ties the land to the *nasara* (the paternal group) rather than that of the matriline. It is difficult to know whether this double movement of, on one hand, the evident and strong connection and tracing to origin places and land made through the *nasara*, and the disconnection of matriline from specific places on the other hand, is the result of a loosening in rules of marriage which used to encourage the continual exchange of women between two matriline, thus ensuring that the land would always be kept within these two matriline. The loosening of these preferential forms of marriage might explain the relocation of land within the paternal core that the *nasara* represents. The matriline appear then to be secondary.

However, the apparent primacy of the *nasara* must not obscure the importance of the matriline. The latter, as I've already said, inscribe a person in a wide network which is as

significant as the one provided by the *nasara*. The matrilineal system as much as the “genealogical” system can be taken into account to define which classificatory term will be used to address another person. Usually the line will prevail, ‘*laen hemi kam fastaem*’ (the line comes first) or “*taem hemi laen yu no save go ova, yu mas stap unda long laen*” (when it is a matter of line, you cannot go over it; you have to stay under the line).

EgoZS is thus primarily the father of Ego’s children and thus the brother of Ego independently of any generational matters. Ego’s sister’s children are always asymmetrically positioned vis-à-vis Ego’s children. Often the different positions that one can occupy within the kinship network interfere; one’s position is defined through marriage as well as descent, and some relations are more prevalent than others. Hence, in the case that one could be either a sister or a mother vis-à-vis someone else, since the sister-brother relationship is primary over any other relationships, the two persons will have to comply to a brother-sister relationship involving extensive restrictions.⁹³

Another aspect which is interesting with matrilineal systems is the way their “members” are affected as a whole even when an event touches one specific person. Not long after my arrival in Tasiriki, a man in his thirties passed away. His wife being line Taro, during the ten days of mourning which followed the death all women from line Taro were under restrictions on behaviour, especially in their movements. Kiki, who is line Taro, was therefore not supposed to leave the village to fetch food (though she did so). As a result, she was criticized as not showing the due respect to the family of the deceased.

The matriline thus lies both at the core of the person and way beyond them. The matriline is a spatio-temporal link established through women and which spreads out through women’s movement upon marrying to other places. This link is not completely devoid of

⁹³ See also Hess (2009: 28). Hess notes that, “Kin terms on Vanua Lava, then, can be understood to be a consolidated manifestation of several defining aspects of social distance.”

emplacement, as it ties children to their mother's brother, and thus to the *nasara* from where the mother comes.

3.2.3.4 Nasara: paternal trajectories of emplacement

The *nasara* does not actually refer to a specific place but rather, on one hand, to a common ancestor and on the other, to a space, often translated in the literature as ceremonial or ancestral ground, where ceremonies are held. That the concept of *nasara* is tied to the idea of ancestry is important because it has a temporality and traceability in time and space that the matriline does not have. The *nasara* is also the expression of patri-virilocality – the place where a woman moves upon marriage and to which she belongs thereafter. The reality covered by the *vanua* and the *nasara* intersect and can in some cases be identical yet they differ in regards to their referent. The *nasara* is extensive in time, that is, it refers to a group of people with a common ancestor who can be named (usually to the 4th generation). This temporality is further inscribed spatially through the movements over generations by the people belonging to the *nasara* in their settlements, the *tan-vanua* or *vanua*.

According to Mondragón (n.d.), “the *nasara* constitutes what is perhaps, from a male perspective, the quintessential aspect of place in the Torres and across North and Central Vanuatu.” It represents, “the ancestral substance of a man's lineage” (n.d.). This is valid for Tasiriki. One can say that initially, the core of the *vanua* is the *nasara*. The *vanua* as settlement is thus the expression of the *nasara* at one point in time in one specific place.

When people used to move around and establish new settlements every four or five years, following their gardens fallow cycles as well as leaving their dead behind, the *nasara* used to represent the ancestral tie which connected their movements from settlement to settlement. Therefore the movements through the land, as well as the former settlements established by the descendants of a *nasara*, define the places and lands one can use or upon

which one can settle. *Nasara* tend to be associated with a specific river and its watershed as territorial limits. From what people say, people used to move extensively across the bush. The fixity and use of land within a specific *nasara* has been reinforced with long-term settlements. Indeed, the increase in population and the resulting increase in the scarcity of land for gardens, aggravated by the extensive use of land for plantations and the necessity to keep gardens not too far from the village, have contributed to a more rigid approach in land use. Where before people could settle on lands which were not theirs and benefit from its usufruct, people now trace very carefully the genealogy of their trajectories and thus define precisely which land is theirs and can be cultivated, or planted with long-term plantations. The former settlements are known as *tan-vanua*, the places of the ancestors. These movements in time have left a map of emplacements.

In the early 1960s, people who had not converted to Christianity, and thus not yet settled around the church, still moved quite frequently between former settlements, while within the last 50 years, Christians have tended to settle on a long-term basis in the villages organized around the church. Plantations and the copra trade have become an important part of life and this necessitates to being close to the road. After almost three generations of settlement in one spot, the increase in population size of Tasiriki triggers fragmentation and the creation of new hamlets, most often expressed by and through a change in church affiliation. A change in the church denomination means leaving one's *nasara*. People then tend to move to lands recognized as former emplacements of their initial *nasara*.

When a man leaves his *nasara* to form his own settlement, it is considered a new *nasara* inasmuch that this person becomes the founding ancestor. The *vanua* on the contrary only denotes the settlement in its synchronicity, that is, what it is and is made to become. The *vanua* thus has a synchronic quality; it is the form the settlement – a community of kin – takes in one place at one point in time. The long term settlements around the church on the coast

give the *vanua* the permanence that it might not have had before, and the multitude of former *vanua-s* in the bush are easy to spot as a banyan tree used to be left to grow there; with time they become huge and stand out. The *vanua* can be larger than the *nasara*; this is the case in Tasiriki where currently three *nasara* live together in one place around one church.⁹⁴

Besides and as a correlate of its expression as paternal core, the word “*nasara*” manifests spatially as the central ground of the settlement, the place where the chief’s power is expressed and ceremonies are held.

Traditionally, houses were positioned around the *nasara*. This is still the case in some of the hamlets and villages neighbouring Tasiriki. In other islands, it has remained a space with a number of taboos attached. Thus, Bolton (2003: 85) notes that in certain areas of Vanuatu, the *sara* or *nasara* is a highly restricted place, never used apart from ceremonies. In Ambae, however, the term *sara* does not denote a restricted place. An open space becomes a *sara* or “ceremonial field” (Rodman 1973) when it is used for meetings, exchanges, and ceremonies otherwise it is just the “hamlet yard”. Bolton also notes that in south western Malakula, the term *nasara* refers to, “the central embodiment of a land-owning group: one identifies who one is by naming one’s *nasara* (ibid.).” The term is most often heard and used to refer to one’s identity and thus one’s special location in the village.⁹⁵

In Tasiriki, the *nasara* is not a restricted space and one can say that all the aspects mentioned above are valid for Tasiriki. Indeed nowadays the crowding of houses as well as the physical constraints imposed by the hilly configuration renders it difficult to keep a space permanently cleared. The *nasara* as a ceremonial clearing thus becomes visible when used. It

⁹⁴ Jolly (1994: 101) also notes that similarly in South Pentecost “in the composition of villages there is a tendency of clustering of male agnates.”

⁹⁵ Eriksen (2008: 29) notes a similar situation in Ranon, Ambrym. The kinship unit which defines the paternal emplacement is the *bulium*. People in Ambrym consider that the words *nasara* and *bulium* refer to the same thing. So the author notes that, “[...] this definition of the concept moving it from the domain of kinship and descent to its relation to place was a useful and appropriate translation.” See also Curtis (1999: 61), cited in Bolton (2003: 70), who defines the *nasara* as being an “exogamous social unit claiming a common ancestral founder [yet] it is important to stress the spatial dimension of the term”.

is quite mobile, and a space will be defined as *nasara* where it is considered most appropriate for each occasion.

The *nasara*, in Tasiriki, is therefore two things, a cleared space where ceremonies are held and which expresses the chief's power, and the metonym that refers to a group with a common paternal ancestor. Where a *vanua* is composed of only one *nasara* (as it is the case in smaller hamlets) each *nasara* has a chief (*moli* or *jif*) associated to a chief's house called a *nakamal*. Formerly the *nakamal* was restricted to men. In the case of people who used to practice and had institutionalised graded ceremonies whereby men took grades by killing pigs each *nakamal* had different fires which reflected the hierarchy between men within (Guiart 1958: 164).⁹⁶

The current system of chiefs in Vanuatu is largely inherited from the colonial and mission era. In Tasiriki, the chief's (*moli*) position is passed from father to son on death. I describe the role of chief in Chapter 7 where I develop the institutional aspect of the *vanua* as well as how the diverse institutions in Tasiriki are articulated. Concerning the institution of chief it is important to note that Tasiriki has a chief who is common to the three *nasara*. He is thus a village chief coming from one of the *nasara* present in the village as a whole. When the chief held a pig killing ceremony in 2010 to take on his chief's name, the place where the pigs were killed was then enclosed, and is now known as the chief's *nasara*. Some trees have been planted, especially *nangaria* bushes (*Cordyline* sp.) which are important ceremonially. The space has been enclosed to prevent the cows from eating the trees. It is located by the *nakamal* on the huge open field in the middle of the village around which the three *nasara* are settled. In this sense, the current chief's *nasara* is almost like a supra-*nasara*.

Nowadays, in Christian villages, the *nakamal* has become a communal house open to all. One can say that, in Tasiriki, there is a communal *nasara* as the chief's expression of

⁹⁶ *Ambu* (fire/firewood) *Tambu* (taboo/restricted)

power which extends to the whole *vanua* and is therefore disconnected from its kinship and ancestral reference. There are individual *nasara* which still function as, and represent the, ancestral paternal cores. Tasiriki thus appears as a federation of *nasara*-s. The main element which federates them is not actually the chief, whose role I come back to in the final chapter, but the Presbyterian Church.

3.3 The church in South West Santo

3.3.1 Accounts from the missionaries

The first attempt to establish a mission in South West Santo by the London Mission Society in 1861 did not last long; the missionaries all died of Malaria (Miller 1990: 176).⁹⁷ The arrival at Cape Lisburn in 1871 of the Rev. John Goodwill from the Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia was the second attempt at establishing a mission in the area. He was seconded by a local chief named *Moli* Gav who had converted and offered his protection to the missionary. However, Goodwill's settlement was met with great disapproval from many people in the bush. The station was based at Kerenavura (Miller 1990: 140), the southern part of Cape Lisburn. He left in 1874 after having endured sickness, hurricanes, and attacks from the local population (Miller 1990: 179-182).

In 1896, the Rev. Fred G. Bowie took the responsibility of administrating the area of Cape Lisburn, South West Santo (Miller 1990: 182). Rev. Bowie was a Scotsman, originally from the Orkneys but settled in Aberdeen. He had been sent by the Presbyterian Church of Scotland to Vanuatu. He was accompanied by his brother, a doctor, appointed to the east coast of Santo. Rev. Bowie stayed with Dr. Annand at the Tangoa Training Institute (TTI thereafter) on the islet of Tangoa located just off the south coast of Santo. In 1900, the mission bought a piece of land at a place called Tasiriki. This choice was strategic for the

⁹⁷ Also known as the Melanesian Mission

Rev. Bowie. From the harbour of Tasiriki he could reach quite easily the west coast, especially the village of Wusi, while supervising the south west coast with access to the upper bush (Miller 1990: 140).

During the early years of the mission, Rev. Bowie translated parts of the Bible into the vernacular language.⁹⁸ From 1908 onwards, Miller mentions that the church in Tasiriki worked towards self-support through offerings (Miller 1990: 148). In 1913, Rev. Bowie took charge of the TTI, and students from Tasiriki joined the centre where they were trained as teachers.

There were many conflicts at that time between converts and non-converts. Miller notes (1990: 150) that, “the slumbering hostility continued down that time [1940s], assisted by an unsympathetic planter who came to occupy Kerenavura plantation, once the land of the first mission settlement.” Guiart notes that in the 1950s, conflicts were still virulent, opposing Christian converts, the people in the upper bush, the colonial administration, and the planter mentioned above (Guiart 1956: 96-138). The early resistance to Goodwill from the inhabitants of coastal South West Santo (the Vulua people) as well as the conflicts which opposed these same people to the planter in Kerenavura still have consequences for the current configuration of relations between the people in the area. This is especially true for the relations between Tasiriki and the village of Pelmoli. I discuss these aspects of local politics, crystallised around the church, in Chapter 7.

⁹⁸ In 1908, Bowie translated John’s Gospel into the vernacular language of Tasiriki, known as *Akei* at that time, followed in 1910, by the Genesis and the Book of Jonah. A copy of John’s Gospel can be found at the Marischal Museum in Aberdeen where archives of Rev. Bowie are kept.

3.3.2 The story of Lulu Varkiki: local perspective on the arrival of the church⁹⁹

The dry account by the mission of the implantation of the church leaves aside important aspects key to understanding the way the church is perceived as well as its centrality in Tasiriki and the Anrua District. The story of Lulu Varkiki which I recount below really sets up the mythological foundations of Tasiriki. Lulu Varkiki is depicted as the one who planted a seed which is meant to grow into a large banyan. In this image, it is the metaphor of the *vanua* as place of growth which is mobilised. I give the main outline of Lulu Varkiki's story.

Lulu Varkiki was a man Mbuvo, that is, a man from the upper part of the Mbuvo River. He was forced to leave his village because he was accused of murder by sorcery. Under threat of being murdered himself in an act of revenge, he managed to run away to the coast. He finally found refuge on the island of Tangoa within the Presbyterian Mission. He stayed there for a while under the protection of the Rev. Bowie, who had taken him into his service. However, each time he went to church service he suffered from headaches. This came to the attention of Rev. Bowie. Lulu finally admitted his crime and the interpretation given was that the headache was the manifestation of the presence of contrary forces in his body. This realisation caused Lulu to fully convert to Christianity. Rev. Bowie thus proceeded to a ritual of exorcism. The way Rev. Bowie is said to have operated is interesting and significant. Indeed, Rev. Bowie did not only resort to prayers but also made use of a white stone. White stones are considered powerful things. When manipulated by a knowledgeable person they have magical effects. The way he used the white stone is also worth mentioning. It is said that he turned the stone above Lulu's head and then asked him to throw it on the other side of the island, behind the place where he had come from. People use a similar practice to remove any

⁹⁹ This version of the implantation of the church in Tasiriki was told by Rara Tosusu (December 2011). The account was completed with additional details by Thomas Jimmy and Vevojivoro Tosusu (Rara Tosusu's daughter).

influences from the spirits.¹⁰⁰ After an incident in which Rev. Bowie helped people recently moved to Tasiriki to be near the mission to retrieve young men who had been kidnapped by a French trader, Rev. Bowie decided that Lulu was finally ready to become a teacher. But before he sent him to teach the Good News to Tasiriki, now established as a mission station, he wanted to be sure that Lulu would stay on the coast as a Christian. For that, Rev. Bowie gave Lulu a test. He made him choose between two kinds of presents: a few pieces of cloth, or some money. Lulu chose money, a choice which satisfied Rev. Bowie because, for him, this meant that Lulu had chosen to remain by the coast, money being useless in the bush. Finally then Lulu was taken to Tasiriki to teach. People were surprised at first as well as suspicious; they had not forgotten Lulu's past. But Lulu told them that he had changed and that he was there to bring them the Good News. Whoever wanted to come to Tasiriki could join as this was a place for peace. Thereafter, more people started to come down and join him around the church. Four *nasara* found their way to this new place thus contributing to the establishment of Tasiriki; the Mbuvo *Nasara*, the Kererara *Nasara*, the Navaka *Nasara* and the Bayalo *Nasara*. These, except for the Kererara, are all names of important nearby rivers, the Bayalo estuary being the most distant from Tasiriki on the south coast. The Navaka is the river which serves as the boundary for the Anrua district, i.e. the peninsula of South West Santo. The Bayalo people were the last ones to join in the 1920s, and the first to "make secession" from Tasiriki as a Presbyterian village when they founded the NTM Church in the early 1980s.¹⁰¹

Three important elements can be noted here about the ways Tasiriki has invented and imagined itself since then. First, the movement from bush to coast which meant partly leaving behind places of origin to join in a single place, not around a common *nasara*, i.e. a community of ancestry, but around the Presbyterian Church, i.e. a community of faith. So despite the fact that the different groups that joined the mission ground at Tasiriki kept their

¹⁰⁰ Thus, if a leaf falls right on them when near a body of water, this possibly being a spirit of some sorts, they pick up the leaf, turn it over their head and throw it behind their back thereby preventing any contamination.

¹⁰¹ Neil Thomas Ministry

nasara identity, they had to find ways to operate together. It is important to note that the necessary condition to stay in Tasiriki was to leave one's customary ways of life and especially any magical practices, outside the new territory. So two definitional points: the church as a common denominator and a settled life by the coast assembling people of different origins with their respective languages and practices. The third aspect which is explicit in the story is the adoption of money which becomes an essential medium in the management and maintenance of the church as an institution. I noted above that in 1908 the people had already managed to implement ways to manage their church through a system of offerings and of fundraising which are still key elements to understand life in today's Tasiriki.

3.3.3 Sketch of the institutional organisation of the Presbyterian Church

The Presbyterian Church in Vanuatu acquired its independence on the 1st of July 1948, a date commemorated in church annually. From that moment on, the church organisation was left in the hands of the local people, while still being supervised and part of the international organisation of the Presbyterian Church. Pastors are ni-Vanuatu. Foreign missionaries still come reside and teach at the Talua Ministry Training Institute on Santo but otherwise the whole organisation is national and recruits locally.

The Presbyterian Church is characterised by a hierarchical organisation. At the district level, there is a committee which supervises the four villages themselves under the supervision of their respective groups of elders. The pastor is the main authority at the district level. The pastor is usually not from the local area and is nominated for a period of three years which can be renewed. The decision for this renewal belongs to the committee of elders. The pastor who resides in one of the villages under his supervision is in charge of all the sacraments, religious education and other institutional aspects. The elders are named by the

local church committee. The elders ensure church service. They can perform funerals when the pastor cannot be present but not any other sacraments.

The Presbyterian Women Missionary Union (PWMU thereafter) is an important component of the Presbyterian Church organisation and is pre-eminent in the organisation of the church at the village level. I come back to the role of women and their work towards supporting the church.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to give a general presentation of the elements which are constitutive of place. I have contextualised the concept by reviewing some of its definitions as given in the ethnographic literature on the archipelago, followed by a definition of the *vanua* in the context of Tasiriki's cosmology. I have attempted to show that the ways by which spatial categories are devised are not separate from people's conception and spatialisation of the relations involving humans and non-humans alike.

In its simplest definition, the *vanua* is the place where people live and thus where they emerge as persons of a specific place. I have presented the main elements which come together to make the emergence of the *vanua* possible. First, the matriline which is "u-topic" (not anchored in a specific place) and constitute the extensive spatial (across the northern part of the archipelago) and temporal (blood genealogies) connection through women. Each traces its ultimate origin in the generative encounter of a female human being and a non-human element – a line of life. Second the *nasara* which ensures the temporal continuity on the paternal side, the side of the land upon which gardens and people are grown, i.e. a line of nurture and growth. People used to move along trajectories which were tied to their ancestral *nasara* and further defined their territory as a *nasara*.

I went on to consider the arrival of the church, and I have pointed to important and potentially structuring shifts in regards to people's way of life. The first of these is a long-term settlement involving peaceful co-habitation of "different" people in one place and the second is the widespread use of a new medium of transaction – money. These characteristics have defined Tasiriki since its foundation. They have had consequences for defining people's relationships to land and kin, and a bearing in directing people's daily efforts and commitments.

The first aspect concerns settlement and movement. Indeed, with the establishment of a permanent settlement people started to move differently. Where people used to be nomadic in the bush, or between bush and coast, their movements are now mostly oriented towards the other coastal villages (as a community of kin and Christians) or between village and town. In the latter case, the motivations are commercial, political, and religious, as much as kin related. People may also marry further away. These movements may be differently oriented, however, their primary concern has been the same all along; i.e. to contribute to the growth of place, ensuring its very possibility. Yet, the movements are not as tied to the land as they used to be. The institutions of the church, and the school as its corollary, have given money a central role as medium for, and index of, the growth of place and people. This has largely contributed to the transformation of garden lands into plantations for cash crops. As I develop in the next chapter, this has also fixed land use. This is reinforced or secured by an affirmation of the *nasara* over the maternal side. With the stable use of land, there is a potential for an accumulation of money and for its concentration in the hands of some and not others. Yet the church has been organised so as to act as an important vector for the circulation of money, pre-empting accumulation and retention as these are regarded as an obstacle to growth.

With the church as central institution, the *nakamal*, the chief's house, has become secondary. Where the *nakamal* used to be the place of men's projects both political and

spiritual, the church is now a joint project between men and women. Women's work for church is prominent while men have invested church as the politico-spiritual space.

Tasiriki is headed by one chief who is attached to the Presbyterian Church and whose genealogy now extends over three generations – grand-father, father and son. In Tasiriki, the simultaneous presence of two churches is sometimes sensed as problematic since usually people founding new churches are expected to move out from the vanua and establish themselves on newly cleared or former grounds of their own *nasara*.

In the next chapter, I consider the way the vanua is constituted and emerges as a place of growth. Growth is what people try to achieve in Tasiriki; to grow people, gardens, pigs and their church, which in turn become the conditions for growth. The vanua is grown to achieve further growth and growth is conditioned by principles which underlie the ways by which the vanua is constituted. One core principle is the two-sided house whose duality as the paternal/maternal unit embodies the whole field of dual metaphors which underlie the vanua – crystallisation and flow, connectedness (bridging, joining) and bounding, blockage, spilling-over (excess where things should be kept separate), permanence and decay etc...

If one makes the hypothesis that the paradigm at the root of place, and therefore sociality, is growth, one can further formulate the second hypothesis that the church is the embodiment (as locus of investment) of this existential/poetical project, the convergence of its means and its very end. To test this proposition necessitates exploring people's relation to God, but also how they comprehend the figure of God – who and what He is, and the way the relation they entertain with Him is key to the very possibility of actualising their project. This is what I attempt to decipher by looking, in the next chapters, at the way the vanua is constituted through the different yet analogous domains of kinship, gardens, work and church and their guiding metaphors.

PART II – GROWING THE VANUA: GROWING GARDENS, KIN and CHURCH

In the previous chapter, I gave an overview of the constitutive elements of place. In the following chapters, I am concerned with the ways by which these elements are organised and articulated, the types of relations people entertain and to what purpose – what people do. This involves kinship embodied in the two-sided house within the *nasara*. I will outline the paths or roads opened or followed by women in the process of marriage, the growing of crops in gardens and plantations, human cycles of life, community and church work, education, and finally the way the church operates.

All these aspects of life are closely intertwined and geared towards a specific idea of what Tasiriki ought to be. They are also mutually constitutive thereby mutually building potency in each other. I treat separately, as much as it is coherently possible, the gardens and the plantations. Although these domains overlap to a large extent in regards to the purpose they serve in people's life, they still pertain to different spheres of actions and serve different goals. Hence, while both gardens and plantations are tied to the growing of kin and the church as much as they are conditioned by them, the way gardens are considered comes closer to the way kinship is conceived while plantations and the church seem to occupy a shared territory. Notwithstanding that both are a product of colonisation and the mission, the church benefits from plantations as its primary source of monetary income and it regulates the effects plantations have on Tasiriki's sociality through opposing accumulation and concentration of money which tends to be viewed negatively in regards to people's conception of sociality.

The content and the form of these chapters are guided by the idea of growth. As a form, the structure of the chapters – growing gardens (Chapter 4), kin (Chapter 5) and church (Chapter 6) follow this metaphor. Growth is not necessarily explicit in all activities; so, in this respect, it is a connection I make. Nonetheless, this choice is not devoid of ethnographic

legitimacy. First, in practice people do grow persons and things; kin, gardens and the church. Growth is indeed a concern, especially articulated when things fail to grow as expected. It is something to be “ensured”, an expected and desired outcome. Ensuring proper growth is not only directly equated with wealth and the flourishing of place but demonstrates in its “objectified outcome” people’s “straight” behaviour – the appropriate way of doing things and relating. Mondragón tags this “respectful deportment” (n.d.) which conditions peace and thus the possibility of further growth. To achieve proper growth is not straightforward in any of people life’s domains. It is the manner by which this given aspect of life is worked upon to achieve certain forms that I describe in these chapters.¹⁰²

Thus “growth”, beyond its concrete manifestations, can, in some contexts, also be considered as a kind of ideology of place, tied as it is to ideas of power and morality when used in the Christian and *kastom* discourses. This aspect I develop in Chapter 7 where I discuss the respective agency of *kastom* and church in the making of the *vanua*.

The church, being both product and source of growth, has become the locus, as well as the major expression, of power. Therefore, it is in the discourse of the church that the notion of growth is the most present. In many sermons, the very idea of growth is made concomitant and proportional to people’s involvement in the church through work, offerings, and the cultivation of their faith.

Yet, as noted in the conclusion of Chapter 2, despite the power conferred to God, the morality of the church cannot ignore the importance and the immediacy of that of *kastom* in affecting and organising relations. In fact, *kastom*, as it becomes apparent in Chapter 5, being the very expression of emplaced kinship, partly escapes the scope of the church while remaining vital in organising relations as to enable the constitution of the *vanua*.

¹⁰² Leach (2003: 99) notes in the case of Reite that, “that things grow is part of taken-for-granted background to human concerns” and also “while things always grow, the power to control this is something people claim.”

Bonnemaïson had written (1986, 192) that, “[...] between ground and people, the link is genealogical, biological, and consubstantial. From the ground, people do not only grow their food, they also get their power, identity, energy and the quality of their emotions.” From this relation between person and place, emerges the image of the *stamba* (stump), to characterise a person’s emplacement, an image pervasive to the whole archipelago and tied to the concept of *man/woman ples* (a man/woman from the place). In the metaphor used by Bonnemaïson, he emphasises the rootedness of place. Thus he wrote that, “the tree is the metaphor of the man; he does not launch himself towards the limitless sky because his roots lead into the profundity of the earth. [...] Even if a tree grows vertically upwards, it is not for it to win the expanses, but to enroot itself. [...] As the land is punctuated with trees, so the space is sown with people-places. Implantation is without doubt the first among all Melanesian values. But if places make people, it is roads which make place (Bonnemaïson 1996: 35)”. Bonnemaïson (1985) had also noted that in Tanna the image of tree is mostly gendered; men are seen as the trees in contrast to women who are compared to birds. This metaphor of male emplacement is thus complemented to women’s movements and their connecting capacity.

Taylor has described how the Sia Raga people of North Pentecost use the image of the land-tree whose, “primary function is to provide a map of relationship between the different landholdings based on the history and the colonisation of that land by ancestors (Taylor 2008: 80).”¹⁰³ While with Bonnemaïson, the tree is static, in Taylor’s depiction the tree is a movement across the landscape whereby the tree grows as people colonise the island. As Taylor notes (2008: 195), “*Jif* Ruben’s Todali’s land tree images demonstrate an interpretive paradigm that seems to transcend the problematic theoretical relationship between events or change and the anthropological notion of structure such as typically understood to exist prior

¹⁰³ Taylor recounts in his monograph “The Other Side”, the genealogy of the image of the land-tree. It was explained in details to him by *Jif* Ruben with whom he stayed during his fieldwork at Avatvotu, Sia Raga, North Pentecost. *Jif* Ruben told him that this tree had been taught to him by his father (Taylor 2008: 78).

to events and therefore be static. The tree has at its foundation the place of its own beginning but it is also emergent and regenerative. The course of its growth thus lends shape to an otherwise uncertain future.”

Taylor (2010: 283) observes that, “an arboreal imagery of roots, trunk, and branches, provide a defining metaphor for such space-time reckoning” whereby the linearity of time is inscribed in a dual spatiality through the notion of sides. Taylor further reckons that, “the importance of the concepts of *stamba* (root, foundation), *rod* (road/trajectory), *stret* (straight, correct) and *saed* (side, category) to Bislama – and across systems of kinship, exchange, gender relations, and other social forms – suggests that this form of reckoning [...] is a more general feature of historiography, epistemology, and social consciousness across northern Vanuatu, and indeed the archipelago (2010: 283).”

Following on these arboreal metaphors, it is the image of the banyan that I finally wish to mobilise and develop when I conclude this work. I contend that the metaphor of a rooted as much as a continuously re-rooted (re-routed) and re-connected banyan can aptly account for the dynamic process of the coming into being of Tasiriki as well as its static expression at one point in time. This image of the banyan tree is not one that I’ve chosen arbitrarily but one that is anchored in people’s life as a concrete manifestation of the past as well as a metaphor on which they draw to speak about their place. Indeed, for people in Tasiriki, banyans are, first and foremost, the traces left in the bush of former settlements as well as the possible dwelling of ancestral spirits. The banyan tree being closely associated with the idea of the *vanua*, past and present, it is quite significant that it is precisely the image of the banyan that appears and is mobilised in the hymn recalling the arrival, planting and growth of the Gospel on the shore of Tasiriki (see Conclusion).

In the metaphor I develop, contrarily to Bonnemaïson’s statement (see above), the crown is as important as the root. Indeed, I argue that the crown could actually be regarded as

the tangible manifestation of the vanua, both diachronically and synchronically. The form the crown takes, though relying at first on the roots, also defines the further direction that the roots will take in the future and, therefore, the shape of the banyan as a whole. The banyan, I contend then, can stand as both an image of the emergence of the vanua since the foundation of the mission ground and that of the vanua in its current becoming.

The pertinence of this image will become more apparent as I develop the following three chapters where the ideas of growth, connectedness, and mutual nurturing between the different domains constituting people's life, are central. Thus, the mythical and historical network of relations presented in Chapter 3 – deeply grounded in the land yet whose current configuration is the product of the mission, could be thought as the root system from where the vanua has been able to emerge. The manifestation of the vanua, in turn, is fully visible in the form the crown takes as the concrete expression of place at one point in time. However, there, in the crown, by a continuous process of re-rooting, is also expressed a tension; that of the idea people have of their place, i.e. what it should be or become.

CHAPTER 4 - GROWING THE VANUA THROUGH WORK:

THE TWO-SIDED HOUSE, GARDENS, AND PLANTATIONS

4.1 Ground and God & Grounded and connected persons

4.1.1 Ground (one) and God's gift

“Without the forest we cannot live”. That’s how Thomas summed up the importance of land for the people in Tasiriki. This was said following a discussion over the “foolishness” of people who sell a piece of land to buy a truck. The consciousness of the short-lived and fleeting wealth brought by such acquisition was evident. Trucks and boats break down and then there is nothing left. Forestry projects (such as the ones going on in the north-western part of the Island) are also seen as a dangerous act; like cutting the branch one is sitting on.

The land, because of its scarcity is also a cause of disputes. Indeed, in rural Santo, working the land is the primary activity for people. Working the land consists of gardening or working on plantations, mostly harvesting and transforming coconut and *kava*. Coconut plantations are now extensive and as such are also perceived as a kind of long-term appropriation detrimental to the garden space. Gardens are the basis of daily life providing the majority of the diet. Yet, as Thomas said again, “*yumi stanap long copra*” (we stand on copra). The importance of coconut plantations as a monetary income cannot be ignored. Money is important for growth. It is key for children’s education as well as to fulfilling the church commitments.

In Guiart’s fieldnotes on the bush of south and west Santo (1958: 190-192), the author mentions a mythical being called Sari who dwelt on the Mount Talapon above the Mbuvo River.¹⁰⁴ At that time, Christianity had been in the area for at least half a century, and even non-Christians knew of the Christian God. This may have influenced what Guiart was told. There are three different stories related to Sari. The Sari in these stories is definitively a

¹⁰⁴ It is interesting to note that Sari dwelt in a place by the upper Mbuvo River, it is also the place of origin of Lulu Varkiki.

mythical character to whom are attributed vital aspects of people's life including death, light and the water taro gardens.

In contemporary Tasiriki, there is no mention of Sari but Sar and Sar is still currently one of the names used for God in the vernacular languages of the Anrua district.¹⁰⁵ In Thomas's perspective Sar is indeed no one else than God. Sar thus can be seen as the hinge upon which the Christian God is equated with the gift of growth.¹⁰⁶

According to Thomas, Sar was indeed to whom the missionaries referred when they introduced God. Sar was God's name before God was named God.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, "*Sar ta se*" (Sar separates). Like the coconuts when they grow, the first leaf separates in two. In Thomas's perspective, inside the coconut plant, there is a man who separates the leaf. Likewise, there is a man whose garden is the world; thus there is a man who "works" everything while people sleep. When the Good News came, the missionaries claimed that there was a God, a Spirit. But, according to Thomas, God (as Sar) was already there. Indeed, one man had been there all along and made all garden produce big.¹⁰⁸ This man cannot be seen. Therefore the main difference between before and after the coming of the Good News is that now there is a place to worship Him (Thomas Jimmy, Tasiriki, 12/2011). God, like Sar, is thus the man behind the scene.

Of significance here is the direct link made between gardens, growth and God, a theme of much importance in the way Christian worship is understood and oriented in Tasiriki (see Chapter 6). Ground is what people stand on, God is the one who grows things and the house is the place where two adults, a man and a woman, work together to grow the food which sustains them and the children they bear to the place. The food grown on the paternal land

¹⁰⁵ It is current that the finale "i" is dropped because not accentuated.

¹⁰⁶ See Book of Hymns *Hapai Tolui Pepei Susuhi Vete* – Sar is used for God in several places (e.g. #167, #208, #212, #219, #220 among others).

¹⁰⁷ See Kolshus (1999: 148) for a very similar equation drawn by the Motese between their mythic hero Qat and Jesus. Qat created life, brought the night and is at the origin of many of the landscape features on Mota.

¹⁰⁸ In Bislama, Thomas used "*ol kakae*" (all the food), which refers here to garden produce.

nurtures the children born from a woman of another matriline.¹⁰⁹ The husband and wife's concerted work as one house nurtures both the place and the connection to another place.

4.1.2 Two-sided house: grounded and connected persons

A house has two sides. It is the union of two matriline, the paternal and the maternal. Once the two-sided house is constituted, the spouses call themselves "*aruana*" (friends or pair).¹¹⁰ The matrilineal connection is passed down by women, so a person born from a house, bears her mother's line "by blood" and her paternal matriline only by name. One gets one's blood from one's mother and, in the case of boys, land from one's father.¹¹¹ If it is a girl, she will carry the matriline elsewhere when she marries. Like Thomas said, she will produce a family in another place. If it is a boy, his children will not bear his matriline but his wife's. Because the land passes from father to son, the land changes matriline. To prevent the land to be lost to another matriline, the son used to marry a woman who was of the same line as his father's. When cross-cousin exchange prevailed, the land used to change lines every generation. But since the grand-children were the same line as their grand-father, therefore the land never used to leave the *nasara* proper. Bolton notes similar strategies for Ambae (2003: 94). There, people indeed, "work hard to ensure that a line remains attached to land". But between the systems of patri-virilocality and that of the lines, the land changed line at each generation. Bolton thus notes that "to counteract this effect in the longer term, men will always ensure that at least one of their sons marries a woman from their own line so that their grand-sons will belong to the same line that they do and thus have access to the same land, [...]."

¹⁰⁹ See Jolly (1994: 93) where she notes that, "both boys and girls are identified with the place of their father while what they owe to their mother's place is a continuing debt for the blood of maternity." See also Rio 2007.

¹¹⁰ The term *aruana* is used in different contexts. I have already mentioned in chapter 3, that it can be translated as "friend" in Bislama but the literal meaning is "a pair". It is interesting to note that it is used to refer to the two "friend lines" which are like "sisters" and also to the pair of yams always planted together as male and female to produce offspring. See glossary for a comparative discussion of the word.

¹¹¹ "*Tata hemi saed long graon*" (the father is on the side of the land). A daughter who is not married can receive land from her father. There is also a specific ceremony called *jajavulaia* (washing hands) whereby a father can ensure that after his death his daughters' sons will have access to that land, it cannot be claimed by the uncles (the mother's brothers). This ceremony is achieved by the girl giving a living pig to her father.

According to Thomas, the missionaries put an end to a mode of marriage which, in from a genealogical point of view, was considered to be too close. As Thomas puts it, with the mission, there was a “change in road”, people started to “go out”; people were no longer committed to marry within their father’s lineage.¹¹² Indeed, there is a perception that since the mission came, “*man i muvmuv*” (people move) while before people were not free to move and the marriage was often arranged.¹¹³ Furthermore, this strategy of alternation between two matrilineal lines is less and less adopted.

In Tasiriki, the most evident trace of these patterns can be seen in the Chief’s line with the alternation of the *Lulu* and *Rara* lines from one generation to another. The current Chief should have married a woman line *Rara* to continue the alternate pattern yet he married a woman of line Pig – *Po* (vern.). His son, the Chief-to-be, married a woman line Taro – *Pete*, thus completely departing from the initial lines which had prevailed in the Kererara *Nasara*. One can note though that some men from the Kererara *Nasara* continue to marry within the prescribed lineages. Yet it is not done in a systematic fashion and no one related the practice to issues of land transmission. As already noted, the land seems to be increasingly fixed within the *nasara* disregarding aspects of matrilineal succession. This is not to say that people do not care anymore about the roads opened in marriage. Thus, one can still note that when a woman leaves for another place or another *nasara*, in the next generation a number of women marry in the *nasara* of their mothers or grand-mothers, yet it is difficult to find any systematic patterns.

Young people marry out, sometimes further away. Nowadays then the road of marriage is not defined so much by constant kin exchange between two matrilineal lines. People move around less in the bush in terms of settlements yet when they move, they move further away.

¹¹² Jolly (1994: 130) notes that similarly for the Sa speaker of South Pentecost that, “the *Kastom* people are contracting more unions with close agnates than the Christians.”

¹¹³ See also Jolly (1994: 125). In pre-colonial time, betrothal was a common practice usually when a girl was a few years old.

Nowadays, the only constraint upon marrying is to marry out of one's matriline or of one's "friend line". The closest one can get is to marry someone of the same line as one's father. This has always been and still remains the preferred form of marriage.

Young people going to school meet people from other places and unions with people from other islands or some further places in Santo is not uncommon. In Tasiriki, some women came from the east coast of Santo, Big Bay (North Santo) or neighbouring islands like Pamaa, Pentecost and the Banks. When referring to these women from other places, women from Tasiriki, tend to name them from their place of origin; i.e. *woman Pamaa*, *woman Penticos*, *woman Bankis* and so forth.

The house or, more precisely, the kitchen (*ima*) is an important place. It is considered the centre of life because it is where the basis for life is kept: water, fire, and food. It is where all the family and friends can come. For a young man, to have the ability to sustain his own kitchen is a pre-requisite for getting married. The kitchen is thus the index of a married man and one's first step into adulthood. Jolly (1994: 117) writes that, "marriage is essential to secure adult status for both men and women." Similarly in Tasiriki, young people can have sexual relationships and even bear children without being considered fully adult. Living with one's parents and being in close contact with one's sisters (joking, touching etc...) finish definitively at the time when one gets married. Even if the young man still works on his parents' gardens, he should show his ability to secure his own independence in supplying the kitchen.

The kitchen is also a place where one can physically get a sense of people's relations and the expected behaviours which pertain to these relations. The kitchen used to be and to a certain extent still is a place where important conceptions of sociality are expressed. Not to have a kitchen is like not having a home. Adults complain nowadays that many young people get married too early while they are not even able to maintain their own kitchen. The

establishment of the kitchen is the outcome of the *wolwol*, the *kastom mared*, which consists of “*pem gel*” (pay the girl, in this context, the bride). This is the pre-condition for the religious wedding called *blesin mared* (see Chapter 5, section 5.3.1.3 on marriage).

Traditionally the kitchen used to be parted in two. The kitchen had two doors, one for men and one for women, the children could circulate freely between the two parts because they are still “green”, or not “ripe”, they are “clean”, not yet differentiated in their gender.¹¹⁴ The kitchen had a post in the middle which indicated where each part ended. There were two hearths and two stone-ovens. One of them was used by women when menstruating. During menstruation, women could not prepare food for men and had to cook using their own hearth. In any case, men and women would not mix in the kitchen, each staying and sticking to their allocated space.

This is reflected in the making of *nalot* plates. The *nalot* is a traditional dish of Northern Vanuatu which is made by pounding with a wooden pestle a pudding of yam, taro, manioc etc... into a kind of elastic dough. It is then covered with coconut milk. The *nalot* is still a special dish that people share around the *nalot* plate and which is eaten with one’s hand (or a bamboo stick for a *nalot* made of breadfruit).¹¹⁵ The person partaking of the meal eats until full then stands up and leaves, another person can take her place and join the people still eating. The *nalot* plate, called *narove* in the vernacular, is carved in a single piece of hardwood such as the *natora* (*Acacia simplex*) or *natavo* (*Terminalia catappa*). In the past there used to be male and female *nalot* plates, usually cut from the same piece of timber. The timber had to be smooth and straight. Women should never sit on the timber to be used for the plate otherwise it would break. The male plates were easily recognized because they had small feet which kept the plate steady on the ground and resisted the pounding. Before, only men could pound with the pestle. This was likened to the sexual act, the wooden plate being

¹¹⁴ Children seem to dwell in the middle. In the church they also dwell in the middle along with the crops brought for Thanksgiving (see chapter 6 on the church).

¹¹⁵ Increasingly people eat in individual plates with spoons and forks. The *nalot* remains a notable exception.

round and concave. Nor could women grate the coconut used to make the coconut milk to be spread on the *nalot* otherwise it would be forbidden to her brother to eat it. The female plate did not have legs and was flat on the ground. It was never pounded. On the female plate would be put half of the *nalot* that had been made on the male's plate (Bubu Ambuluran, Pelmoli, December 28th 2011).



Photo 4.1 - Kiki preparing a *nalot* manioc in the kitchen with Angela and Judy

The mission changed this configuration. The kitchen became a single space with a single-door that husband and wife share. There is only one *nalot* plate in a kitchen, usually a male one, female ones are rarely carved nowadays. Women and men can pound the *nalot* and it does not matter whether it is a woman who prepares the *nalot* from beginning to end, even the grating of the coconut. Women and men eat from the same plate and it can be at the same time. In my family, children always ate first, or with Kiki and then Thomas ate. He always was the last one to eat.

The use of the *nalot* plate and the kitchen has become homothetic. This is not to say that the duality which makes and characterizes the single house has been lost, but it has lost some of its visibility. This loss of visibility between male and female domains although not contested creates a kind of anxiety in times of crisis. The fact that things are not contained and

can spill into inappropriate domains has consequences. I come back to this extensively in Chapter 7 when I consider the negative and sometimes dire consequences of non-containment of things and persons in their respective domains.

The notion of the two-door kitchen is not however completely lost. It has remained an important metaphor to qualify the “straightness” of a marital union between two persons. A metaphorical single-door kitchen is not “straight”. It is then said that people live with only a “single door” open while for a union to be legitimized it should be open on both sides. Hess (2009:26) notes similarly for Vanua Lava that, “the exogamous rule of marriage is expressed through the very material image of the house which cannot ‘stand up with just one side’.” Say we have two persons who are of different matrilineages, so one condition for a straight union is met, one door is open. But if the kinship configuration in which they are makes them as classificatory brothers and sisters, then the second door is locked. To open the door, they have to change perspective in regards to their respective kin position, like, for example, emphasising one’s connections through the matrilineage rather than the genealogical configuration. The new kinship configuration can only be chosen among the possible existing configurations, and a pig will have to be killed to make it effective. Eriksen notes a very similar practice in Ranon (2008: 25, 26) whereby people draw all the possible kinship configurations and adopt the one that is acceptable so that they can marry the partner they have chosen.

Once their kin relations have been changed adequately, the two doors are open. The kitchen is “straight”. In some cases, the change in kin terms precedes the new configuration. Killing a pig enables the change, so that from that moment on, the undesirable kinship configuration has been “deleted” which renders the union possible.

The kitchen as crystallisation of the two matrilineages and as place of nurture is thus what establishes the kinship configurations available to the people growing in that kitchen.

The kitchen ensures the continuity of the *nasara* through nurture but is also strongly linked and tied through obligations to the maternal *nasara*. Children call their MB *Avei* (mother). They have obligations of mutual assistance and support but the MB is the person who has the final word and authority regarding his sisters' children, especially in case of conflict over marriage. In case the father is absent for some reason and the kitchen is dissolved, the children will return to their MB. Children born of the road, i.e. unknown father, or born from a non-married couple are also under the authority of the MB. Obligations towards the maternal side are also expressed through the nature of the relationships the husband entertains with his wife's fathers called *Palika*. When they meet, the son-in-law cannot joke and must carry half of the prepared food to them (see Chapter 5).

In Tasiriki, the house is Presbyterian Christian, except for the NTM people (see Chapter 1). A woman marrying into Tasiriki to a Presbyterian husband should change her affiliation if she does not belong to the Presbyterian Church beforehand. It is the same for all the other church denominations. Eriksen (2008: 86) notes that, in contrast to that what is in use in Tasiriki, the village of Linbul, on Ambrym, became SDA through women. She notes that, "in the same manner as women opened the roads into new settlements for their brothers or husbands, "out-marrying" women became the road for the church as well."

In 2010, a Presbyterian woman from Pelmoli married a man from the SDA settlement at Mbul Mamara.¹¹⁶ Although the bride's side insisted that the *kastom* and Christian ceremonies be held according to the Presbyterian ways and in the Presbyterian Church, the woman subsequently became a member of the SDA congregation.¹¹⁷ This has implications in

¹¹⁶ It is the SDA settlement established by Vekarae Kiki's brother. It is located by the truck road above Pelmoli on one of the former settlements of his own *nasara*.

¹¹⁷ The SDA side initially refused to have pigs killed during the *kastom* ceremony while the Presbyterians insisted on the importance of this ritual so as to ensure that everything was clarified between the families before the union. Shedding pig's blood is understood to clean all the conflicts and pollution thus clearing the roads for relationships (see Chapter 7).

regards to the way church affiliations are equated to settlements, an important point to which I return when I discuss the church and the *vanua* in Chapter 6.

The house ideally has the Bible as its foundation. The sermons addressed at the time of the *blesin mared* (the Christian union) are usually all directed towards an understanding of the family in which children should respect their parents, the wife her husband like people their Church while the husband should take care of his wife and children as Christ sacrificed to his Church.¹¹⁸ The Bible is regarded as a member of the family, someone to refer to when one has questions; the Bible is compared to a man without arms and legs, yet who can provide all the answers if one gives it one's own arms and legs, bringing the man alive by opening the sacred book.¹¹⁹ The necessity to pray and the importance of prayer in one's life was an oft-repeated theme during sermons. The act of praying was understood not to be secondary to domestic life but its constant companion. As Thomas Jimmy puts it one time during church service "praying without faith is no use", now "faith in Christ produces good work".¹²⁰ People pray at home, usually before sleeping and when waking up in the morning. In Thomas's house, this is an important practice. Sundays are days of Sabbath. No work can be done except the cooking for the Sunday lunch before the service. In our house, Sunday morning was unmistakable; the whole house was woken up with the Solomon's choirs blasting from Thomas's radio.

4.2 Work

4.2.1 *Matavun*: growing gardens and plantations

Matavun is what most of the adults do in the morning; they make their way to the gardens, leaving behind, in the village, the elderly who cannot walk to the gardens anymore and women with their very young children.

¹¹⁸ The main reference during church weddings are Ephesians V, §22~33.

¹¹⁹ This analogy of the Bible as a wise man sleeping at home waiting for arms and legs to be brought alive to providing advice was recounted during the service on the 05/06/2011 by Dom Jimmy as that day's children story.

¹²⁰ Sermon given by Bubu Robbie on the 21/08/2011 during a joined service Tasiriki-Pelmoli held in Pelmoli.

People take their bush knives and sometimes an old rice bag which they use to fill the harvest of the day from the gardens. The rice bag has replaced woven baskets. However, the rice bag, though convenient, is not indispensable. Women know how to weave baskets from coconut leaves, something they do on the spot or on the way to the gardens often in less than twenty minutes. The bush knife is the sole indispensable tool one needs upon going to work. After the bush knife, a matchbox may be the second most useful thing to carry if one plans to cook at one point during the day.

At home, the first person who is up, around 6am, lights the fire and cooks breakfast of rice or tubers depending on the supply in the kitchen and the time available. A quick breakfast means rice. The others wake up one after the other, the smell of firewood helping to stir the sleepers. Only the *kava* drinkers will sleep much longer in the morning. It is a time of discussions about the day. Children prepare for school if it is a school day. Men wait for the truck to go. The truck may be carrying some men and women from the West Coast to town or a load of copra for someone. There are always discussions around the truck. Once the truck is gone, then the day can really start.

Men and women usually leave the village separately; women and children together and men often alone. They may go to the exact same place, they may be going to the gardens to work together there as a family but the journey is often “one-one” as people say.¹²¹ Women stop more than men on the way. They gather things as they go along, they stop to weave a basket, make a rope, they chat, catch up with the news.

¹²¹ Bislama – “oli go wan wan”. An expression which is also used when people separate after a gathering, this expression tells the end of the gathering, after coming as one, they go one-one.



Photo 4.2 – On the way to the Navurvar (water taro garden) weaving baskets from coconut leaves.

Leaving the village means crossing the cattle gate to the south or going through a narrow path between huge cliffs on the northern side. In both cases, it means leaving the enclosed village behind its high white coral cliffs. Turning around one just sees a curtain of cliffs and trees, almost like a forest to the unfamiliar eye.

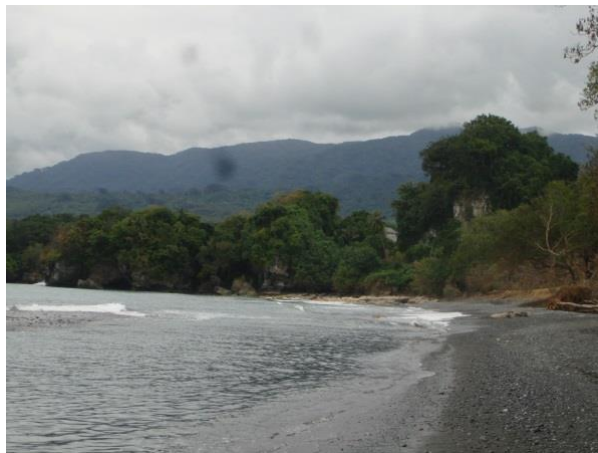


Photo 4.3 – At the end of the beach that stretches between Tasiriki and Pelmoli.

The south entrance of Tasiriki hidden behind cliffs and trees

When one looks uphill or downhill, plantations are everywhere covering huge surfaces of coastal fringe, if not all of it. When one walks towards the Mbuvo River and then to the

gardens, one goes through hectares of plantations. The gardens have been slowly pushed further away uphill and inland.



Photo 4.4 – The beach that stretches between Tasiriki and Pelmoli.

Here looking south towards Pelmoli and the Cape Lisburn.

Leaving the village on either side, the first landscape one encounters is the beach. The beach is called yusvus, and the strip of land that stretches along the seashore is called uta (outside). On the southern side, one first walks on the dirt road, or truck road, passing the Primary School. Then one engages on the path of the uta. It is a highly anthropic biotope. First, it is a place where people fetch most of the firewood from the groves of burao (*Hibiscus tiliaceus* sp.) that have been left to grow for this very purpose on both sides of the estuary of the Mbuvo River. On the path on the way to the river, one finds some of the common medicinal plants and trees. Usually, it is also along the uta that Pandanus trees are to be found. Their leaves are used to make mats and baskets. Palm trees are also planted in that space. It is where women and children look for worms for fishing etc... Yet the uta is dominated by coconut plantations, other than for the small groves of banana trees which have been planted by elderly people who cannot go uphill anymore.

All these different elements of the landscape are joined through a vast network of paths, called sala, usually narrow, which denotes the habit of walking single file. The trees on

the sides of these paths usually bear the many scars inflicted by people's habit of constantly striking them with their bush knives, a habit or making one's presence known? Other paths appear and disappear depending on people's activities and their concentration in specific areas at specific times.



Photo 4.5 – The Mbuvo river taken from uphill Lamanro.

The way towards Tasiriki is on the right bank of the river.



Photo 4.6 – The Mbuvo taken at the ford before crossing on the way to Lamanro and Vi-Anan.

The Mbuvo is a kind of nerve centre; a place to stop on one's way up to or down from the gardens. Some people go uphill on its right bank, others on the left. On the left side of the Mbuvo, most lands, from the sea uphill, are used by the Kererara *Nasara*. These lands are actually the heritage from a grand-mother who was a woman Vulua.¹²² The coconut plantations there are vast, planted from the coastal fringe to the top of the hills, all the way up, on very steep slopes. After reaching the first plateau, one faces again hectares of plantations. Walking for another half an hour, one crosses the main little stream of the garden area. It is called Ae Rihi (the small water). From then on, leaving Lamanro behind one is now in Vi-anan. Vi-anan is a mosaic of plantations and horticultural gardens.

Vi-Anan has become the place where Thomas and his family, as well as all his brothers and sisters, have their gardens and some of their plantations (which were otherwise mainly located in Lamanro). Vi-Anan is the place which nurtures the Kererara. Gardens have moved around. Where there is now a coconut plantation was once Thomas and Kiki's garden taro when they first got married. The clearing of Vi-Anan for gardens is now interspersed with coconut plantations that began to appear there two decades ago.

Vi-Anan, which literally means the place that eats, is not good according to Kiki but is the only place left available for the gardens. Vi-Anan was a place where her family had settled at one point. They left it after people had started to die one after the other of malaria, hence the idea that it is a place that "eats" people.

Nearby, carved out from the Tira, the large mountain stream which runs parallel to the Mbuvo ending in Pelmoli, is the *Navurvar*, the water taro garden. This huge open garden is shared by the villages of Tasiriki and Pelmoli.

¹²² All lands beyond the Mbuvo are former ancestral grounds of the Vulua people. The upper bush was mostly settled and cultivated by the ancestors of the current people of Vuna-Ur (Kiki's kin). Before the time of *Moli* Sara, the first chief of Tasiriki (1920), there was one man called Sopo who lived on the right side of the Mbuvo and whose ground it was. He had 4 children, and among them one girl. The girl was called VeTavui (daughter of a father whose line is Banana). Two of the boys died, one had married but was without a son and then he died. When *Moli* Sara married VeTavui, all the lands which used to belong to Sopo were transferred to the other side of the Mbuvo that is to Tasiriki and to the Kererara *Nasara* in particular to whom *Moli* Sara belonged.

The map that I have given so far of the gardens and plantations is partial. It does not account for all the other gardens and plantations which can be found on the other side of the Mbuvo, on the northern side of Tasiriki or the ones located directly above the village. This reflects the fact that everyone's knowledge of the gardens is always partial. One only really knows the gardens associated to one's *nasara*. Even within such a small perimeter, the area is only criss-crossed along certain paths. The gardens which are not one's own are seldom visited or passed by if the owner is not there. Although Vi-Anan is made of a mosaic of gardens interspersed with plantations, gardens are hardly seen from the main path. To reach one's own garden, it is always along the same old paths, day after day. The result is that of an extreme familiarity with one's own surroundings so that any single change can be perceived. People literally read the paths and it is not difficult for them to decipher whether someone has passed by and when. This is not to say that there are only a few paths walked, there are many. Indeed, there are many fruit and nut trees dispersed here and there. They have been planted by kin on former gardens and people regularly visit them on their way to the gardens. Walking to the gardens can therefore be far from straightforward, winding from fruit trees to nut trees then to fruit trees again and so on. This is even more so when walking to the gardens with the children. One can be sure that all the potential fruit-bearing and nut-bearing trees will be visited before reaching the destination. For someone who is not familiar with the area from the start, day after day small aspects become known, and it is thus that one slowly manages to picture the place.

4.2.1.1 Horticultural gardens

Plantations cover far more space than the horticultural gardens. Nonetheless, I want to start with the horticultural gardens because, despite plantations progressive and steady expansion,

horticultural gardens remain not only the basis for livelihood providing most of the food consumed in Tasiriki, they also constitute the basis for people's sociality.

Usually the different gardens have a separate life. Taro is not planted with yam and the water taro garden is a world in itself.



Photo 4.7 – The Navurvar, the water taro garden

Horticultural gardens have specific names depending on what crop is grown there, at what stage of the growth process they are, and whether they are in fallow or not. People grow different kinds of tubers such as taro (*Colocasia esculenta*), yams (*Dioscorea spp.*), manioc (*Manihot esculenta*), wild yams (*Dioscorea spp.*), and sometimes sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea batatas*). Also planted is corn which is often interspersed amongst the taro or the yam plants. Some space is devoted to different kinds of greens, gourds, and vegetables. Species of vegetables which are not endemic, like cabbage, corn, cucumbers, carrots, and peppers all come from the agricultural store's seed supplies. Other seeds circulate between people who, after visiting other people's gardens, decide to try new vegetables or varieties of species.

Women particularly like to plant all kinds of new vegetables. They usually tag these gardens "project", which in some cases could well be understood as a kind of

“experimenting”. Women love to borrow seeds and compare the different vegetables and fruits which come out of their gardens. If say a “watermelon” is thought to be especially “sweet”, other women will collect the seeds to plant in their own gardens.¹²³ Most of these “project” crops will be directed towards household consumption, but sometimes they can be literally part of a “project” like the women’s market, started in the village during my stay, by one of the “PWMU cell groups”.

People may also continue to cultivate plants that were originally planted as cash crops for domestic purposes. These are mostly ginger, vanilla and some greens which had a potential for being sold in the market in town.¹²⁴ The bush is also interspersed by many cocoa trees. These are the remnants of a potential business which, like the others, lacked any real outlet and soon were abandoned. There are also some white wood plantations and people still plant some sandalwood, although the prospected reward is for the next generation. The Ministry of Agriculture have promoted all sorts of cash cropping schemes for development without really securing a market for the produce. Thomas said that people are like the *Nambilak* bird which dies of thirst while being surrounded by rivers. By constantly looking for a better income and the miraculous cash crop, they end up with nothing. Thus, people have mostly reverted to copra, despite its fluctuating market, and *kava*. At least, coconut plantations do not need any special care unlike cocoa trees or other labour intensive and fragile crops like vanilla.

¹²³ People are quite concerned by the “sweetness” of what they eat. “Sweet” indicates that the food is not only tasty but of quality. Someone who grows “sweet food” is much admired. Thus people often comment upon what they eat and comparison – in good or in bad – between one’s crops and the others’ is common practice.

¹²⁴ Women used to go to the market in Luganville to sell their produce. During my stay, this seldom happened (women said that it was yet another work when they were already too busy). However, almost a year later, back home, I got one day a phone call from Kiki and all my aunts who were staying for a few days in Luganville at the market to sell garden produce for the coffers of the church. When women go to town to sell at the market, they tend to stay there until everything is sold, usually sleeping at the market under the tables. There was a big project which was financed by the PWMU to build a house for women to sleep when in town. The budget was huge, and although the project started in the early 2000s women were still paying the outstanding balance. During PWMU meetings, this used to generate important discussions because women said that they were not using this house anyway; indeed to sleep there they had to pay so that they would rather sleep at the market.

YAMS

The yam gardens, *talui kam*, are the result of a slash and burn practice while the taro garden, *givae*, can just be planted after weeding. Gardens are usually planted for 4-5 years and then are left fallow 6-7 years. Since land is becoming scarce due to the expansion of cash crop plantations, the fallow turnover now tends to be shortened. The yam garden is usually planted on a dry slope while dry taro gardens are planted on a flat land. Each house has its yam and dry taro gardens. The water taro garden is shared by two villages. Each house has a number of terraces, usually two or three depending on the land they have been allotted.

While the yam is cultivated on a yearly basis and provides a template for the yearly calendar, taro is practically planted all-year round and therefore can be eaten anytime in the year. However, from the months of December to February, almost all the gardens have been harvested and taro is rarely eaten. During summer months, all kinds of bananas, plantains (*Musa* spp.) and breadfruits are ripe which is timely since possible cyclones might prevent people from reaching the gardens.

Yams are planted once a year and harvested once a year. There are many varieties of yams. I have recorded 22 and this is not exhaustive. The number of varieties is dropping though. People tend to spend less time with their yams and in Tasiriki, Kiki was the reference point, indeed, she was called the “Doctor in Yams”! Most people with whom I spent time planting their yam garden seldom knew the names of the different varieties and followed a very basic planting protocol. The planting of yam gardens used to be done communally and is now done at the household level. If women are alone, usually they are helped by other women. People acknowledge that cultivating yams requires a great deal of work which some now find too onerous (see also Jolly 1994: 67; Rio 2007: 108).

The clearing, burning and planting is usually done at the end of August and during September when the weather is at its driest. Dryness is a *sine qua non* condition to the planting of yams lest they rot. After the main clearing is done, one must cut the small trees and branches, burn, and then remove the residues by hand.



Photo 4.8 – Kiki preparing the new yam garden in Vi-Anan (30/09/2011)

The yams to be planted are cut on a piece of wood – usually the tree chosen will have to do with a person’s own magic.¹²⁵ The upper part of the yam, called the patun kam (head yam), is cut out on this piece of wood then the same thing is done to the keren kam (bottom yam). A small piece of the yam’s body – olen kam, called pakole is removed and is cooked and eaten on the day the garden is planted. This work used to be done by men. Only the body of the yam called valui kam (the middle of the yam) is left. The women then came and used to

¹²⁵ The use of the wood of the *nangalat* (*Dendrocyde* sp.) prevents rotting while the use of the leaf of *vulae* “blue water tree” “blocks” the garden, that is, it protects it from evil/malevolent spirits. Others cut their yams on a *Ficus* species called *evus* which have its fruits growing directly on the bark and from the bottom of its trunk; this can ensure an important harvest with big tubers. Another tree is the *nakoma* (species not identified), a tree easy to pull out. This will ensure that the yam will easily be pulled out. This is not insignificant because yams are to be pulled out without being broken which requires skill, lest they cannot be kept for re-planting.

put the yams in a special basket for planting.¹²⁶ Yams were buried by women in the holes dug beforehand by the men. While Jolly (1994: 167) describes the co-operative process of planting yam between Sa-speakers men and women as explicitly likened to a sexual coupling and procreation, this was not made explicit in Tasiriki. Yet men used to be the ones who had to break the ground while women were planting. Within the ground though, the disposition and the conditions for good growth are very similar to what was previously expected within the two-sided house or in the gardens.



Photo 4.9 – Kiki cutting the yam before planting at the house garden in Vi-Anan (03/10/2011)

Women knew where each yam was to be planted; white in the middle and red on the sides. According to Kiki, the planting of the white yams in the middle is important because they are the most precious. The red ones cannot be buried with the white ones, except on the

¹²⁶ The basket was called *etau*; this used to be a practice done by Kiki's mother and these are not weaved anymore in Tasiriki. Kiki has not taught any of the basket weaving she knows to her daughters. From what she says, people are too busy so there is no more time to devote to that.

sides where they may alternate. The red yams are known to be fierce towards the white yams. They may make them run away. On the sides, the white and the red yams are planted alternatively, man and woman respectively. The white yams planted on the side are there to prevent the red ones from polluting the white ones which are in the middle. The garden is planted from the bottom – *kerekere*, to the head - *patpatu*.

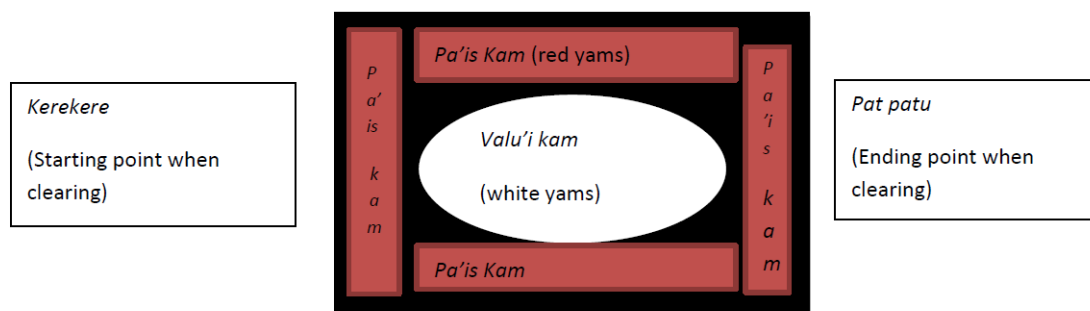


Fig. 4.1 – Schema of the yam garden.

Thomas's mother used to have a white stone which was planted in the middle of the garden – this stone had a protective power. The stone was shining white and the shape was like the head of a yam. This had an effect on yams which used to be very abundant and big at that time. Now the stone is lost and people say that the yams are much smaller and less abundant.

The cycle of growth is nine months and the garden needs to be weeded three times. Weeding is paired with specific tasks which are vital to the proper growth of the garden. The first stage involves the clearing and planting (see above), the second stage involves planting sticks for the shoot to grow, and then the last stage consists of guiding the shoot along the stick with regular weeding. Harvest is usually around early April.



Photo 4.10 – The yam garden two months and a half after planting (16/12/2011)

The harvest is done when the upper leaves turn yellow indicating that the tuber below is ready to harvest. The harvest involves a ceremony and the sharing of yams between people. The yam once harvested is blessed in the church and shared; some are eaten, others not (see also Chapter 5). The yams which have not been eaten are put in a house built for them – the size and the manufacture of the house depends on the time people wish to devote to it. From a corner in the garden house, a little bed made of wood and covered by *viaro* leaves (*Heliconia indica*, Musaceae, also known as “lif laplap” in Bislama¹²⁷), to a small structure like an open house raised above ground on a small pillar, or to a real house, these are all possible structures to host the yams until they are planted or eaten. When in a “real house”, they are usually parted between the two sides of the house, one side for the yams to be eaten, the other side for the ones to be planted after six months, or to be kept for exchange.

¹²⁷ Leaves used to wrap the traditional dish called *Laplap*.

Yam is an important food and it is thought that eating yam makes one strong. But this is not the only value of these tubers. First, in contrast to other tubers, yams do not decay and can be kept a long time (see also Jolly 1994: 67). The most appreciated are the white ones because their non-decaying whiteness makes them special. It brings them onto a par with pig's tusks and white stones, both associated with power.

Although all the gardens are subject to taboos, extra-care is taken with yams. Yams are very sensitive to sounds and smells, as if they were people.¹²⁸ Most taboos around the gardens and especially around the yam garden work with analogies between yams and men. As noted in the introduction, the equation of people with yam brings them into configurations of relations which make them commensurate (see Leach 2003: 102); this is most apparent in the taboos regarding women and menstruation.

Most of the taboos around yam horticulture were also relevant to the other gardens. However, it was mostly during the time that we worked on the yam gardens that these restrictions and interdictions were voiced and respected. Most taboos are related to heat, smell, and blood. The pollution comes mostly from bodily emanations, heat and smell which are caused by the ingestion of foods; usually animal or stale.¹²⁹ These dry the garden as much as women menstruation blood, *kaen tetei* (bad blood) whose smell the yams are very sensitive to. Likewise, eating too much before going to the garden will have as consequence the proliferation of roots. The congestion inside the body is transferred to congestion below ground; in both cases by indigestion or proliferation of roots, neither the body nor the tuber can grow well.

¹²⁸ See also Rio (2007: 112), for the sensitivity of yams to sound.

¹²⁹ Here meat is linked with blood. Any meat is dangerous, turtle included (*totel, kakae blong hem olsem animol, i gat smel*). Eggs of the bird called *straptak* are also forbidden. The *straptak* lays eggs in a hole in the ground. It is said that the bird farts on its eggs to keep them warm. The heat is thus transferred to the eggs. To eat the eggs will make the body emanate heat. Likewise, any food prepared on the previous day is considered inadequate to be eaten before going to the yam garden. Cold or re-heated food, as well as the fact that coconut milk usually turns sour after a night, are all factors which will have as effects to produce emanations of heat from the body which then dries the leaves of the yam's vine.

TARO

The other important crop is taro (*Colocasia esculenta*). Taro is different from yam; it is ephemeral, it rots. For the Sa people on Pentecost Island, yam is male and taro is female (Jolly 1994: 62-67). This is not expressed this way in Tasiriki. There is no explicit association between yam and taro as being male and female respectively, yet they are used in a complementary fashion. They do different things while appearing in the same contexts.

Taro is planted all year round. In contrast to yam, there is no real protocol for the planting of taro although there is a procedure. Only the first harvest of a newly planted taro garden will be given peculiar attention. This specific harvest will be notified to others by using *nangaria* leaves (*Cordyline* sp.) on the basket carried by women or the yoke carried by men. While varieties of yams are many, the diversity of taro is not as important. Nowadays the preferred varieties are the ones which can be planted all year round and are not sensitive to weather patterns and change. This is the case, for example, of the *Taro Potan* which can endure drought and is thus planted even in the dry season when, before, no taro could be planted (June to August).



Photo 4.11 – Newly planted taro garden Vi-Anan (16/07/2011)

Taro tubers are the main staple for any feast during an important celebration. Taro gardens are planted in anticipation of a celebration to come. Hence, taro is involved in all public feasts held during all types of ceremonies but in a different way than the yam is. While the yam is very much like a pig – a valuable passing from one person to another as living token changing hands with its full potential for growth attached, taro is brought as food, as nurture which is going to be shared. During a marriage ceremony a single yam is given at the same time as the pig and money to the bride's MB, sealing the exchange. Taro is also present but in the bride-wealth with the dead bullocks, dead pigs, and all kinds of household utensils. Taro will be shared, cooked and eaten together on the day of its harvest; this ingestion and commensality make it serve another purpose than that of the yam which is given "alive" so to speak.

Taro is also present in a significant manner during thanksgiving ceremonies within the context of the church. The bundles of taro are brought to be sold and thus are transformed into money which contributes to the church. Taro is thus definitively tied to nurture and commensality. It has an ephemeral quality but also its abundance and the possibility to plant a taro garden just to provide for a ceremony make it the tuber that can be pooled and shared.

In Tasiriki, taro remains the central element of food display although there is a feeling that rice is taking over, showing people's capacity to mobilize money rather than their capacity to grow gardens. And this is precisely the reason why people insist on the necessity to exhibit a large amount of taro during ceremonies. They say that "*taro hemi mas bitim man*" (the taro should outnumber people). As Rio suggests for Ambrym, as a result of the intertwining of *kastom* and intermarriages between islands, food in general has taken up a much greater part in ceremonies and this is, "[...] because of its basic nature in referring back to the social relationships between the people who produced it [...] (2007, p.105)" that is the produce of one's relationship to land and place.

GROWING PIGS: ANOTHER EMBODIMENT OF GROWTH BETWEEN PEOPLE AND GARDEN

The Pig is very similar to the yam in many respects. It is grown with great attention, like a member of the family. It is also part of exchange in the same manner as yam. In other islands, the yam harvest was something which was a bit similar to grade-taking by pig killing.

Through their yams men showed their capacity to harness a power of growth and they showed their magic (see Eriksen 2008: 113). In many places yam is still an important demonstration of a person's capacity to grow things. In Tasiriki, although a person who is able to keep many varieties of yams is worthy of consideration, yams do not confer the same prestige as the ability to raise pigs. Hence, pigs and yams are similar yet they are not duplicates.

The two main kinds of pigs that have been particularly valued are the *narave* (=hermaphrodite pig) which used to be found on the west coast of Santo or on the islet of Malo, the other called *po*, the most common, is a tusker. People from Malo who do not grow yam used to exchange their *narave* for yam. Now these pigs are usually bought with money. The pigs raised in Tasiriki nowadays are all tuskers. They are mostly kept in ditches along the cliffs within the village or sometimes they are kept enclosed up in the bush by the gardens. Some are kept on the small peninsula of Geren Vanua, these are the pigs raised to be killed by the next chief. All pigs are fed with the leftovers, the vegetables scrapings and with *navara*.¹³⁰ When left in the gardens and plantations, they are attached or enclosed and feed on what is there. Whether in the village, or on the peninsula of Geren Vanua, they have to be fed. Food is carried to them daily and this is often done by women.

Pigs are not important in the diet in caloric terms. One does not kill a pig without a serious reason. If pig is to become food (which people enjoy very much by the way), it is because it has already served another purpose, a social one (see also Jolly 1994: 68). Pigs are taken care of very attentively. One can say that pigs are the most highly regarded among all

¹³⁰ It is the name for the sprouting coconut and thus also the name given to the spongy part of a sprouting coconut which is removed from the coconut when split for copra.

the domestic animals in Tasiriki. Dogs are indeed kept with people but they are not really fed or taken care of the way pigs are. Chicken are also well kept and they are likewise valuable, taking part in exchanges and also considered to be quite a precious gift. They are often given as gifts in ceremonies; they can be given to repair an offense and are often eaten during celebrations.¹³¹

However pigs still stand apart. The pig stands at a cross-road.¹³² The pigs are crucial to sociality in many respects I will develop in Chapter 7. From the time it is born the piglet is looked after with utmost care. When it is big enough to walk about, the piglet will follow its owner to the gardens. It will be petted and given all kinds of food. The pig usually follows its owner everywhere until it becomes too big for that. In contrast to the cows which are allowed to roam in the village everywhere, the pigs are contained and for a good reason. A pig which breaks free in a garden can be a real disaster and many stories of garden's destruction (intended or not) are imputed to them. They are kept on ropes and fed as much as possible.

4.2.1.2 Plantations: the production of copra and *kava*

I have already mentioned the importance of plantations in the landscape and in people's lives. When going to the gardens, interspersed in the bush are the garden houses and often nearby, what people call the "*bed copra*". These constructions are the furnace where the coconut flesh is dried before being sold in town to be transformed into copra oil.

¹³¹ For the feast which is prepared for the Yam Harvest, usually people prepare a *laplap* of yam and add a chicken on top of the *laplap*. They are also used for the ceremony of the first hair cutting. The child hit the chicken, the same way pigs are hit in ceremonies for a man to proclaim his title of chief.

¹³² See also Jolly (1994: 68), who notes that pigs are between food and the symbolic potency of an artefact.



Photo 4.12 – *Bed copra* at Lamanro

A plantation, once planted and fully grown can be productive for 80 to 100 years. The cycle of harvest is approximately every 3 months that is the time it takes for enough ripe coconuts to fall to ensure one big harvest of copra. People in South West Santo “stand” on copra; it is the major and most regular short-term source of monetary income. Copra is the most straightforward cash crop. Thus, when money is needed people devote a week or two to make enough copra for it to be worth taking to town to sell (usually between 20 to 25 bags; the average weight of 15 bags being 1 ton). In 2010-2011, the price for 1 ton had dropped from 80 thousands vatu to 30 thousands vatu, which made it almost worthless since the transport to town would take away half of the expected income (1000 vatu for 1 bag of copra). In such cases, people may wait a while for the price to rise again and then sell it. However, the more you wait, the lighter the copra becomes and thus it is important to evaluate the most appropriate timing for the whole process. Weather is another variable that has to be taken into account since it is harder to dry copra when the weather is rainy.

There is a marked increase in copra business at key moments of the year. This is usually, when people need to pay their children’s school fees, often around Christmas and in August before yam planting takes up all of people’s time. While during these peaks, people

might even spend a whole week up in the gardens to look after their copra, work on plantations remain steady all year round.

Kava (*Piper methysticum* sp.) is another good source of income but it takes around five years for a *kava* plant to reach maturity ready to be sold. Yet *kava* remains reliable thanks to the developed national and international – especially Australian – markets which ensure a steady well-paid outlet. However, to sell one's *kava* requires quite a lot of work and the appropriate weather because it must be well dried before it is sold.

A harvest of *kava* like one of copra often requires collective work for processing a large quantity, otherwise, like any production it can be done at the household level. Usually men uproot the plant and cut the roots, women do the first peeling. The *kava* is then brought down in baskets and left in the water overnight to be thoroughly cleansed.¹³³ The *kava* is then left to dry and harden for a few days, preferably in the sun, and then thoroughly peeled again to remove any black spots or impurities. Then the root can be sold. It is either taken to Luganville, or sometimes some *kava* dealers come to the village with their truck and buy the production available at the village, thus saving the people from the cost of the truck to town.

For garden and plantation work, there is no real division of labour. Men and women work together on what is the priority on a particular day. Sometimes, one is on the plantation while the other works in the gardens. The size of plantations are variable and as a family it can take a good week to achieve the whole copra cycle – clearing, heaping, splitting, taking the flesh out and drying. If the work is done collectively, then women do the clearing and splitting while men remove the flesh and carry the filled bags to the furnace and are in charge of keeping the fire going. Although it is usually men who carry the bags downhill, if the timing is tight, then women help.

¹³³ Usually when *kava* is harvested in large amounts, it is put in baskets made of coconut leaves and then put by the small pond created by the waterfall of the Vinga, the village stream. Water thus continually falls and flows removing all the dirt.



Photo 4.13 – Coconut plantation in Lamanro after harvest (13/12/2011)

In December-January, for the summer holidays, all the young people come home from high school or university. They thus not only participate in Christmas and New Year festivities but also steadily work on plantations to produce enough copra to pay the school fees of the coming year. While adults come to help, young people tend to work together, taking turns on the different plantations. Like with any cooperative work, in the evening, the person who has asked for help cooks dinner for all the workers, usually rice and tin fish cooked with greens.

Coconut plantations occupy a place apart in the bush. They are not subject to any taboos as though the nature of the production has extracted the coconuts, within this particular context, from the analogical and relational realm embodied in the other garden produce.

The plantations are also the place where most of women's work for the church is done. The church can only be grown with money while being itself, in many respects, a technology

of growth.¹³⁴ As noted above, not only does “faith in Christ produce good work” but one’s relation to God and the work devoted to Him can be one guarantee for gardens and place to grow well. I come back to these aspects when I consider the growing and making of kinship, church, and thus place. Indeed, much of growth, beyond what is given and people’s work, depends upon people’s moral attitude and care towards their gardens and their kin as much as upon their relationship with God.

Kava holds a specific place within the sphere of work. Unlike coconuts which have somehow left the realm of relations, *kava* is considered to be “spirited” and female gendered. Although essentially worked for income, the plant is still regarded as powerful in its effects on people. It brings quietness and peace to the drinker, yet it has a detrimental effect on women if ingested, or if they have close contact with the plant. Traditionally, women were kept away from the *kava* except in its medicinal use. Today women have no real choice other than to work with *kava*. In Chapter 7, I return to *kava* when I discuss the dysfunctions that people in Tasiriki perceive. It suffices for now to note that the problems which arise around *kava* are related to notions of respect, containment and boundaries, notions put into tension by people’s diverging constraints and priorities as well as the attitude and concerns of young people which differ from their elders.

4.2.1.3 Other forms of work and sources of monetary income

Work on plantations is the main source of monetary income. Yet, some people have other kinds of monetary income. During my stay, the village counted seven stores, with three stores running most regularly.¹³⁵ The stores belong to particular households and are considered as being just a complementary activity besides work in the gardens and on plantations.

¹³⁴ This is detailed in Chapter 6 when I consider women’s work for the church.

¹³⁵ The stores sell in small quantities a variety of products from the basics, like oil, rice, salt, sugar, matches, batteries, soap etc... to a choice of biscuits, powder juices, cigarettes, sweets, tea and coffee, plates, pieces of

Some men are also attracted by temporary work in New Zealand on apple farms. The contracts usually run for a total of 7 to 9 months. Men leave in September and return in April. This period is the best for them to go because the yams have been planted and they can be back at the time of harvest. Only women are not very keen on their husbands leaving. They are left with all the garden, plantation, and children's work on top of their many commitments to kin and church during the worst seasonal period of the year.¹³⁶

While work on the gardens and on plantations remain enplaced and tied to land, the monetary income generated through running a store or working abroad is disconnected from land.

4.3 Conclusion

The “working unit” is the kitchen, the central space. It is the *vanuaku* – one's own *vanua*. The kitchen embodies the coming together of two different matrilineages. It is also the opening and connecting of the *nasara* to the outside through women. This connection used to be much more tight and restricted; the preferential form of marriage used to be between cross-cousins and restricted to the two same matrilineages across generations. This has changed with the arrival of the mission. The kitchen used to be clearly organized in a bi-polar manner, with the men on one side, the women on the other. This is not the case anymore although the metaphor of the two doors, and thus of two-sides brought together as one while differentiated inside still governs the types of relations embodied in the house. Finally, the kitchen is the place of production of food and thus children's growth through nurture.

Garden produce and the money extracted from work on plantations play a role in the life cycles of people. Yet the cyclic character of garden produce and the image of growth that

cloth etc... They are usually opened in the early morning or in the evening before and after people leave and come back from the gardens.

¹³⁶ See also Jolly (1994: 88-89), on wage labour, yam cycles and the women's discontent with men leaving for wage labour.

gardens embody make them akin to a person's life cycle as a yearly condensed dynamic of life. Yam and taro each participate in their way to the different rituals which punctuate a person's life.

A local story recalls a time when yam and people were one and the same. This story was told to me at the very end of my stay. Yet, I knew of its existence from early on. Not long after my arrival Bubu Ambuluran, one of Kiki's fathers, had agreed to recount a few kastom stories to me and to a wide assembly who had gathered around the small *nakamal* of Vuna-Ur. He had wanted to tell this story but after second thoughts, had changed his mind and told another one. When I asked Kiki why he did not want to tell it, she answered that it was a "*rabis stori*" (rubbish story). She meant that if recounted in its entirety children could not have stayed to listen, while it could not be told incomplete either. This story remained a mystery until that last evening when we were discussing yams again, and Kiki decided to tell me the story of Tarve. She must have reduced it to its bare bones.

Tarve was a yam man. When there were some celebrations, Tarve used to chase and seduce all the yam women. The people got angry at him so they bit him and pushed him down the creek named Vi-Olas, just above Pelmoli. From there he fell and rolled down until he reached the shore. There he petrified and became a long big white stone like a huge yam. Depending on the tides and currents, some years the stone is buried under the sand while at other times it appears uncovered. In the former case, all yams of that year will grow well. But in the latter case, the harvest will be bad.

The equation of yam and people epitomizes the relation between people, gardens, the environment and cycles of life. This equation is brought in a network of resonances which are indicative of people's conception of growth as part of wider processes, not only of generation but also guided/conditioned by morally adequate behaviours of care, respect and avoidance which allow any manifestation or promotion of growth (see Chapter 7).

In regards to metaphors and forms, an important point is the gendered dichotomy of female and male which manifests as blood and white hard items respectively. Blood is ambivalent; it is a source of life when contained, yet a dangerous pollutant to both gardens and men when released from the body. The red yams are necessary to the growth of the gardens yet they have to be planted such as they do not contaminate the white ones.

In a sense, this is very similar to what happens in the house, where man and woman live together, produce children together, yet when women are menstruating, a state expressed as *jalogvula* (moon sickness), their blood becomes dangerous and can expose men and the gardens to risks considered lethal. On the other hand, anything white and hard (or enduring) such as white yams, white stones and so forth are considered valuable or powerful, or both.

One can also note that the house and the yam garden are organized in a similar manner; evincing patterns of emplacement and roads which are the basis for life and then growth and obey the same cyclical patterns, being at the same time the base and the end point yet also expressing a renewal, be it generational for the kitchen or yearly for the tubers.

Within their yearly cycles, the planted yams are emplaced. Once harvested, they know two different trajectories, objectified by the way they are emplaced in the yam house or whether they are stored or brought down to the kitchen (see Mosko 2009 and Chapter 5). One trajectory is that of nurture or renewal. The yams are eaten or are kept to be planted again to enable further growth by producing a new generation of tubers. These yams never leave place. The other trajectory is that of exchange. The yams participate in the making of new roads and, exchanged for the bride upon marriage, may be planted in the place of origin of the newly married woman.

CHAPTER 5 - GROWING AND MAKING KINSHIP

5.1 Introduction

While in Chapter 4, I focused on the productive aspects of house and work, the next two chapters follow a parallel construction: the growth of kinship and church respectively. This is explored through the different cycles – monthly, yearly, generational – which intersect people's lives and whereby the end-products of one or many cycles contribute to set in motion other cycles. Each cycle thus can be seen as a trajectory of growth in itself as well as being one segment within a wider overall world of growth.

Mosko (2009) has shown that the botanical metaphor of base-body-tip-fruit widely used by the Trobriands Islanders, and common in Melanesia, can be understood and described both in its synchronicity, as the template form taken by different entities (people, yams, the house of yams etc...), and in its morpho-dynamic temporality. This, as I have noted before, contributes to make the spheres of life contiguous as much as a co-dependent where the fruit of one is always the base of the other. These recurrences of base, body, tip and fruit, corresponds to people's life's stages; respectively childhood, adulthood, old age and, finally, one's existence as a spirit (Mosko 2009: 693). These life stages are themselves the results of processes of birth, growth, decay and death which allow the possibility of a renewal.

In Tasiriki, reproductive cycles, like the yearly garden cycles or life-time kin cycles are likewise analogically paralleled. The church yearly cycles reflect these patterns and it is again the aspect of yearly renewal that people emphasized, while the activity around the church focuses on its growth and the wish to bring it to maturation. Indeed these yearly cycles are further inscribed within a linear trajectory whereby people work at creating the conditions to move the *vanua*, in a conjoint manner, towards the emergence of a place which conforms to a Christian ideal; that is a place where people “follow the step of Christ” and base their life on

the Bible. This has a double finality; one, “mundane”, is to aim towards the emergence of a peaceful, healthy and wealthy place, the other, conditioned by the previous, to establish Tasiriki as a holy place ready for the coming of Christ and the Last Judgement.

Work is very important for bringing the desired growth about. In the previous chapter, I described the work done in the gardens and on plantations. Here I show how the produce of this work constitutes the basis for nurture and exchange, the two aspects which promote kin's growth. Likewise, in the next chapter, concerned with the growth of the church, I consider the importance of women's work for the church.

Indeed, women's work can be seen as fundamental for the church's growth, yet their work is inscribed within a larger system which draws in and mobilizes the contribution of the whole congregation, men and women alike. Thus women's work cannot be reduced to a straightforward mobilization of wealth directed to the church. Indeed fundraising, thanksgiving ceremonies and the weekly service collection of money can do that. Women's work is important as both a process and as a result. In their yearly work cycles, women are mobilized around the church directing part of their activity towards the growth of the church, institutionally and spiritually, while the other part is devoted to the material and spiritual support of specific kin; widows, elders, children, or sick persons.

I will show that through women's work, money is not only earned but grown. The fact that women “grow” money, which ultimately goes back into the church, is important because it evidences the fact that the money is made to fruit by drawing and mobilizing people within the church project; the church project being the basis of the place's growth. Thus, one can say that work in gardens and on plantations, and the produce of that work, are literally recycled setting in motion another kind of work, that of growing kin and church that is growing place.

Before I engage in the description of the different cycles which criss-cross people's lives, and along which these unfold, it is necessary to consider how these cycles relate to

different aspects of growth. Indeed, life cycles in their temporality already denote the idea of growth as a given, from birth to death. In this case though, growth is not incremental, because what is grown then decays and dies, leaving nothing. Cycles could unfold without people doing anything, yet for things to grow well, the relations which sustain growth should be well attended to so as to produce the expected outcome – the specific form that people wish to achieve (see also Rio 2007).

In this chapter, I am concerned with the growth of kin. This involves being concerned not only with nurture, the recognition of specific relations but also the necessity to open new roads and connections. In Tasiriki, kinship operates within two conjoint and overlapping frameworks.

The first is tied to the system of the maternal lineage and the *nasara* as paternal emplacement. As such, this framework rests on a vast configuration of kin conditioning a person's connection to land and to specific others. The other framework is provided by the church. I have noted in the previous chapter how the two-sided house, the first framework, is also a Christian house understood to be ideally based on the Bible as its foundation, following a conception of kinship where the main metaphor for relations is that of Christ towards his Church.

Therefore, in Tasiriki, to be grown into a person of the place is as much tied to one's specific emplacement within the network of kin as one's growth into a Christian. In both cases though, the relation to one's kin is emphasized. The place can grow well as long as the "right" relations are maintained or made to happen, as long as relations take specific forms or point to the "right" direction (see Rio 2007: 151, 156), where the appropriate connections are made.

It becomes then quite manifest that growth is not something automatic. People's actions/intentions can undo, impede or block growth. In Tasiriki, different reasons are invoked when faced with dysfunctions in the community. Yet, these reasons usually refer back to

“blockages” arising from a lack of faith and/or a lack of respect (see Chapter 7). While the lack of respect is often traced to a “lack of *kastom*”, there is a recurrent idea professed in the church sermons that people’s “childlike” attitude also prevents them from moving forward.¹³⁷

Thus, if work is a condition for growth and can set growth in motion, it is not sufficient. Moreover it can also generate attitudes which are tagged as “selfish”, and this is especially so for any work which yields, as its product, money. This attitude of “selfishness” but also the jealousy it triggers are judged detrimental to the growth of the community as a whole. Indeed, they suggest containment without release, things being “held tight” when the possibility of growth is understood in terms of flow, circulation, and through acts of giving and receiving – even if there is a coercive aspect to it (see also Eriksen 2008: 101).

Acts of giving do different things in different contexts. While thanksgiving ceremonies involve kin, the act of giving is a way to make the relation appear as it should be. It is also strongly associated with one’s moral attitude and the sincerity of one’s thankfulness towards God. In that regard, the church has become an important catalyst in the way it forces money to move around thus preventing it to be “blocked” or “accumulated” somewhere (see also Rio 2007: 208).

The anticipated formal outcome of these acts is what people work for, while the forms that people actually achieve express the state of their relations at this point in time. This may be most evident in the expected and actual form the *vanua* assumes or is made to assume (see Chapters 6 and 7).

¹³⁷ In the New Testament sense of “childlike” in Corinthians I, chap.13§11 (used during sermon on the 25/09/2012)

5.2 “*Yam hemi man*”¹³⁸

As mentioned in the conclusion of the last chapter, the potent imagery of yam qua people is based on associations which are made apparent, among other things, through taboos where men and yam are seen to be sensitive to similar things, the most evident being women’s menstruation (non-contained “polluted” blood). As already mentioned in Chapter 5, the protocols of planting, which separate white and red yams, recall the gendered dichotomy and containment which used to prevail in the two-sided house.

Similarly, the double trajectory followed by the harvested yam indexed by its positioning in the yam house (emplacement, or circulation through exchange) resonates with the two possible trajectories followed by people themselves once adult. This is most visible in the way men are thought to be emplaced while women are associated with movement, connection to other places through matrimonial “transaction” and “exchange” (see also Jolly 1994, Bolton 2003, Eriksen 2008). In its adult life, between harvest and re-planting, one can say that yam then assumes a “gendered” form, like people, a function to the trajectory it takes. Once the yams have been “oriented”, some are eaten, some are exchanged and some are replanted to participate in the reproductive cycle (see Mosko 2009: 688).

In Tasiriki, like in other areas of the archipelago, the parallel between yam and people is further apparent in the context of reproduction.¹³⁹ Indeed, the seed-yam once planted will rot becoming the source for the shoot nourishing the new tubers. The rotting yam is called *tarapene* like the unanimated corpse of a deceased person once the spirit has left the body. As explained by Vevojivoro Tosusu, “When a person is dead, she is lying in the house, her breath is gone, her spirit is gone; we call this person *tarapene*.”

Bubu Rara Tosusu expressed the role of the *tarapene* thus: “He changes, he is old but he has a new life within him, like he is changing life, his head gives new food, the new food

¹³⁸ Here “man” designates “people”. In the case of yam’s sensitivity to women’s menstruation, the yam seems to be gendered as “male”.

¹³⁹ See Rio 2007, Jolly 1994 among others.

comes out of his head.” This analogy between yam and man is further expressed by the way siblings are conceived – all siblings are one yam; the first born being the head of yam and the last born the “end” or “bottom” of the yam. The periodicity of the image is made clear when people say that at the time of death the head of yam takes the father’s role. Thus the analogy of yam and man is expressed synchronically, as an isomorphic manifestation between the tuber and the group of siblings as one body, and diachronically through a morpho-dynamic periodicity.

Indeed, the nine months of growth that follows are also significant in the parallel drawn between yam and people and especially the fact that growing yams is said to necessitate the same care as that of children. Indeed, the care required to grow yams and children is another very explicit and potent analogy that people use in Tasiriki. Both yam and children require care for good growth. This period of care covers the whole time that the child yam is growing in the ground, while it is contained and under the supervision of the parents. Neglect has as direct consequence that the yams might run away or rot (see also Rio 2007: 13 for a similar analogy). The care is provided mostly above ground, ensuring the proper growth of the vine along the planted stick and regular weeding. Yet, the configuration of relations which would make apparent the respective roles of agnates and affine in the growth of the yam in an analogical manner as that of kin is not something which is made apparent, nor mentioned or emphasized, in Tasiriki’s current practices contrarily to Rio describes for Ranon, in Ambrym. Indeed Rio (2007: 116) explains that, “[A]fter the long process of *lar*, where [the person] continues to look after the vine or the road of the *metarem* (i.e. eye of yam), it is allowed to grow by itself. At the end of the process, one or several sons of the *metarem* will come out of the ground and be revealed and these will be the food or capital of the person who planted the father, the *metarem*. We can clearly see here the image of the third party as the creator of the relationship between the two parties underground, in a productive process

where the intergenerational transformation is crucial.” Therefore, according to Rio the relation between the growing vine and the growing tuber can be likened respectively to the movement of women objectified as a male idiom namely the *buluim*, i.e. the paternal core (Rio 2007: 130).

This last point is quite important in regard to the way kinship is thought about in contemporary Tasiriki. Hence, where it has been shown that the, “imagery of yam growth [can be seen] as crystallisation of the other arenas of social reproduction” (Rio 2007: 116) and, “what is expressed in the metaphorisation between kinship and gardening is that the cycle of interdependence of father and son is kept under the surveillance of a 3rd party [men from the mother’s place] (Rio 2007:118),” the status of yam growth in Tasiriki, by the way it differs from that what Rio has described for Ranon, can be regarded as significant and quite telling of the current kinship configurations.

As I have described, the way persons are grown follow two frameworks; a conception of kinship where the child is defined by their maternal lineage through “blood” and then by its paternal emplacement, and that of the Christian family contained within the perimeter of the house, in the strict sense of the term. These two frameworks work in a conjoint manner. This is most apparent at the time of marriage where the *wolwol*, the *kastom* ceremony, is followed by the “*blesin mared*”, the Christian marriage ceremony. The two frameworks mobilize and shape kin relations in different ways, yet they still are targeted towards the same thing, to allow the place to grow.

Now I come back to the yam analogy. There is evidence that the yam garden suffers a relative “disaffection”. Indeed, much less attention is given to the protocol, the division of labour is not necessarily respected, and while yams are still being taken care of, there is a general complaint about the amount of work they necessitate. Therefore, if the yam garden is the expression of specific understandings of kinship and gender relations, this shift away from

the initial protocol, and from the attention it used to crystallise, could be seen as the expression of how kin relations in Tasiriki have been (re)framed through the church with its different values and commitments, thus partly reorganising the relations implied in the house, i.e. between man and woman, and between paternal and maternal kin. This is not to say that the planting of yam does not crystallise kinship and gendered relations anymore but rather, being their expression, it could be seen as indexical of their change.

The New Yam harvest is another example. The New Yam harvest remains an important celebration in the year. After the chief has set the day, in the morning, people leave for their gardens and harvest their first yams. The yams are then brought back to the village and put in the church in a heap where they are blessed. The heaping of yam makes it impossible to know to whom they belonged in the first place. Once blessed, they are bought back by the same people who brought them; all the money goes to the church. Once bought back, they are taken to the house to be cooked in the form of a *laplap* in a stone oven. Usually a chicken is added to the *laplap*. Once cooked these *laplap* are consumed by the whole community in the *nakamal* where feasts are usually held.¹⁴⁰

Eriksen notes that, in Ranon, since the New Yam ceremony has been incorporated into the church, thus transferring the yams in the “women’s sphere”, this ceremony does not mobilize the interest of men anymore (2008: 117-118). This illustrates her argument that the church in Ranon can be considered as being female gendered. In Ranon’s context, the incorporation of yam within the church denotes a complete reversal from what used to be a male-dominated ceremony (ibid.). Thus, while in the gardens the relations brought about to ensure yam’s growth referred to a specific configuration of kinship involving the trio father-son-maternal kin, when they were harvested they were considered as male idioms and the “circling of women” was completely back-grounded and invisible. Now, being exposed in the

¹⁴⁰ See also Rio (2007: 113), for a very similar description of the yam harvest ceremony held within the Presbyterian Church of Ranon.

female-gendered church, left in the hands of women, heaped in a way which prevent the distinction of who had grown which tuber, these “male” idioms reveal the relations which used to be maintained in the background.

The situation in Tasiriki is different yet similar. Indeed, in Tasiriki, the issue/problematic of the church cannot be expressed in terms of gender in the same way as Eriksen postulates it for Ranon (see Chapter 2). What is similar though is that yams, in a different context, still crystallise patterns of relations. Thus, like a person, a yam has to receive the blessing of the church and contribute to the church to ensure its own growth and renewal.

5.3 A person's life cycle

The life of a person is marked by the different stages of birth, growth and death. At the time of death, the body decays like that of the yam while the “spirit” of the person, *talume*, leaves its incarnated form and joins the community of the dead, *tamate*. In Tasiriki, coming into the world mirrors leaving it. Ten days are necessary after birth for a new born to fully enter the constituted community of kin and likewise ten days are necessary for the dead to leave behind this same community and enter the realm of the dead, called *tuka* (see Chapter 3).

After birth, coming into the world is characterized by a placement in a kinship configuration as the outcome of the two-sided house on one hand and as the placement amidst siblings on the other – becoming one part of a yam. It is said that on the fifth day, the umbilical cord detaches and falls down.

In Tasiriki, there is no explicit eschatology of re-generation. Indeed, although the generation to come is designated as *bubu*, which is the same term as the one used for the ancestors, this is not sufficient to suppose that the new-born is a re-emergence of its ancestors. People just mentioned that a baby could be named after one of its ancestors in case his

behaviour or expressions recalled this particular dead person, but it was never made explicit that the dead could possibly come back in the form of children.¹⁴¹

As the person grows aspects of nurture are emphasized and this is reflected in the growth of hair which is thought to be the result of paternal nurture in the sense that the children are grown out of the joint work and production of the mother and father but coming out of the paternal ground/land. As the child grows, he is nurtured by the productive work of the house. After two or three years, hair is cut for the first time. Two ceremonies actually involve the cutting of hair; one for small children called *roto vulun* (to cut hair), and one for male adolescents called *roto umina* (to cut facial hair); usually it is the head of the yam, boy or girl, who is concerned.

The dependency towards one's MB, the maternal side, becomes increasingly visible at the time where the young boy is about to establish a two-sided house himself, changing the kinship configuration in which he has grown, especially in regard to the relations to his siblings.

Upon death, the person progressively leaves the realm of the living over a period of ten days, mirroring the time of his coming into society after birth.¹⁴² During the ten days of mourning, life is usually at a standstill. Work stops. On the fifth day, the person's neck and belly break apart; the dead person realizes she is dead. On that day, she pays her last visit to her kin making noise. A first communal feast is held at which the person is remembered. On the tenth day however, the person's body falls apart, all the joints are said to break apart, a

¹⁴¹ See here Leach (2009: 158) who mentions that in Reite, PNG, one can speak of regeneration because the new-born is thought to be the re-emergence of a power from the past and thus at birth, the body is closest in time to the power of its ancestors. Mosko (2009: 694) also describes how, in the Trobriands, the dead humans' souls parallel the divergent roads followed by seed and exchange yams. "Released *baloma* [the dead's spirit] travel initially to *tuma* the world of the dead, but eventually they return to the world of the living as *waiwai* 'spirit children' to regenerate new humans much as seed yams reproduce new yams plants." See also Jolly (2001: 180) who notes that for the Sa speaker on Pentecost Island, Vanuatu, the mother and her baby are dangerous to men and other women because, "they have come close to ancestral powers and are more vulnerable and open to spiritual influences at this time".

¹⁴² Although it might be slightly different from place to place, at the moment of death, it is very common that in Vanuatu, the commemorations are done at intervals of 5 days, then 10 etc... (See Jolly 1994: 165) In Tasiriki, the last feast is held after a hundred days. Usually, it is the end of the mourning period for the closest kinsmen.

literal dismembering. It is said that this is the day to forget the dead. Upon that day, it is said that the person integrates the world of the ancestors and spirits and work can resume.

Ancestors, however, surround and still influence the world of the living (see Chapters 3 and 7). To counteract such influence people remove from the *vanua* the traces of the person as much as they can and, when necessary do, “block” the spirit’s road, i.e. the possibility of a relation.¹⁴³ While the person becomes indistinct and her traces are removed from the place of the living, the networks of relations that had been shaped over a lifetime are thus disentangled. On the hundredth day, another feast is held, the hair left to grow since the funerals by kin, *uku vul*, are cut. Usually, this ritual only concerns a couple of very close male kin. Kinsmen can also resume eating the food they had been eating at the time of death subsequently forbidden as taboo. At the time of death, if the person is a man, it is not only the kinship configurations which are re-organised but also that of the land (see below section on death).

5.3.1 Roads of nurture and exchange: growing the house and place

As with growing gardens, there is work involved in growing kinship. The way kinship is grown involves relationships within the two-sided house and beyond. The most evident aspect of growth is through nurture. Garden produce are thus in part recycled within kinship growth, as food but also as part of ceremonies which recognize and transform kin in specific ways.

A ceremony like *roto umina*, where the first facial hairs are cut, is said to be held to thank the father’s nurture which is evidenced by the boy having reached his full grown state. In this respect, one can say, using Strathern’s vocabulary, that what is made apparent is the effect of nurture; the result of years of nurture on the paternal ground is made for all to see. It

¹⁴³ There are a number of rituals to remove the trace of the person. The first is to burn all her belongings. Another is called *sulia lupe henei limana* which literally means “to remove a person’s hand from the *lupe* (the bamboo lattices covered with thatch which make up the roof of a house).” In this latter case, it is a way to remove the hand of the dead person from any house that he/she had helped building. A piece of thatch is burnt with the hair of a pig killed for the occasion.

is the recognition of the covert and unmediated nurture of the joint work of parents on the father's ground.

As in any *kastom* ceremony, food is at the centre of the event as mobilized wealth which has been grown and “extracted” from kin over months of preparation. This wealth and food is redistributed, shared and eaten together. This is one way in which garden produce and food enter and fashion in a very significant way the kinship network. Indeed, the way food circulates and its mode of circulation and consumption, or non-consumption, denote relations in process, while upon being consumed it is a recognition of the relations as they are for the time being.

5.3.1.1 Nurture



Photo 5.1 - Peeled taro ready to be cooked

In Tasiriki, as I have mentioned in the first chapter, incorporating the food of the place makes a person strong. It was said that upon my arrival I was *sofsof* (soft) and *bunbun* (all bones) and, after a couple of months, people started to comment that I was becoming *fatfat* and *virvir* (black). The former referred to the food that I had been nurtured with and the latter to the fact that I was taking part in daily life activities including the hard work in the gardens and on plantations. This association with the strength of the body and the food (nexus of people and land) eaten is neither peculiar to Tasiriki nor Vanuatu (see Bonnemaïson 1986: 192; Jolly 1994; Eriksen 2008: 17; Leach 2003: 123 among others).

As pointed out by Jolly (cited in Eriksen 2008: 17) food indeed mediates between body and land and therefore food from the garden establishes a strong connection between person and place. It is significant that one of the first things Thomas deplored to me was children's enthusiasm for rice and tin meat or fish to the detriment of the local food. Yet, young people, despite their love for rice and tins of all sorts, can still be quite critical towards the choices of plantings adults make in the gardens; like, planting more manioc, a resistant tuber which does not necessitate too much work, and a lesser emphasis on yams. Angela, Thomas's daughter, often complained about this shift. She had been used to eating a lot of yams in her childhood and she refused to eat manioc which she considered not to be "food".

Nurturing people, and thus relations through food happens daily. Visiting someone, one will always be given food. Likewise accompanying someone to his/her garden, one will always be given something from the garden to bring home. Plates circulate between kin. When something a bit special is prepared, plates are sent to kinsmen. Then the plate comes back a few days or weeks later, never empty. It is true that, in our case, the exchange of plates often involved exchanges between Thomas and his sisters.

Strathern (1988: 263) observed that, "[m]aternal and paternal parts are paired as sources for growth and health to be dually maintained to sustain future well-being. [...]"

[U]nmediated transactions between kin are ordinarily covert, [...], only the effect is visible. When intention is made explicit, however, when nurture is acknowledged through gift exchange, the interactions assume an overt form.” In Tasiriki, the recognition of nurture is expressed in different ways, both in the church and through *kastom*. In the latter case, I was able to witness a *roto umina* (cutting of facial hairs); ceremony which had not been held in Tasiriki for more than 20 years.

***Roto umina*: acknowledging the nurture from the paternal place**

The cutting of the first facial hairs of boys in Tasiriki is a ceremony that is held to express the thankfulness and respect towards the father for his nurture. Indeed, it is understood that the growth of the first hairs are that of the father. In the specific instance I witnessed, on December 22nd 2011, the cutting of facial hair was done by the paternal uncles who received gifts in return. The MB was indeed present. He was actually orchestrating the whole ceremony. In this particular case, it was said that he held this role because people in Tasiriki claimed not to know how to perform such ceremonies properly anymore and it so happened that the boys’ MB, who was a *Kastom man*, knew the protocol well. So it was said that it was thanks to him that the ceremony could be performed.

His presence, as the orchestrator of the ceremony alongside his sister and his brother in law, was to ensure that it would be conducted in the proper manner respecting the order of procedure as well as the appropriate redistribution of gifts. One of the chief’s brothers told me, “*supos yu no save hao blong mekem hemi stret, yu mistem*” (If you don’t know how to make it straight, you’ll miss it). Thus, it was important that the ceremony was not done for nothing, i.e. that it performed its purpose; people could not afford to get it wrong. Louise’s mother, the boy’s maternal grand-mother, was also present and oversaw the ceremony with

her son.¹⁴⁴ During these ceremonies, the MB is usually expected to give something valuable to his ZC.



Photo 5.2 – Ceremony of *roto umina* performed in Tasiriki on the 22nd of December 2011

The ceremony took place in the early morning by the mango tree which is located on the small piazza lying between all the houses and kitchens of the chief's brothers and sons. People started to gather, either standing by the piazza, or sitting by other people's kitchens. The two boys were sitting in front of a heap of taro, with mats on top and fowls attached to it, while Louise's mother stood by the heap with her son. The two boys had their head bent. As often in ceremonies, the persons concerned rarely smile and rather exhibit a grave or solemn face. This posture is most manifest during marriage ceremonies. According to Rio (2007: 151), this "sad and mute" expression of the main protagonists in a ceremony could almost be seen, "as if they are under attack by the donors with the baby powder." This feeling of "being under attack" contrasts though with the means of "attack", i.e. the baby powder, the perfume and the gifts, which are usually positively loaded.

¹⁴⁴ The evening before the ceremony, a *kastom* dance was organized, called *polo turi*, "*sakem bamboo stanap*" (throw the bamboo stand-up). Similarly, since no one in Tasiriki is able to perform such a dance, it was Louise's relatives from Ipaiato, a village further south by the Navaka, who came to perform the dance.

The two boys had a *salusalu* around the neck and the back of their neck was covered with baby powder.¹⁴⁵ There was only one heap of taro because the two boys were born from the same womb. The taro, fowls and mats had been gathered by Louise from different kin on both the maternal and paternal sides. The boys had *kava* roots under their legs, and each had a pair of newly bought scissors as well as a chicken put on the three mats in their lap.

Kava is always present in ceremonies, and people say that *kava*, like chicken, is there as symbol of peace. The *kava* is recognized as such because *kava* is a woman. Hence, when two houses are in conflict, if a woman is sent, then there is peace, the women open the door of relationships, and likewise the mediation of *kava* when drunk together make men happy; they become quiet and peaceful.

After their father had given a speech to thank all the participants and to recall the reason for the ceremony, one of his brothers and another paternal uncle from the west coast were asked to come and cut a few hairs from the newly-grown beard of the two boys. This done, the two boys gave their uncles the mats and fowls that they had in their lap and then a couple bundles of taro.

¹⁴⁵ *Salusalu* is a necklace made of flowers – when woven by hand it is usually made of Hibiscus and Frangipani flowers. *Salusalu* can also be bought at the store; in this case they are made of fake flowers. They are worn each time there is an important celebration or ceremony. While the baby powder and the perfume sprayed on these occasions on the main protagonists but also participants, they are said to convey people “happy” or “joyful” mood, the *salusalu* is used to “flash”. This “flashing” or colourful brightness is recurrent in the way ceremonies are staged – flowers of all sorts and colours, *Cordyline*, coconut and palm leaves are often used to decorate the places where the ceremonies are held; the church, the school, the *nakamal* and so forth. People may also dress with very bright colours and there is an abundant use of perfume and baby powder.



Photo 5.3 – *Roto umina* – gifts exchange with the paternal uncles

The bullock was to be shared later on, when all the taro, fowls and mats had been distributed. After the two uncles were given their gifts, then it was the boys who were given gifts, followed by the distribution of mats mostly to older women to thank them, this was made on Louise behalf, and finally there was a distribution among various relatives of the taro, fowls, mats and *kava* roots.¹⁴⁶

The chicken and taro had been distributed among the different households to be cooked for the communal feast and so was the meat of the bullock killed for the occasion. No pigs were involved in the ceremony. According to Louise, this was not required as long as there were mats, fowls and taro, these were considered enough. After everyone had eaten the “*pablik kakaē*” (the public feast), the ceremony ended.

¹⁴⁶ Louise used the term “my glad heart” to express the fact that she had decided to distribute mats, which however had been contributed by other kin.



Photo 5.4 – *Roto umina* - distribution of the heap of taro, fowls and mats to different kin to be put on stone oven for the public feast.

Hair is the growth of the father in one's body. Therefore, the first hairs should not be cut as though they were insignificant. It is the hairs or beard of the head of yam (the eldest) which are usually cut, be it a boy or a girl. Thus while birth is the coming of a new life; it can be seen as an embodiment of the maternal side that is the continuity of the maternal lineage. As the child grows, the maternal side which has given life is then completed and nurtured by the paternal side, the paternal side being the side of the ground. The manifestation of growth and nurture from the paternal ground is expressed in the body hair.

Conversely to other “initiation ceremonies” found in the archipelago, such as the circumcision ceremony held in Ranon, Ambrym, known as *maljel*, and described by Rio (2007: 144-157), where, according to the author, the ceremony is directed towards the maternal kin, in Tasiriki, the ceremony of *roto umina*, seems to turn the relations the other way around and be directed towards the acknowledgement of the nurture of the paternal emplacement rather than a recognition that, “[the boys] are not only produced by their father's place but also by their mother's place (Rio 2007: 153).” In the *maljel* (Rio 2007: 152-153), the most visible person is the father who has organized and mobilized all the wealth which is then put in the hand of his son who redirects it towards the maternal kin. In the case described herein, it was the maternal kin who were orchestrating the ceremony and the wealth

assembled by Louise was put in the hands of her boys and redirected towards their paternal uncles.

Yet, the ceremony also involved an act from the paternal uncles; they were the ones asked to perform the cutting. The boys were in a passive attitude and the whole ceremony was in the hand of their parents until gifts between them and their uncles were exchanged. Maybe the fact that they gave the gifts to their uncles after these latter had cut their hair was their first gesture recognising their new status. The uncles, maternal and paternal, then gave presents to the boys, putting into their own hand the relations they would be responsible for in the future (see Rio 2007: 153).

The direction of ceremonies involving haircutting might have been different in the past. Indeed, for the ceremony of the first haircut, Guiart (1958: 168) notes that it is around the child's second year that the ceremony would be held and it was the MB who cut the child's hair while the paternal side offered on this occasion a feast served with chicken. Similarly, at birth, it appears that the way the child was brought into the world of people has undergone considerable simplification over time thus concealing the respective positions and roles of the paternal and maternal sides in the production of children.

Guiart (1958: 168) gives some details in regards to practices which hint at the fact that there used to be much more emphasis put on the kin relations involving the two sides of the house where rituals showed that the paternal side clearly owed this new life to the maternal side. At birth, the paternal side was beaten and sprayed by the people who had participated in the singing at birth. The paternal side on the 50th day had to organise a feast for these same people. If the child died before 50 days, a feast was held for the maternal side, the paternal side had to give compensation to the maternal side.

These are not practiced anymore in Tasiriki. Yet, there is a practice which is worth noting which mirrors the mother's brother (MB)'s role; it is that of the father's sister (FZ) and

her brother's children (BC). While it is overtly acknowledged that the MB is the ruler of his sister's children (ZC) because he and they are one (same matriline), there is a practice of adoption whereby the FZ can adopt one of her brother's daughters in case the brother in question has already another daughter. This adoption is not necessarily voiced explicitly. It happens just after birth. If the FZ comes to visit the mother and the newly born child with presents, the mother knows that the child is not hers anymore. The FZ will sustain her help to the mother in all matters of nurture or other necessary goods for another year thus claiming a "right" over the child. While the child stays with her parents, she will nonetheless have obligations to her FZ, especially work in the gardens or other chores. In such cases, the daughter's father becomes like her MB. One could say that it is as though she is reclaimed by the paternal side while being incorporated in another *nasara*, that of the father's sister's husband (FZH).

The role of the MB as a "ruler"¹⁴⁷ is widely acknowledged yet, except at the time of marriage where he is the one who receives the pig's rope upon the bride's exchange, the MB is seldom visible. This does not mean however that he does not have influence. That less emphasis is being put on the role of the MB during ceremonies, or the fading away of ceremonies that used to render visible the role of the MB, might be traced to the fact that other kinds of kinship relations are emphasized and made to appear. This can be contrasted to the Thanksgiving ceremonies performed in the church, described below, where specific roles are celebrated – mother, father, children, and thus involve only the relationship between these specific persons. The *roto umina* clearly directed the relations towards the paternal side; on one hand, acknowledging the nurture of the father, and, on the other, bringing forth new relations with these specific uncles who may be subsequently significant and important in the life of these two boys.

¹⁴⁷ "*Vetina hemi olsem ril bos blong ol pikinini blong sista blong hem*" (The MB is the real boss of all his sister's children) and "*Vetina hemi rulum long olgeta*" (the MB rules them – here the ZC).

5.3.1.2 Nurturing knowledge: growing with kin, school and the church

The growth of a child requires nurture. And nurture takes also the form of parents' investment in the education of their children. Indeed, children follow another rhythm than the adults – that of the yearly cycle of school and its holidays, but also the linear trajectory which might take them from the primary to the secondary and sometimes to university. School is as central in children's life as the time spent in the gardens, and with their kin, young and old. Children spend an important time in school and with each other, in the village or up in the bush on week-ends or holidays. Then there is the time spent with kin; parents, grand-parents and one's brothers and sisters.

In school, because most of the teachers are from other islands, and students from different villages, children mostly communicate in Bislama and are taught a Western-type of knowledge. If the students pass their exam at the end of their 8th year, they leave the village environment to join the secondary schools in town, mostly Luganville or Port Vila. During their secondary education, they usually reside at school or may stay with family in town if possible. They seldom come back to the village except for those students schooling in the nearest secondary schools who can therefore afford to visit for the two-weeks holidays every six weeks. Otherwise, all the young people are really back home only for the two months of summer holidays (December-January).

The emphasis and investment of people in Tasiriki towards their school and the commitment they have to provide their children with education is evidenced by the way the whole village is mobilised to ensure that the school runs properly despite dysfunctions.¹⁴⁸ Fundraising and thanksgiving ceremonies are regularly held in the school, and people

¹⁴⁸ During my stay (2011-2012), the school did not run properly for administrative reasons. There was a real concern shown by the parents and everything was done to solve the crisis. Some parents even thought about sending their children to Saletui Primary School (the other important school of the district located at the level of Tanovusvus, three hours walk further south).

contribute communal work for its maintenance, such as the building of new dormitories for the children who are resident during the week days, or with food when there is not enough money to buy rice and flour from town for the resident children. It is also evidenced at the household level where parents spend a lot of time working to pay for school fees and other school-related expenses.

Parents have an acute perception that for their children to be able to live in the current world, basic reading and counting are necessary skills. Reading is also considered to be very important so as to be able to read the Bible. It is indeed regarded as an important concern for the future of the church and the ability of the new generation to take over the work of the current generation of elders. It is the future emergence and form of the *vanua* which is at stake here.

Yet, children's schooling can also be a source of worry. In school, children learn a Western-oriented form of knowledge and receive a Christian education. Hence, all that time (five days a week) spent away from the parents and the gardens is not spent learning other skills, like weaving, carving, gardening, or listening to stories. Moreover, young people tend to contest their elders' knowledge and understandings which are not compatible with what they are told in school. Children say that they know better.

Mamara Primary School: “I am the light of the world” (John: 8 §12)



Photo 5.5 – The commemorative plaque and a view of Mamara Primary School

This quote from the Gospel of John (8§12), “I am the light of the world”, is inscribed on the commemorative plaque of the founding of the school in 1977.¹⁴⁹ The choice of the name and the quote from the New Testament are not arbitrary. I come back later on the “obsession” with light in Tasiriki, but as I mentioned above, school is highly regarded by most people in the Anrua district. Education is associated with growth that is the possibility to open roads and link the village to town and possibly “power”. Indeed, the possibility to access jobs in public institutions at the State or Provincial level is considered as an achievement. Any person who pursues higher education is highly regarded. When a child or a young adult is promising, people will pool their efforts to send the person to school and thus contribute collectively to this promotion. There are expectations from the people living in town and holding administrative jobs, such as buying trucks for the village or contribute to the road or school or dispensary, or other facilities... The absence of people holding such positions in a village is regarded as a kind of “impediment”, something I discuss in Chapter 7. Jolly (2001: 202) similarly notes that, “the national arena then is the realm of power and prestige to which men aspire.”

Thus the school has come to embody the republic of Vanuatu’s values – that of the Nation and Christianity. A day at school starts with the raising of the flag and the singing of the National Anthem, while starting and closing the class time requires singing church hymns or reciting a prayer. In school, there is no distinction between the church affiliations or village

¹⁴⁹ Mamara School has eight classes (primary and junior high levels). The first years classes are quite crowded (more than 20 students in average) and then the number of students decreases from year 6 to year 8 (around 15 students). There are children from Tasiriki, Pelmoli and other bush hamlets or coastal villages north of Tasiriki like Kerewae. In the school year 2010-2011, apart from two teachers from Tasiriki proper, teaching the youngest classes and not initially trained as teachers, and one teacher from Pelmoli, trained as a teacher, all the others were appointed by the government and coming from other islands or areas of Santo as was the Head Master. Teachers live outside of the village by the children’s dormitories. They are supplied for their food by the school kitchen which depends on the school garden cultivated and maintained by the children and a stock of rice and flour brought in from town once a month. Once a week, children cut wood to supply all of the teachers’ kitchens. Mamara School also has a library, the contribution of a volunteer from the Peace Corp. who stayed three years in Tasiriki and had managed to secure financial aid from the Australian Government – it is filled with donated books from Australia and the United States. Three of the school buildings are built in cement and have received some financial aid from the EU for renovation. Otherwise, the maintenance of the school is the regular work of parents and the job of children – daily cleaning and weekly weeding.

of origin except for the statistics on the walls in each classroom indicating the children's parents' names, their church affiliations and date of birth.

Of course, "*kastom*" is represented in the institution. It is mostly in school that children acquire the idea that they belong to a larger *vanua* and that people on other islands may do things differently. Yet, the institutional *kastom*, although represented in all its diversity in the textbooks, may have little in common with what people refer to as *kastom* at the local level, i.e. the actual practices that they regard as being the fundamental, if not existential, ways of their place. Yet, surely, the institutional vision of *kastom* conveyed through the school and the media do also influence the way *kastom* is now understood at the local level.¹⁵⁰

Between school and life in the village, children navigate between forms of knowledge and practices without effort. Work in the garden is always necessary; school is yet another possible road. There are quite a few men in Tasiriki now working in the administration and these men are regarded as Big Men. The connection people have to these Big Men is also a way to grow and attract wealth to the place.

More and more girls are sent to secondary school. They are usually much more serious than the boys and thus are more successful. Parents do not discriminate between boys and girls; they always support the child who may possibly make its way to a paid job. Yet, many children never manage to enter high school or higher education. Boys then join the village's youth and work on their parents' land until they marry and make a new kitchen while girls stay with their parents until they marry (if they do so).

¹⁵⁰ People spend a lot of time listening to the radio. See Bolton (2003:52,103), on the importance of the radio in the development of the national identity of Vanuatu and the propagation of a specific conception of *kastom*. Bolton (2003: 53) also notes that this activity used to be more a male activity. I think it is still so. At home, only Thomas, and then myself, listened to the radio. Women and children liked to go watch videos.

5.3.1.3 “*Ol woman oli konekt ol man*”: emplacement and connections through marriage

Marriage is the coming together of two places and the opening of new roads (see Bolton 1999: 49). As already mentioned marriage is the establishment of a new kitchen that is a connected emplacement. On the other hand, it is also the establishment of the Christian family through the sacrament of marriage. In the Presbyterian villages of South West Santo, marriages are occasions when one can witness the most elaborate form of *kastom* ceremonies. During these ceremonies, the important elements which are part of people's management and elicitation of relations are displayed for all to see and “eat”.

The description I give below of both the *wolwol* and the *blesin mared* allow me to introduce some key points in regard to the conception of kinship and place, the importance of food beyond nurture, the role of yam, pigs and the expectations that are brought into marriage; kinship, place and the church.

The *wolwol* always precedes the *blesin mared* and a *blesin mared* can even be celebrated much later after the *wolwol* has been completed. Taylor (2008: 124) notes that, in Pentecost, when the *blesin mared* is not performed on the same day as *kastom*, it sometimes serves to strengthen an existing marriage. However, usually, people tend to celebrate both at the same time over one or two days depending on the organisation and unexpected events.

The term *wolwol* is actually the same term used for any monetary transaction. Thomas Jimmy insisted on the fact that “*woman hemi man*” so they cannot be treated like objects and that even if the term is the same, the different contexts of buying a commodity and exchanging women are not identical. However, Jolly (1994: 137-138) remarks that, “by paying a woman in cash the transaction is rendered more akin to buying alienable commodities in the store, [...] this correspondence tends to diminish the claims of woman's natal kin and to de-emphasize the continuing character of debts of maternity.” In Tasiriki, except for some obligations upon seeing one's affinal kin and the rule of the MB over his ZC,

there is no evidence of a continual debt over maternity. The now universal practice of the *wolwol*, which really started, in Tasiriki, just a couple of generations ago, may have contributed to the lessening influence of affines. A similar note could be made about land. Land seems to be increasingly fixed within the *nasara*, thus the diminishing importance of marrying back into ones matriline.

The *wolwol* cannot be performed as long as the road is not cleared. That is, as long as there are unresolved offenses or acts perceived as such by the two households. This might be the case when a young woman has been “pulled” by a young man not respecting the procedures which still require that the young people show respect to their parents and kin by not engaging in an open relation without their consent. When the offense is considered important by one of the household, most often on the girl’s side, compensation is asked from the other party. This will “clear”, “straighten” the road and bring *tamata* (peace) between the two sides.¹⁵¹ The fines can be a consequential amount of money thus putting pressure on the household and the group of kin concerned. Once fines have been paid, the offenses are “buried”; they cannot be brought again as subjects of dissension or complaints if later conflicts should arise between the two sides.

When the date for the *wolwol* has been set, then the young man’s kin start to gather all that is needed to pay for the bride – pigs, yam and money. They plant a taro garden and reserve a bullock available to be killed to contribute to the bride’s wealth. On the day of the *wolwol*, the first part of the day is characterized by a flow of people coming from near and far, bringing taro and all sorts of presents for the new couple, sometimes money as well. Each person comes with two bundles of taro, one for each side, the groom side and the bride

¹⁵¹ If a household asks for the payment of a fine, the amount demanded is usually a function of the seriousness of the offense. If for example a young man has pulled a young woman but she hasn’t left the parental house to live with him, the family may agree for the *wolwol* without prior payment of a fine.

side.¹⁵² The taro bundles are first distributed between three heaps; the bride's side, the groom's side and the "public" heap that will be cooked for the communal feast.



Photo 5.6 – Bubu Ambuluran going to a *wolwol* in Pelmoli

If the bride and the groom had been living together before the *wolwol* at least one pig is killed to "*klin ol doti*" that is to clear all the "unclean" acts, such as having sex and children prior being married. These pigs are eaten during the public feast except by the bride's brothers.

Once the pigs have been killed, the bride comes out of her kin's kitchen where she had stayed all that time. The groom's side brings a live pig this time, usually with grown tusks. The pig is attached to a rope held by the groom's father, the elder brother or the MB. The pig is handed to the bride and then passed to her MB. With the pig at the other end of the rope there is a yam and money which are also part of the bride's wealth.

¹⁵² Taro must have had a symbolic meaning in regards to marriage. Indeed, on these occasions, the bundles are tied in a specific way and whole – the leaves cannot be cut. Jolly notes that, "the taro tied up as enormous bundles represent the relations that each man has to his wife's agnates (1994: 168)."



Photo 5.7 – Wolwol in Lovenue – the pig and the yam for the exchange with the bride

Before the wolwol, speeches are given by the kin on the groom's side and after the wolwol the speeches are given by the bride's side. These speeches usually tend to bring to the fore elements of the respective life of the two spouses, some elements about the families involved, clarifying and summing up the current situation in regards to kin, exposing explicitly the current configuration in which the spouses take part. Thus, one can say that the pigs and the speeches clear and open the way so to speak.

The other important aspect of the wolwol is the moving around of food in the form of taro, bullock and the pigs that have been killed. The heaps are redistributed proportionally between all the households who contributed to the ceremony. In a way, people leave almost with the same amount of food they came with, while the heap intended for the place where the ceremony takes place, serves as the food for the public feast. In this regard, the moving around of food can be seen as a generalised act of nurture. People eat each other's food, ingesting the new configuration of relations established by the wolwol.



Photo 5.8 – *Wolwol* in Pelmoli – redistribution of the taro to the participants from the different villages

When all kinship relations have been clarified, the *blesin mared* (the Christian ceremony) can take place. The groom and the bride change into a suit and a white dress respectively and walk to the church under an arch of young palm tree leaves, their cheeks are painted white, the bride has a crown of flowers on the head and the groom two circles of flowers crossing on his chest and back. There is usually quite a long procession from the bride's place to the church with the string bands playing. The string bands sing songs composed for the occasion which usually speak of the event of the day or the story of the married couple.



Photo 5.9 – *Blesin mared* of Jaklyn and Ae Nalin in Tasiriki – walking to the church, the string band players are dressed in purple

The service finished, the bride and groom and their family stand outside the church. All the guests who attended the service shake hands with them and the female relatives of the bride tend to cry as they shake her hand. It may be noted that at all times during marriage ceremonies, the bride and the groom never smile nor show a happy face and when comes the time of shaking hands in the *nakamal* before the bride goes to her husband's house, the bride will keep crying and expressing grief at definitively leaving the side of her family. The groom's relatives dance and laugh louder and louder, "so that she does not drown the house". I have asked why they were not smiling and happy, I got the answer that there was indeed nothing to rejoice about getting married (see also Rio 2007: 151).

The *blesin mared* also involves a sharing of food through a ritual called "cutting the cake". This ritual is quite important. During the whole *kastom* ceremony, the bride and the groom remain in a "passive state", i.e. everything seems to happen outside of them or through them. However, for the cutting of the cake, they perform the act. This looks similar, in a way, to what happened during the *roto umina*. First the ceremony seems to be in the hand of the adults thus registering upstream relations between the paternal and maternal kin so to speak, while the gift exchange between the boys and their uncles spoke of downstream relations. Here, the spouses cut the cake together and share it among the people who have attended. The accompanying discourse is always centred on the fact that anyone eating a piece of this cake will, in the future, never be strangers in the newly-weds house. Although, the people attending are exactly the same as the ones attending the *wolwol*, in this case, one can witness the first act of giving from the new kitchen, opening their own roads as it were.



Photo 5.10 – *Blesin mared* in Pelmoli – cutting the cake ceremony

After the *blesin mared*, the second part of the *kastom* ceremony is performed starting with the feast in the *nakamal*. As Jolly (1994: 117) notes, women, upon marrying, “walk”; they have to cover the distance between their place of origin to their husband’s place, connecting the two places. Indeed, after the feast, the bride goes back to her parents’ house and from there leave in a procession led by the string band and followed by her kin carrying all the bride-wealth. The first destination is the *nakamal* for the “shaking hands” ritual and then she is taken to her husband’s place.



Photo 5.11 – *Wolwol* in Pelmoli – Procession to the *nakamal* for the ceremony of “shaking hands”

The grooms' relatives are also part of the dancing procession. Once in the *nakamal*, she meets her husband and they sit together. This part of the ceremony is called "shaking hands". People enter in file from one door of the *nakamal* and pass by the married couple with whom they shake hands (like when coming out of the church), then put small presents such as soap and plates or small dishes in front of or besides the couple. During the whole time the string band plays inside the *nakamal* and the husbands' relatives dance and happy shouting covers the cries of the bride's relatives.

When this is over, all the things are carried out of the *nakamal* and again a procession led by the string band brings the bride to the house of her husband. After the bride is finally settled at her husband's place, everyone just disperses, taking with them the taro and meat distributed after the *wolwol*.

From then on, there is a new kitchen. The kitchen is the end point and the beginning of a new cycle. All the food shared during the wedding, the wealth exchanged, like the bride and the groom are all the produce of kin's work. The kitchen objectifies the capacity of a place to produce persons who will further the growth of that place as well as its capacity to make connections, to keep the roads open.

***"Naoia i gat wan kitshin long saot west Santo"*¹⁵³**

Indeed, the kitchen is a node. I have described extensively in the previous chapter the importance of the kitchen as place of production but also as place of nurture. The marriage ceremony allows two persons to shift from the position of being nurtured to a position of nurturing. For a person it is shifting from undifferentiated siblingship to differentiated siblingship and the responsibilities towards kin which accompany such a shift. The kitchen is also a node in that it brings together two *nasara* or places. For the paternal place, this means

¹⁵³ "Now there is a kitchen in South West Santo", this was part of the speech given by the side of the bride during the *wolwol* in Lovenue, thus signalling that by marrying the girl (from south Malakula), they had now a connection with South West Santo.

the opening of a road or the maintenance of the road that had been opened in a precedent union. This is similarly noted by Taylor (2008: 125) for North Pentecost, where, “households are [...] pivotal to Sia Raga understandings of relationships between people across space particularly with regard to marriage and to the interconnected network of roads. [...] Since the most frequent purpose for building a new house is to accommodate the arrival of a bride from another *vanua*, *imwa* (the house) also reveal links between *vanua*.” Rodman (1985:56) had indeed long observed that, “houses serve as symbols of kinship that articulate land and people and that express a link between matrilineal and patri-filial groups.”

The role of women as opening roads and connecting is valued, it is said to bring peace. Besides, the woman brings a different *kastom* and thus brings change. In Tasiriki, women say that they are bringing back the spirit of *kastom* (see Chapter 7).¹⁵⁴ The woman is also likened to a seed which grows in a place foreign to her kin. Thus, when the pastor’s daughter married the young boy from the hamlet of Lovenue it was said that, with her, the seed of the Good News was further likely to be well implanted and grow in the district. While the pastor and his wife were leaving for another place, by marrying their daughter, the heir of a family who had always been a vector of the Gospel, it is their work which was further taking root, ensuring that the Gospel would continue to grow there. It is interesting to note that this acquaintance with the Gospel was associated to high level of education and good jobs which characterized the pastor’s wife’s kin.¹⁵⁵ These are all attributes that are now highly valued in Tasiriki as another form of growth.

A woman is a place implanted and growing in another place. The exchange of women is still very much seen as a pacifying act and the possibility of growth renewed. It is very

¹⁵⁴ “*Ol mama from difren vilej oli stap pulum spirit blong kastom i kam bak.*” (Louise, Tasiriki, 24/01/2012)

¹⁵⁵ The pastor’s daughter was in fact adopted. She was the pastor’s wife’s brother’s daughter but living with the pastor and his wife and thus was considered as their daughter. The pastor’s wife family has been long involved with the Presbyterian Church. The ancestors went to Queensland and they returned to Vanuatu propagating the Good News. They are from the South of Malakula. Many of the pastor’s wife relatives are well-educated and have good jobs and this was emphasized during the speeches.

much expected that a woman from the boy's place will at some point be married to a boy of the girl's place. For the time being, the roads thus opened imply an obligation of mutual assistance. The implantation of a kitchen in the paternal core is indeed a new unit but with the relations already implied within (see also Eriksen 2008: 23).

Marriage also effects transformations in kin relations. The woman by entering a new *nasara* not only brings the possibility of new life by bearing children but also contributes with her work to her husband's place.¹⁵⁶ The woman also acquires a status of spouse which changes her relations to her own place; that is her kin and especially her brother. While brothers and sisters remain close to each other, the marriage "genders" them and they now need to respect a distance between them called *rispek* (respect). Or conversely, the obligation for respect establishes the distance. In any case, the relation moves, in their bodily positioning, from a close familiarity to a distant one; they cannot touch, be enclosed in the same space and usually they speak at a good distance from one another.

Moreover, the brother acquires an authority upon his sister; his sister must listen to him; he has the final word. As they enter into fatherhood and motherhood, the brother and sister's relation is actually crystallised around the sister's children over whom the brother has an authority. In case the sister gets divorced or bears a child without being married, her brother has a "right" over her children. The MB is the ultimate reference for them in respect to what they can do or cannot do. Yet, as I have mentioned earlier, a sister also acquires possible "rights" over her brother's daughters (see Chapter 4).

Marriage also sets the relations with affines with whom again a distance must be kept actually denoting the particular attention that must be maintained as well as obligations one has towards them. This is expressed and manifested in different ways; the exclusive use of kin terms when addressing them, no joking relationships and the necessity to share half of your

¹⁵⁶ See also Bolton (2003: 103). She notes that, "When a woman bears children she strengthens and reinforces her connection to her new place."

food with them when visiting. When they are older, they must be taken care of and given food to eat. Thus while the woman brings “the gift of life” (Rio 2007: 220) to her husband’s *nasara*, there is an obligation of nurture towards the maternal side, i.e. the children and the woman’s brothers and fathers.

The closer one is to another person, the more respect is required on one’s part, that is the closer one stands to another person, the more respectful deportment is necessary so that relations are well contained. This last point is very important and the idea of containment and boundaries seem to be crucial in managing people’s relations. This I explore in more detail in Chapter 7.

5.3.1.4 Thanksgiving ceremonies: staging kinship in the church

Van Heekeren, referring to Godelier, argues that in Melanesia there is a “compelling imperative” whereby “no member of these societies if they wish to go on existing can decide to cease giving and receiving”, henceforth Christian existence must also be underpinned by this imperative (2010: 174).’

The ceremonies just described are all ceremonies tied to events of a person’s lifetime and intercept the lives of other kin, thereby transforming the relations people have with each other each time one of such events happens. Thanksgiving ceremonies are of another order, they are recurrent and yearly. There are two kinds of thanksgiving ceremonies. The monthly ones dedicated to God as creator and provider, which I describe in the chapter I devote to the growing of the church (Chapter 6), and the ones which are yearly and calendar-dependent such as the ones organized for Mother’s, Father’s, and Children’s day and directed towards a specific “kin category”.

During these ceremonies which are staged in the church, relations are not necessarily transformed rather they inscribe the participants, the ones who are thanked and the ones who

thank, in specific kin roles, that of fathers, “*ol papa*”, mothers, “*ol mama*”, or children, “*ol pikinini*”. It should be noted that in case of the Mother’s or Father’s day, children as much as the respective spouse offer gifts. On these occasions, what is recognized is the other’s “work” as Mother or Father. These ceremonies are held in the church and gift giving is thus publicly witnessed, as are the feelings which, in such occasions, are overtly expressed towards one’s kin; that of gratitude, guilt, sorrow etc... These ceremonies are indeed highly emotional and can be quite lengthy as people take the time to cry in each other’s arms.

The thanksgiving ceremony proper will be held during the church service or at the end. The targeted persons will be lined up and relatives who are offering them gift(s) stand in a line facing them. When announced, all the gift givers step forth and give their gifts; usually someone will spray some perfume and apply some baby powder to their back. On these occasions, the role and duties of the ‘categorical person’ within one’s family and as a Christian will be re-emphasized.

The presents usually given are goods bought from the stores, mostly plates and calicos. No garden produce or animals are involved in these ceremonies, and this makes a big difference from the *kastom* ceremonies where these latter are central. While in these latter ceremonies months of work are necessary to grow and mobilize the necessary food and wealth, in the thanksgiving ceremonies the person does not depend on kin to buy the gift. The gesture is one’s own and engages only oneself.

The Mother’s Day which was celebrated in Pelmoli on the 8th of May and in which I took part because Kiki had decided to visit her kin that day, is exemplary of such ceremonies. Because it was Mother’s Day all the women, qualified as “*ol mama*”, were at the centre of the event. Before entering the church, they were put in a row and the children put *salusalu* around their neck with the usual baby powder and perfume. The atmosphere was very joyous. One of my classificatory brothers was orchestrating the whole proceedings but the women were in

charge of the service that day, led by the pastor's wife. The same brother then stood up and made a speech addressed to all the women in the assembly to thank them for their work and service as mothers. Then the thanksgiving ceremony proper started with women being called to stand up in a line in front of the congregation, men and women, and then young children, older sons and husbands came to give presents to them.



Photo 5.12 – Mother's Day in Pelmoli (08/05/2011) – *ol mama* after the church service

As mentioned above, and as is the case in any ceremonies of gift giving held in the church, the whole ceremony was very emotional, people cried in each other arms for a long time. At the end, women went out first, and stood in a row at the entrance of the church, the men then came out and shook hands with all the standing women. As it is usual after a ceremony in the church, cookies and drinks were distributed. The String Band played and women danced. People lingered for a while and then went home to eat the Sunday lunch.

The gift, in that case, as a “metaphor of the act of constitution” (Strathern 1988: 203), “works as the cause of the relation and its effect (Strathern 1988: 221).” The act of giving or not giving brings the relation into a particular form or acts on it (mending, reaffirming, recognizing or not recognizing, severing and so forth), and yet the gift is given to a specific person because of the relation. The relation is thus the cause of the gift and the anticipated

outcome of the act of giving (see Strathern 1988). How do thanksgiving ceremonies differ from what people tag “*kastom seremoni*” and how is this related to the idea of growth?

The configurations of thanksgivings ceremonies are quite different from the ceremonies where what is at stake is the positioning of the child vis-à-vis his/her paternal and maternal kin, where gifts point in specific directions. In the case of the *roto umina*, described above, the gifts pointed from the boys (maternal side) to their uncles (paternal side) or any of the other persons to whom gifts were given as a gesture of “thankfulness”.

In the thanksgiving ceremonies, although it is held in public and thus involves a collective demonstration, there is no collective mobilization of wealth to “return a gift” or proceed to an exchange. The act of “gift giving” is the recognition of a singular relation, from one person to another. That the act of giving mends, maintains, or reinforces the relation, it does not “transform” it. It is the recognition of that particular relation which is already “there” so to speak.

Hence the refusal to go stand up in the line to receive a gift may be traced to the fact that one did not give a gift when the other side of the relation had to be recognized. People still demand that the person go stand in the line “forcing” the gift on that person therefore maybe impressing on that person her role or soothing a relation which has not be maintained as expected.

The context in thanksgiving ceremonies is the “Christian family” so to speak, and the recognition of the Mothers by the Fathers and vice-versa do not necessarily bring in its wake the whole configuration of agnatic and affinal relations, though it may. Indeed, the event usually concerns only people from the place, irrespective of which *nasara* they belong to. It is usually part of the Sunday church service, therefore only agnates are usually present. Thanksgiving ceremonies involving kin re-enact the relations embodied in the house as

conceived by the church paralleling the thanksgiving ceremonies performed towards the church, their thankfulness as children of God (see Chapter 6).

5.3.1.5 Death: between remembering and forgetting and the possibility of renewal

The occurrence of death is always a special moment. One can say that life comes to a standstill. There is no work, people of the place are contained within the village, and other people flow in crying. Death is a time of commensality. It is punctuated by two important collective feasts, on the 5th and 10th day, but in fact people pool and share food during the whole mourning period eating together every day at the house of the dead person. People take turns to killing bullocks. It is a time where people are as one and act as one (see Chapter 7). The churches also come as one, taking turns to perform prayer sessions in the evening. Even the Sunday service is sometimes held at the house of the dead person.

Before the mission, people used to be buried in the kitchen but they are now buried on the land of their *nasara* in the bush. When the dead were buried in the kitchen, it would not take long for the people to move on, leaving behind the dead corpse and the kitchen to decay. Soon, the vegetation took over leaving no trace of the dead except for the people who remembered the former houses emplacements. With time, the dead were anywhere and thus possibly everywhere. Nowadays, people are buried in graves which are usually fenced and sometimes covered with cement, in a way localising, emplacing, and circumscribing the dead.

The dead are thus strangely kept in a paradoxical position, between forgetting and remembering, or rather between identities, as undifferentiated ancestors and as individuals. This is most pregnant in the way the 10th day feast ending the mourning of Thomas's FZ was held. This was pointed to me by Thomas's father who told me to be aware of the fact that nowadays *kastom* was not yesterday's, so I had to be careful when documenting it. He indeed complained that the ritual looked more like *wan lafet* (a party) than a 10th day feast when it is

time to forget the dead completely. While before the feast discourses were pronounced to thank the dead person for what she had done, Bubu Jimmy said that these words usually belonged to the 5th day feast when the dead person pays her last visit to the family. The 10th day, conversely, is held to accompany the dismembering of the dead person to remove her from the memory of the living.

The public feast on this occasion used to be very simple. Food was laid down on *viaro* leaves, anyone who wanted to could come, and people ate and then left without a word. The leftovers were left for the dogs and the *viaro* leaves were disposed of only the next day so that the spirits still lingering in the bush would not be able to eat the leftovers. Sharing the same food with the spirits indeed would enact a kind of commensality with the dead thus risking making people sick, a blurring of boundaries endangering the community of the living.

The current forms of the burial and the change in the 10th day feast all indicate a change in the way the dead are remembered. People remain inscribed in place in a different manner that they used to be. Maybe this is a correlate to the more rigid and fixed relationship to land.

After the death of a man, at the level of the *nasara*, it is from the head of yam, to the next generation's head of yam that the responsibility of managing and sharing land is given.¹⁵⁷ Because of the increase in land disputes and court cases around land use, people tend to write down their will and this can be only contested in court. This practice can also be seen as a new road taken by the people in Tasiriki, the road of law. As Thomas puts it: "*Law i gat plente rus blong hem, taem yu pulum ol rus blong hem, yu spendem bigfala mane blong karem bigfala mane*" (the law has many roots, when you pull out all its roots, you spend a lot of money to get a lot of money).

¹⁵⁷ The head of yam is always the eldest brother. If one of the brothers dies, then the second takes the position of head of yam and so on. When the last brother of that generation dies, then it is the new yam who takes its turn, the eldest son of the siblings.

The current practices around death seem to contrast sharply with earlier ones where people and gardens followed very similar cycles of life and decay and renewal. This poses questions about the expression of renewal nowadays. As I shall develop in the next chapter, renewal is a very important theme in people's life. While the yam analogy is still very strong in people's understanding of kinship and its cyclic periodicity, renewal also finds a strong expression within the church where the yearly rhythms of openings and closings of church activities, New Year and the Christian liturgical cycle constitute important moments in people's life and sociality. The thanksgiving ceremonies such as the one described above, participate very much in these cycles whereby relationships are constantly re-enacted and renewed.

In the light of what has been discussed in this chapter, considering some of the shifts observed in the conception of kinship may ask the question of the possible tension(s) that could emerge between the *kastom* and Christian conceptions of kinship just described. One conception is intrinsic to the system based on matriline and one's belonging to a *nasara*, and as such, is inscribed within a very broad network of relations, constantly reconfigured by the doing and undoing of relations and strongly tied to the land. This conception is constitutive of the *vanua* as it emerges as the expression of a specific configuration of these relations with their many variables implied. The other is the Christian conception of kinship. As I have already noted, this latter conception, although also very much constitutive of the *vanua* in its Christian expression, tends to inscribe people within specific and circumscribed roles at the "house" level. As such, it is less concerned with the broad network of relations, but rather acts on impressing specific roles upon people. Hence, while the first is rooted and connected to the land, the second is tied to the "house", not only as productive unit but also as a place to foster faith.

There, however, one must be cautious. Indeed, for example, change in church affiliations often happens along kinship lines and the establishment of a new settlement around a new church does imply claims over land and, as such, can reconfigure kinship relations in important ways. Therefore, it is impossible not to affirm that these two conceptions are potentially in tension as well as a source of conflicting tensions, especially when the church has become such a strong locus of power. Nonetheless, to fully understand the relations between these two poles of kinship would require further research.

For now, it can be argued though that this dual conception of kinship appears very much to be working in a complementary manner. In fact, the Christian conception of kinship, by operating at the level of the “house”, does contain its own limits in being able to articulate and organise the broader network of relations, therefore it still strongly relies upon the pre-Christian conception of kinship as its base. This does not mean that the former does not affect and transform the latter and vice-versa. The mutual influence these two conceptions of kinship have on each other becomes quite obvious when it comes to aspects of morality implied in the management of gender relations so as to contain their respective power. In this regard, the Christian conception of kinship actually may have had a significant influence upon people’s perception of these relations and, thus, subsequently, possibly promoting a much more patriarchal-oriented model of control than it may have been the case in a pre-, or early-, Christian context (see also Kolshus (1999: 149-152) for a similar phenomenon on Mota).

I further address and develop in details these aspects of morality and gender relations in the last chapter of this work when I discuss issues around the disruption of relations and the subsequent threat of “non-growth” these may imply, thereby allowing me to re-inscribe the discussion within the broader issue of growth.

CHAPTER 6 – GROWING AND MAKING THE CHURCH



Photo 6.1 – Going to the church service with taro offerings for thanksgiving (1)

6.1 Introduction

The church has its own rhythm and cycles, not least the liturgical one. After daily work, church related rhythms are the most prevalent in people's lives. On one hand, there is the weekly Sabbath on Sundays where most of the day is devoted to the church, starting with the morning service followed by, for men, the 3 pm church service and meetings, and for women their "PWMU cell group" meetings to discuss the work to come.

Indeed, women follow their own weekly, monthly, and yearly rhythm and cycles through the work devoted to their organisation, the PWMU, the Presbyterian Women Mission Union. Each year, women work for a period of eight months for the church, usually opening the new session by mid-February and closing it by mid-October. This period is attuned to children's school rhythms while also, in a way, complementing the yam's cycle. Indeed, the yam garden necessitates work from the time it is planted to the time of harvest, and it is

noticeable that during these months that women's communal work slows down (from September onwards) or stops.

The three months or so during which women do not work for the church are actually very busy months for different reasons. Not only is there work to be done in the newly planted yam garden but kinship-based communal work on plantations becomes very intensive so as to "harvest" money for Christmas.¹⁵⁸ After the period of rest characteristic of Christmas and New Year, work on plantations, unless the weather prevents it, becomes intensive again so as to pay the coming school fees, especially for secondary education.¹⁵⁹

Besides these, there is the monthly and yearly rhythm of thanksgiving ceremonies which seem to crystallize important aspects of people's life, namely their relation to God and to the land that sustains their livelihood, and their obligations as Christians and kin. In the previous chapter, I considered the thanksgiving ceremonies directed towards kin. I suggested that these ceremonies allow a performance of kinship in the church. Yet, the idea of kinship which is promoted refers to the Christian ideal of kinship based on the father, the mother and the children. Gift giving mobilizes only specific persons towards specific others who have been objectified for the ceremony into a specific "kin" role. No transformation of relations are involved, rather it is a re-enactment of the relation, as it were. Yet, these ceremonies also function as a recurrent recognition of the work of the person towards one's kin, in particular as a father or a mother.

Here, I am concerned mostly with the ceremonies of thanksgiving that are directed towards God and the church. These are usually held monthly and often involve the joint participation of Tasiriki and Pelmoli, either in Tasiriki or in Pelmoli. On these days, people usually bring garden produce or food to church. If it is a joint thanksgiving, then people from

¹⁵⁸ The amount of money donated to the church at Christmas and New Year is substantial. Whereas usually people only donate coins, during these celebrations, they donate banknotes.

¹⁵⁹ From December onward, the cyclonic period also intensifies, sometimes preventing access to gardens and plantations for a couple of weeks or more at a time.

one village make their way to the other village with their produce. The occasional joint aspect of these ceremonies is interesting because it brings to the fore not only the way the church provides a context of identification which goes beyond the village but also how it mobilizes kinship ties in a different manner than that of the other ceremonies. It might be said that what is at stake is similar in the fact that it fosters kin relations in a specific form, that of the church and the kinship model it promotes. In this model the relations in the house should be analogous to that of the church. However, these are also the very principles upon which kinship is lived in Tasiriki namely the maternal line and the paternal emplacement. I discuss this aspect in the last section of the chapter. It appears that both aspects are fundamental to Tasiriki's sociality, the latter being the very root of the former.

To capture this I introduce the image of the banyan tree, which I contend, can serve very effectively as a metaphor to express the constituting processes of Tasiriki's sociality. One can see the kinship system as being the root system anchored in the soil while the church and its organizational ideals can be seen as the crown. There is a constant coming and going between the two poles of the tree, while understanding that a banyan can only grow and support itself by sending back from its crown adventitious roots which find their way in the soil to establish new roots in a more or less close vicinity to the initial "trunk". I come back extensively to the potent metaphor of the banyan tree in the conclusion of this work.

The coming of the church in Tasiriki, as I argued in Chapter 4, has been associated with money. Recall the exchange between the Rev. Bowie and Lulu Varkiki before the Rev. sends Lulu to Tasiriki. The fact that Lulu chose the money reassures the Rev. Bowie as to Lulu's mind-set and commitment towards the church. And indeed, commitment to the church, though it cannot in any case be reduced to the sole "harvesting" of money, has been key to the growth of the church since the foundation of the mission ground (see Chapter 3).

The church is fed with money yet the attitude of people towards money is ambivalent. This ambivalent status of money is cast as ‘evil’ by the church, in that one’s desire for money can contribute to people turning away from their Christian (and kin) obligations or may lead a person to engage in actions which jeopardize the future of the community or the next generation. Nonetheless, as Thomas put it, “money is the root of all collective institutions,” i.e. the church, the school, the dispensary and all the church satellites organizations, like that of the women, youth and so forth. This ambivalence is partly solved by ‘forcing’ the circulation of money within the community before it takes its way to the church. However, there is much more circulating here than money alone in all the “transactions” going on around the church activities. As the budgets are redistributed over smaller groups, it is reciprocity and exchanges that are taking place so that each group is able to complete its own budget. Obligations and commitments required by the church and expressed through various church activities thus seem to be one important aspect in organizing people’s lives and surely account for most “social activities”.

I will discuss the eschatological stances of the church cycles which, in great measure, parallel or accompany the other cycles of life discussed previously. While Christmas and Easter ceremonies are important, it is interesting to note that the New Year celebrations are also entirely framed within the church. There is a real sense that people understand the change of year as a rupture, or, at least, the possibility of a rupture with the previous years and the “bad” habits, *rabis fasin*, accumulated over the year, if not the years and people are constantly summoned to be ready and prepared for the coming of the Kingdom of God. However, it is also regarded as the possibility of a renewal, the possibility to grow out of childhood and take the road out of slavery. This I discuss in the last part of this chapter.

I start the chapter with what is at the root of the church’s growth, women’s work. Women’s work makes apparent an interesting organisation where money is made to circulate

in a productive manner. Moreover, the act of work itself, which then appears in the form of money, is valued. Some women are much more involved in the church than others and it is often the same group of women that tend to show up for the church work on plantations, especially when the work involved all women. To remedy to the fact that some women do not show up when the whole group is mobilised, an emphasis is now put on the “PWMU cell group” to meet its own budget, somehow forcing a greater participation. Work, as much as the produce of work, is thought to contribute to the growth of the church because it is not only the “*wok blong God*” (the work for God) but also a vector for the “*tok blong God*” (God’s Word).

6.2 “*Wok blong God*”: feeding and nurturing the church with money

People in Tasiriki say that people may change their church affiliation to escape the many commitments that belonging to the Presbyterian Church entail. Yet, as they then add, whatever church you belong to, there are commitments, one cannot escape commitments.

6.2.1 PWMU and women’s work

The Presbyterian Woman Mission Union was founded in 1945 by a ni-Vanuatu woman from the island of Efate. She travelled around the archipelago to establish and organize groups of women in all the Presbyterian Mission villages. The PWMU organizes women’s work/mission and study activities within the context of the Presbyterian Church.

The women who take part in the PWMU are usually categorized as *mama*, they are usually “mothers” but not necessarily married. Unmarried women in Tasiriki are not rare. Many of my aunts had children but never married. Some live with a man without marrying, others have chosen not to marry. (Women who do not marry and who do not have a partner often live with their parents.)

The PWMU thus brings “*ol mama*” together at the village and district level. Women manage their agenda, budget, activities and although under the supervision of an elder, the time for PWMU work, meetings, study etc...is theirs. For women, it is the time they spend and organise together.

At the district level (here the Anrua district), the women members of the PWMU are organised within a hierarchical structure which comprises three levels. The district level is composed of all the women members of the PWMU from the four villages aforementioned. Women come together at the district level for monthly meetings called *kombaen*, i.e. combined fellowship. At the district level, the women are under the supervision of the pastor’s wife. She is the link to the Presbyterian women’s provincial and national level. At the district level, there is a president, a vice-president, a secretary and a treasurer. These women are chosen for two years and then they rotate by village thus there is a complete rotation of the four villages every eight years. The *kombaen* office manages the district budget and sets the agenda of all the activities for the whole year.

Women’s *kombaen* meetings are really “all women’s day”. The women arrive in the village where the meeting is held. Usually, it starts with a service in the village church unless the meeting is held within the schools (Mamara or Saletui). Usually, there are only women in the church except for a handful of men, (elders or musicians, who assist but do not participate unless music is played!). The women who are in charge of the service are usually the women in charge of the two-year *kombaen* office. The pastor’s wife is always present and usually gives the sermon. After the church service, women usually have lunch together in the *nakamal*. When I arrived, the rule was that the women of the village who hosted the meeting prepared food for everybody. Before the 2011 session was closed, it was announced by elders that a decision had been taken that the women from the different village would have to bring their own share of food to the meeting or pay the women of the hosting village. Women were

quite outraged by this decision but it was implemented right away at the District Closing of the PWMU session. Women had to take food with them all the way to Tanovusvusi and cook upon arriving with the local women before the church service. Each woman brought some taro and 500 vatu for participation.

Once the lunch eaten the women usually do their “visits”, i.e. a specific action targeted towards widows, the sick or elderly people. It could also be a session of Bible study or the organization of a fundraising and then the meeting to discuss all possible issues and fix the next agenda. Women voice their discontent towards other’s women work or even contest what is asked from them by the pastor’s wife. Then, before night women make their way home.

The load of work and responsibility for the women in charge is quite heavy and meetings are far from being peaceful gatherings. Usually heated debates precede decisions and women can be harsh towards each other when they consider that the work is not done properly. They also protest quite vehemently when a lot of contribution is asked from them because it adds to the load of work that they have to do at the household level. Attendance at the *kombaen* meetings proper was not very high during my stay, especially from the Tasiriki women, usually a handful (at most). I will return to *kombaen* attendance below and the criticisms addressed by the elders regarding this state of affairs along with the women’s reasons and reactions to this “disaffection”. This point is tied to church commitments which are important financially, time, and work-wise.

In 2011, there were around forty women in Tasiriki who regularly took part in the organisation which meant that more than a half of the Presbyterian women fell within the “*mama*” category. Among them, eight were considered to be *olfala* (old) so they could not really participate in the hard work involved on plantations but could still be involved with activities which require less work such as the organisation of fundraising. In the village, there are two levels of organization. The smallest unit is the “PWMU cell group” which is usually

composed of less than ten women. During my stay, there were five of these groups in the village under the supervision of five different elders.

In Kiki's group in which I took part, there were six women – M, FyBW, FyBWZ, one of FFBD, FeBW, and FFBSW.¹⁶⁰ The composition of the "PWMU cell group" does not follow a specific kin configuration but yet roughly approximated the patterns of settlement around the village and the kinship proximity to the elder responsible for the group. At the village level, the groups convene once a year to choose an administrative office composed of one president, one treasurer and one secretary. There is also a committee of two or three women depending on the number of volunteers.

Friday is usually the day when women join and work together for the PWMU village-level budget while Wednesday may be the day for work at the cell's group level. It was not systematic and there were some periods in the year when women's work was more intensive than others. By the end of August, when it was time to prepare the new yam garden, work decreased quite dramatically and attendance became very low. In normal times, a third of women would show up. Although there might be a rotation, it was often the same women who were involved in the work.

There is a budget for each "PWMU cell group" and women are left free to find and organize their own work and activities to fulfil the target budget. The money collected is given to the church. Their agenda and 'strategy' may not necessarily need the final approval of the elder responsible of the group. The budget at the "cell group" level is a subdivision of the main budget set for the village at the district level, itself a subdivision of the *kombaen* budget. Men are associated to some of the PWMU activities especially for fundraising activities, but rarely in the work. Yet it is the men who commission women's work on plantations and pay them. The village budget is subdivided equally between all the "PWMU

¹⁶⁰ In this list "Ego" refers to me.

cell groups” of the village. Women can decide to gather more money than the budget to be given to the church in order to finance other types of activities or buy things for themselves like plates, cups and spoons to be used when they meet and eat together.

Women engage in very diverse activities so as to collect enough money for the church budget. The most regular activity is the weekly group work on plantations paid by a person in the village or by one of the members of the “cell group”. For example, Thomas may pay 1500 vatu to his own group or to the village group for a day of work on his plantation.

The group of women will do a day’s work, and the money will go to fulfil the budget. This remunerated communal work helps the person who paid for it in achieving a quite heavy and extensive work which would have required several days if done by the family unit. As mentioned earlier, since many women have started to not show up, work at the village level had become increasingly rare and during my stay much of the work and strategies were established at the level of the “cell group”.

There is definitely a gender dimension to the church activities. Women do much of the physical weekly work while men are involved in the running of the institution. This does not mean that men’s physical work is not mobilized for the church but it is much more occasional and has to do with the maintenance of the church building. For plantation work, I mentioned in Chapter 4 that some activities are gendered when both men and women are involved in the same work. This gendered aspect of work is not systematic at all when work is done at the family level, but is quite visible when the work is done collectively. Hence, when working on plantations for the church budget, the responsibility of women is to clear and clean the plantation and heap and split the coconuts while men are the ones who prise out the flesh from the shells and carry the bags to the furnace. If working on *kava*, men uproot, women peel and clean.

Women have to develop and actually develop all sorts of ideas and to make the money they earn working on plantations more fruitful. For example, they buy cloth to sew dresses while others make mats or other objects. In the end, women buy these from each other. During my stay, they had the idea of making uniforms for each group to wear for their meetings. After the cloth was bought, Vevojivoro Tosusu did most of the sewing and the women all bought their dresses back. The money went to the basket. In 2011, one of the groups organized a local market. Other sources of income are the fundraising events to which men usually contribute. They are usually in charge of the meat. Fundraising is usually organized at the “cell group” level but mobilizes the whole village as purchasers, contributors, and consumers.



Photo 6.2 – Vevojivoro Tosusu (left) and VeKarae Kiki (right) sewing dresses

Women also organize events they call “mate to meet”.¹⁶¹ Each woman cooks a dish and brings it to one of the women’s house to be shared with the others, a kind of potluck. However, for that occasion, a monetary contribution has been set and the women come with their dish and some money for their budget. They then spend the evening together. Women will take turn to host these meals.

¹⁶¹ See also Eriksen (2010:101). The author mentions that this practice of “mate to meet” comes from an Australian fund-raising concept.

All these activities and the strategies to fulfil one's budget are discussed regularly during "cell group" meetings often held on Sunday afternoons. If a woman has a specific talent, like sewing, she may contribute to the "cell group" by this activity thus relieving her of work on plantations. Women also have income from the Project or Guest House. There is a Guest house manager and part of the money earned goes into the budget for the PWMU.

Thus, women's work responds to the yearly or more long-term agenda. There are many things to which women contribute with their work. They contribute to the Annual Presbyterian Assembly held every year with dresses they sew themselves, the making of *salusalu*, baskets of food and so forth.¹⁶² With their budget the women also contribute to paying for the pastor's wife to travel to the Assembly and for her missionary work which takes her to other islands like the Banks where the Presbyterian Church is not well developed.¹⁶³ Then there are other contributions. When women perform what they call "visits", women either contribute with their own household produce or in case of a monetary contribution take from the women's basket. In 2011, they finally finished paying the outstanding cost of the "market house" in Luganville.¹⁶⁴ This was announced during the 2011 PWMU district closing session.

6.2.2 Fundraising: food exchange or transaction towards the church?

Fundraising are yet another way to collect money for the church. These events are organised regularly by the different "cell groups". Fundraising are usually focused on food. The fundraising event is usually announced the previous Sunday during the service. On the given day, the "cell group", men and women, cook all day. The men usually have killed a bullock.

¹⁶² The missionary work is a program called "Outreach". The General Assemblies are often held in Port-Vila, other Assemblies can be held on different islands.

¹⁶³ In the Banks, the majority of the population is Anglican. Historically, the LMS was stronger in the outlier islands such as the Banks and the Torres.

¹⁶⁴ See chapter 4. The house was supposed to serve as a "hostel" for the PWMU women going to the market to sell their products.

The food is usually rice, bullock meat or other meat (the children may have been sent to fish and catch prawn etc...). It is sold by the plate. However, if no meat is available traditional dishes, most often *laplap* or *simboro* (see glossary) will be prepared. People pay more readily when bullock meat is served. On the days of fundraising the children are usually very excited. Although people might cook for themselves, when one group organises a fundraising, others are encouraged to participate so they always send someone to buy one or two plates.

Eriksen notes that in Ranon, “fundraising events do not involve a great deal of money” and that, “people were eager to arrange different kinds of fundraising events almost for the fun of it”, but that, “perhaps the most important reason for holding these events was that they brought people together for a common purpose – sharing food” (Eriksen 2008: 101). Although there is no piling of food as during other important “kastom” ceremonies, Eriksen considers that the, “syntax is also the same: people pool and share (2008: 103).” The ceremonial economy, in Tasiriki like on Ambrym, does always mobilize food and people pool to share. Yet, in the context of Tasiriki, it seems that with the fundraising events, the process, purpose, and effects depart in a quite important manner from any of the food displays involved in ceremonies which involve kinship.

As I have already noted, in kinship related ceremonies outside the context of the church, the demonstration of food serves to show one’s ability to grow but also to mobilize other people’s growth and to redirect it towards specific others, an interpretation which is closer to Rio’s view of “rerouting” (2007: 202) than of Eriksen’s sharing, though there is certainly an aspect of commensality and redistribution. The food that is mobilized making the exchange possible comes from two sides made visible through the heaping of the food. From two heaps it is made one before being redistributed.

Rio points out that ceremonies involving kinship follow a double movement showing an outward motion of giving and an inward motion of eating (2007: 203). He makes a parallel

with Strathern's reproductive cycle whereby there is a production of objects through work and the consumption of these objects materialises new relations (2007: 203). It is interesting to note that the process follows a cycle of overtness and covertness. The giving and amassing of the raw food is somehow covert, while their consumption after transformation is overt and is acknowledged. The act of incorporation in these contexts seems to me quite important in signifying that people have incorporated the new relations and the food of the others with whom the exchange has taken place. Or rather, by sharing the food that has been brought and eating it, they have been made into these new relations. Thus, in these ceremonies, there is always a transformation happening, there is a before and an after. This is accentuated by the fact that the food is heaped up raw, redistributed, and then cooked in a large stone-oven made for the day before being eaten.

Fundraising are in this regard very different. If there is pooling, it is within the "cell group". There is no extraction per se from other kin. These occasions are quite casual and do not necessarily involve a communal feast. Once everything is ready, the person in charge of the "cell group" blows a whistle and people, when it pleases them, come with their plates, pay and then most of them go back home to eat. Most importantly, there is no sharing per se but a transaction. It is money that is pooled and shared for the church. The redistribution or sharing may rest, as it were, in the idea that in the end the growth of the church benefits all.

Where Eriksen notes that in Ranon, events are organised for the fun of it, thus relegating the money to a secondary position, in Tasiriki, while there is surely fun involved in the preparation of the fundraising, the centrality of money cannot be downplayed. There had been conflicts over the fact that two fundraising for two different groups were being held at the same time, thus dividing by two the income expected to be raised. This was rectified during the church service and thereafter only one fundraising at a time could be held.

I agree with Eriksen (2008: 101) that despite the apparent prevalence of money in these events, the reason is not “economic” per se. In fact, it is quite the contrary. The money which is gathered exits the “economic” sphere. The money leaves the realm of exchange to nurture the church. It forces the money out, so to speak; it channels it away from people’s consumption or suspected tendency to keep it for their own use.

Once in the basket of the “PWMU cell group”, the money serves a “greater” purpose than it usually serves. If it does bring about a transformation over people, it is to turn them away from their “selfishness”, forcing their contribution to the “*wok blong God*”; and yet in a rather pleasant, joyful and fun way. Nonetheless, fundraising could actually be seen as a sort of economy, of a material and spiritual order, whereby the circulation of money mediates relations between people and their church, and subsequently God, who is at the source of the very possibility of their productivity and growth.

So, within the context of the church, the ceremonies and display of food that could be regarded as coming the closest to ceremonies involving kinship in which pooling and sharing are indeed central, are the thanksgiving ceremonies.

6.2.3 Thanksgiving ceremonies: gardens in the church and the sacralisation of work

I discussed thanksgiving ceremonies in the previous chapter in the context of kinship. I discuss them briefly again below in the context of the yearly closing ceremonies of the PMWU work which also involve gift-giving. In this part, I am concerned with the thanksgivings directed to God which take the form of offerings. In this section I only give the description of what thanksgiving ceremonies look like, what they do, while in the next section, I am concerned with their necessity as expressed in the context of the church sermons – the rhetoric of thanksgiving as it were.

These celebrations are usually held monthly and sometimes are conflated with other important celebrations like Christmas, New Year or the opening and closing of the PWMU work year. As already mentioned, they can be held either in Tasiriki or in Pelmoli as joint thanksgivings. One of them was also celebrated in the school.



Photo 6.3 - Sunday service in Tasiriki with the pastor leading the service, Thomas Jimmy reading the Bible, and taro as offerings.

In a way, each Sunday involves a thanksgiving in the form of the money collection which takes place during the service. People may also sometimes bring some garden produce as an offering. Yet, thanksgiving ceremonies operate on a much larger scale. On these occasions, people essentially bring garden produce to the church. It can however be other types of food such as bread or rice, or a monetary contribution which is the form the produce of plantations take. This last point is significant. The sermons given on thanksgiving days are usually concerned with the recognition that one's wealth, be it expressed through the good harvest of garden produce and food abundance or the money one gained from selling one's

kava or copra production, is ultimately dependent on God's grace and will to sustain, or ability to take-away what He has given.

Saturdays are rarely days of hard work. Unless there is anything urgent to be done, it is more likely that people will go up in the gardens to gather food for Sunday. They might do a bit of weeding and maintenance. Usually children go up as well and spend the day playing in the bush, looking for fruits, nuts, a wild fowl, prawns, or just going from garden to garden looking for green coconuts to drink or corn to roast. Their presence allows more food to be carried home than usual. So, on the Saturday preceding thanksgiving days, people gather extra garden produce to bring to the church on Sundays. It can also be bundles of green coconuts or anything that people may like to purchase; corn, pineapples and so forth.

On Sunday, when the bell rings as usual, people slowly make their way to the church (it usually takes a full half hour before the whole congregation fills the church). The first to arrive sing familiar hymns accompanied by the guitar playing of Tata Dom who also leads the singing. On thanksgivings days, upon entering the church people put their produce in front of the altar. In one case I witnessed in Pelmoli during a joint-thanksgiving between Tasiriki and Pelmoli, the produce were left outside and then brought in all at once in the name of the whole congregation.¹⁶⁵ By the time the service starts, there is a large heap in front of the altar. Hence, like in other ceremonies where food is pooled, nobody knows what had been brought by whom. In any case, upon entering the church the garden produce leaves the realm of work and production and becomes the testimony of God's gift as well as the capacity of Tasiriki to bring this gift to fruition.

Thanksgivings ceremonies are not different from other services except for the emphasis in the sermon on the importance of giving (see below). Once the heap of garden produce has been blessed alongside the money collected, and the service has completely

¹⁶⁵ This was the only thanksgiving that I attended in Pelmoli so I do not know whether this was just their particular practice. It can be suggested that by doing so, the produce enters the church as one, i.e. as the joint produce of place as a whole.

ended, all the produce are given a monetary value by the elders and then are sold back to the same people in attendance. One will thus have brought something from one's garden and then make a further monetary contribution by buying something.

When everything has been sold, the total amount of money is announced and people leave if they had not done so already. Money is thus the end product of thanksgiving ceremonies, the medium through which people's contribution to the church as an acknowledgement of God's gift is "quantified" or measured. All the money goes directly to the church where it then serves different purposes, such as paying the pastor's salary, building and maintaining church facilities, or contributing to the overall budget fixed by the Presbyterian Church at the national and international levels.

Inside the church, men usually sit on one side, women on the other, the youngest on the benches closest to the altar and the oldest on the rear ones. Women usually outnumber men. Many women just sit on the floor at the very back by the door. Very young children always sit in the middle, in between. So, on the days of thanksgivings, it is almost as though children "dispute" their space with the garden produce. It always seemed to me that, on these occasions, the children and the garden produce were somehow commensurate, being both the living proofs of God's gift and the productive capacity of place. The analogy may stop here. However, like in the *roto umina*, where the single heap of taro behind the two boys signifies their coming out of one womb and one house, likewise, in the church, children are like the garden produce, coming out of one place.

6.2.4 "*Blong tede yumi stap long environmen blong mane*": the issue with money¹⁶⁶

People's relation to money is far from being straightforward. In people's discourse, outside the context of the church, money is still regarded as something peripheral, exogenous. It is

¹⁶⁶ "Because today we live in an environment of money"

something that belongs to the world of white people. The claim was commonly made that while white people “*kakae vatu*” (eat money) people in Tasiriki eat what they produce from the land and therefore do not need it much.¹⁶⁷

Yet money is a daily concern, it directs much of people’s activities and is often at the centre of people’s conversations. On one hand, people criticise the ones who spend their time running after money, on the other hand, it is thought that a man who does not have money is lazy. On one hand, it is regarded as something “evil” and can be associated with sorcery in cases of manipulation of great amounts, while, on the other hand, money is a sign of one’s ability to work and the very means by which people can nurture the church and subsequently, to a certain extent, the health and wealth of their place. In Tasiriki, money thus holds a very ambivalent status which can be summed up by the two following observations that Thomas made; money is the root of all collective institutions yet it is also the root of most conflicts over land.¹⁶⁸ These observations point to an important fact; that money undermines some institutions while promoting others, such as those of kinship and the church (see Chapter 7).

Conflicts over land are numerous. They concern various claims over land but also any damage done to the gardens,¹⁶⁹ the uprooting of one person’s plantations by another, or a person’s legitimate occupation of land. In this latter regard, problems arise mostly in the case of coconut plantations which involve long-term occupation of land. The managing of land conflicts is regarded as one important prerogative of the chief who is supposed to know the whole history of the lands and the people in the village and therefore should be able to arbitrate the contradictory claims. In Tasiriki, the authority of the chief on that matter is

¹⁶⁷ See also Taylor (2008: 66). The author cites the title of a song performed by String Bands called “*Moni moni i spoelem yumi*” (money spoils us). This closely resembles the many discourses around money as heard in Tasiriki. And see also Kolshus (1999: 150), on issues between money, land and the growing importance of the father’s role.

¹⁶⁸ “*Mane hemi stamba blong ol komuniti mo institusen, joj, skul, dispensari ...*”, “*Mane hemi stamba blong mos raorao blong graon.*”

¹⁶⁹ Pigs or bullocks left roaming (intentionally or not) or intentional damage to someone else’s gardens (uprooting, cutting of crops, acts of sorcery which often manifest as the drying out of crops or the crops not growing at all etc...).

increasingly contested.¹⁷⁰ Often after the decision has been taken by the chief at the level of the village court people who are not satisfied with the decision will take the case to a court based on western law. As Thomas observed, western law has many roots which can be pulled, and with each root comes money. So even if an appeal to western law is costly, one can also expect to gain much. The fact that the chief's decisions are easily by-passed compromises his authority and this has a direct effect on the state of kinship relations.

Thus money is indeed seen as a kind of ailment and is associated with many of the ailments that people may face. While being associated with wealth, it is also seen as an important cause of pressure tied to all sorts of commitments. For Thomas, money creates more needs and these needs trigger a kind of "obsession" with money. As a consequence, people spend much more time working on plantations for money than in their gardens. The consequences can be observed in the fact that garden produce are thought to be much smaller than before and people turn to "easy" crops, like manioc. This is manifest in the low diversity of taro varieties and a decrease in that of yams.

Thomas expressed the idea that previously people's needs were very simple and as a result ancestors used to live much longer since they were content with what their environment provided them. By leaving behind an ancestral way of life, he thinks that people have jeopardized their health and well-being. But, according to Thomas, this is not the plight of the Christian communities alone and a plea to a return to a pre-Christian *kastom*. In that respect, Thomas considers that despite the claim of some people to be *kastom*, true *kastom* people do not exist anymore, as even these *Kastom* men are always looking for money. Thomas thus seems to be more interested in reintroducing *kastom* ways of transactions (like establishing a

¹⁷⁰ According to Thomas, before people would not talk back to the chief, but now, as knowledge increases, all have their own opinions and they air them. In the traditional courts, people would express their thoughts and then the chief would have the final decision, he would give the authorization for something to be done. Now people resort to law. The law is written while *kastom* is not, so *kastom* cannot be used for legal proceedings.

“*kastom* bank” using pig tusks for example as proposed by a group on Pentecost Island) alongside that of money which he knows they cannot do without.

Therefore a direct connection is made between people’s deteriorating health and the necessity to make money. Women’s work with *kava* is a case in point (see Chapter 7). People feel tired and think that they spend too much time working, not giving their body a rest. During my stay, Thomas decided that, besides the rest on Sabbath, he would devote another day of the week to rest; however this resolution did not last very long in the face of his many commitments.

Around Christmas, an event divided people in Tasiriki and much of the division could be traced to money. A woman in the village died of old age. With Christmas approaching people were in a frenzy of making copra. Since everyone wanted to go to town, there was a shortage of transport which would become even more acute during the Christmas and New Year period when one of the truck drivers was going home for the celebrations. Aware of all this, the sons of the deceased woman decided not to celebrate the fifth day feast. However, this is the day where the spirit of the deceased is visiting for the last time and as such is quite important. The decision was not well received on the side of the deceased woman’s brothers. A decision was taken by the maternal side (the mother’s brothers) that the fifth day feast would be held but one of the woman’s brothers still refused to take part in the tenth day feast to show his disapproval towards his sister’s children. This is not to say that in Tasiriki people do not pay respect to their dead but rather that people are caught in the midst of commitments which often lead them to turn to pragmatics causing them to bypass some obligations towards their kin. This is not devoid of consequences. First, it generates tension between kin and between generations, and secondly, if something were to happen to one of those neglecting rites for the deceased, it would surely be traced to their attitude.

Indeed contra to people's claims money has become an important, almost indispensable, element of their lives and, as noted above, it remains the only food the church can be fed with.¹⁷¹ As I have explained in Chapter 3, money is concomitant with the church, and this had been so since its arrival in Tasiriki. The church however also functions as the main regulator and channel for money. Rio (2007: 208) describes how money in Ranon is perceived as dangerous in the way it can just disappear. Once the transaction or exchange is complete, unlike food and pigs, nobody really knows what happens to the money, it could have been redistributed but might well have been "hidden away" and this is what makes it dangerous (ibid.). Likewise, in Tasiriki, the idea that things are "held tight", and that they do not circulate, that they are blocked or accumulated is perceived as a threat to sociality. Like the circulation of food which makes relations appear as much as it defines them, money must be circulated (see also below).

In Tasiriki, the origin of money, as much as its destination, is something that people question. The ability to manipulate and gather significant amounts of money without visible work is regarded as the work of a "*man blong devel*". Therefore it is important that the money is brought into the open, made to move, as well as being directed towards, and transformed into something good and holy, and this is what, among other things, the church does.

6.3 "*Tok blong God*": nurturing the church through acts of giving

6.3.1 The necessity of thanksgiving: being thankful for what is given and ensuring growth

The thanksgiving ceremonies described above are often accompanied by sermons which emphasize the necessity to give. Thanksgivings seem to act in several directions. As offerings, they consist in acknowledging what God has provided. As Van Heekeren notes Vula's people are always reminded that, "nothing is produced, everything must be given" (2010: 189).

¹⁷¹ See also Taylor (2008: 66) who notes that, on Pentecost like in Tasiriki, while the money remains secondary for subsistence, it is now of vital importance in other areas of people's life.

However, there is more to it than that. By bringing the fruits of their labour to the church, people show that they have worked upon God's gift, they have made it fruitful. In this regard, the parable of the talents (Matthew 25: 14-30) was recounted at a thanksgiving ceremony held in the school, thereby emphasising that what is given must be further grown and not buried (hidden away).

During thanksgiving ceremonies, the sermons are primarily based on the importance to give and to do so in a proper manner, with a good intention. It is also stated that no produce is ultimately one's own. Hence, during the thanksgivings of the 22nd of May 2011, it was the story of Cain and Abel which was the basis for the sermon. The proper way to offer was directly linked to the subsequent health and wealth of what had been planted. The sermon insisted on the fact that God knows of people's intentions and therefore the state of prosperity of a place reflect people's attitude towards God. This echoed another thanksgiving held three weeks earlier at Mamara Primary School. Since the service was held in the school, both the NTM and Presbyterian congregations were present, and each gave a sermon. The Presbyterian sermon insisted on the necessity to give back; it was argued that life is given by God, so that what had been grown ultimately had been given and therefore could not be regarded as just the produce of one's work. It was repeated several times that one should not hold tight to anything lest a blockage (*blokem*) be created. Then the NTM side gave a sermon against the selfish pursuit of money. They insisted that money carries people away from God and therefore contributes to things being *olbaot* (falling apart / not well cared for). To pursue merely one's own well-being can only lead to death through overwork, thus people should instead walk straight in the steps of Jesus and growth will come.

Two months later, during a joint thanksgiving between Tasiriki and Pelmoli, it was again reiterated that it was necessary to give with one's full heart and to give back to God the best of what one has. It is no use to give half-heartedly. Thus, one is indeed expected to bring

the best of one's harvest. In any case, one's intention and sincerity, being ultimately transparent to God, one should expect to harvest the consequences of one's intentions. Giving will bring blessings however blessing from God may come in rather unexpected and various ways which do not necessarily reflect one's immediate wishes.

The emphasis on the necessity to give then is very much part of the discourse of the church and is conveyed very clearly in the sermons which support the expected financial commitment from people. Sometimes this can be implemented in quite a coercive manner, such as the decision, announced at the branch opening of the PWMU work year, of the imposition of a "tax" for the church; each family was asked to pay 1000 vatu per person per year in addition to any other church commitments.

6.3.2 Conveying "*tok blong God*": women's spiritual work

It is quite manifest from what I've depicted in the section devoted to the work of women that work for the church takes up a large proportion of their time. As I describe below, the work for monetary income is only part of their "mission", and "mission" is indeed an appropriate word since an important part of women's activity is also "spiritual"; they are the vehicles of the "*tok blong God*".¹⁷² Women also prepare performances for each monthly meeting; most of the time these are hymns that they sing at the end of the service but it can also be short skits illustrating passages of the Bible. Once a year, to celebrate the founding of the PWMU, women attend a Bible week led by one of the village elders.

During the branch opening of the PWMU week which celebrated the 66th anniversary of the founding of the PWMU, the sermon was given by the elder who was to teach the

¹⁷² I don't know whether it is a good idea to use the word spiritual here, since in any case, even the "material" work they do – working on plantations, is in a way also to fulfil "a spiritual" purpose. I use it for now though, to distinguish the two kinds of work while keeping in mind that such a distinction is artificial in a sense that there is actually no division made between the spiritual and the material. Two different terms are used though by Tasiriki people themselves, one is "*wok blong God*", the other is "*tok blong God*" and in this sense the distinction between doing and saying might be valid.

women every morning. In his sermon, the elder reasserted that people are the vehicle of the word and are God's workers. If people fail to meet this responsibility, then who else could? That's why women's work within the PWMU is important; through their work in the PWMU association, women carry "*tok blong God mo wok blong God*". Women are expected to go to church every Friday morning to "carry devotion". Women took turn every week to lead the morning service. The weekly planning was put on the church wall. However, attendance to this Friday service was however very low and thus again triggered the criticisms of the elders towards women's lack of investment.

Yet, as it is apparent from the above description, the women are already coping with many activities. One of these is what people call "visiting." It is a kind of "charity" work that brings support to people considered to be in need, such as widows; the elderly and the ill, but it could also be directed towards schools.

6.3.2.1 Visiting

For each monthly *kombaen*, women determine who they will visit. During my stay, there were two visits to the schools (one in Mamara (July), one in Saletui (June), and one visit was devoted to widows (May). In August, the visit was cancelled because there was a *wolwol* on the same day as the meeting, the September meeting was cancelled because of the weather, and the October meeting was the district closing of the yearly PWMU work so there were no visits. However, women also "visit" people outside of *kombaen* meetings, at the village level, whenever a situation requires it. If a person is sick or an elderly person alone, women meet at this person's place. They usually bring food or other small items and stay for an hour or so, singing and praying. When a person is sick, a session of prayers is usually organised.

As in thanksgiving ceremonies involving kinship, during such visits, the worlds of the church and kinship could be either seen as collapsing colliding, overlapping or following a

kind of parallel trajectory. One could say, and I develop this further in the next chapter, that the church stages kinship in a specific way by abstracting “roles” as it were, the widow, the sick and the elderly vs. the PWMU group. In such contexts, these men and women cast in their specific roles are to a certain extent disconnected from the usual network of kinship relations. Yet, the kind of relations which are evinced by the work of the PWMU are not substitutes for these former relations, instead they operate at a different level. I think that it might be useful not to look at such activities as a way of “creating community”. Indeed, these “situations” are already taken care of by kin, what PWMU women do then directly relates to “*wok blong God*” and “*tok blong God*”, a missionary act. What is to be understood here by missionary act? I would contend that it is not a matter of “converting” but rather of conveying the Christian faith and thus the power of God.

One can also point at the “social” dimension of the PWMU activity. Thus, during the meeting at Saletui Primary School, the pastor’s wife reiterated the necessity to activate the youth program for young girls in the women’s respective villages (Girls Scouts). Her argument was that this prevents early marriage, develops their Christian knowledge and faith, and moreover they can learn skills such as sewing, cooking and so forth. It is worth mentioning that this kind of discourse is not necessarily followed by an active implementation of these activities on the part of the women.

When women pray for kin “in need”, it is yet another kind of action which is performed. When the person is sick, their presence is further inscribed within the healing framework and the understanding of the power of praying as a remedy to illness. When visiting widows, it was the power of prayer and the Bible as the ultimate support and resources which was emphasised. This was most apparent during the visit paid to three widows I witnessed in the hamlet of Lovenue during the *kombaen* meeting of May 2011.

During the visit held in the house of one of the widows, only women were present. It started with each widow expressing her grievance, all of them insisting on the fact that they were not well taken care of by their kin and that their lives were very hard. They had to work in the gardens by themselves and barely had enough to eat. It was a very emotional meeting as the widowed women cried quite loudly emphasising their predicament. This public recrimination towards kin is rather rare and I did not witness similar instances of it.

The group of women responded by contributing materially with a variety of goods bought from the store. Then, they started a session of prayers and Bible reading. As usual, the session started with women congratulating each other over the work they had been able to accomplish, and expressed their thankfulness for being able to accomplish work and to get through despite adversity and hard times. They prayed for the widowed women and encouraged them to stay strong in the face of challenges while turning to the Bible, as the “*tok blong God*”, as the most trustable and efficient support they could look for. Then the session ended and all the women, including the widows, left for the *kombaen* meeting.

6.3.2.2 Performances

Besides the activities described above, women also gathered to sing and dance together. Usually, each time there was a meeting women from the different villages took turns to sing hymns. Sometimes they performed action songs and prepare short skits to re-enact or rehearse small passages of the Bible.

Van Heekeren has argued that, in the case of the Vula’a, PNG, “the religiosity of eating-together and singing-together that finds expression in combined fellowship draws on the very foundation of what is Vula’a, the desire to reproduce and extend relationship through exchange (2010: 188)”. In Tasiriki, and by extension, in the Anrua District, while the fellowship women do contribute to the reproduction or extension of relations and surely enjoy

singing and eating together, however, it seems to me that this also serves a different purpose. Conversely to the Vula'a, *kombaen* meetings are not necessarily well-attended. It is often the members of the administrative office and a few other women who join for the meetings. Moreover, the singing and eating constitute a very small part of the day. It rather appears to me that what women are doing on these occasions is work; *kombaen* meetings are duty.

There is something about presenting place to the other women which is at stake. For example, that the women decided to sew "uniforms" that would distinguish them from the others who participate adds weight to my suggestion. At the district closing, one elder stressed the fact that women from the different villages should not see themselves as competing groups but as a joined force in completing "*wok blong God*". Women nonetheless continuously engaged in comparisons. The competitive feeling which transpired was not limited to the hymns but extended to the capacity of each village to complete the budget that has been fixed. At the district level, it was their reputation at the provincial level which was at stake.

At the branch (village level) closing of the PWMU work year, the pastor's wife was given a hammer. She acknowledged that she had never been given such an object yet it was true that she had been hammering "*tok blong God*" into the heads of the women. On that day, she gave a sermon. It was based on a passage of Exodus, in which the people of Israel are led by God to the Promised Land through the desert showing them the long way instead of the short one. The pastor's wife interpretation of this passage was that it was indeed often a difficult and challenging road that the women had to follow. The demands are many and the work is often arduous, yet the efforts are worthwhile. She therefore asked the women to persevere even when they were facing hard challenges. Likewise, during the district closing of the PWMU session, the pastor's wife apologized for having been harsh with the women yet remarking that it was for their own good to avoid gaining a bad reputation at the provincial

level by not completing their work. She added that she had done her best to help the women with their obligations, for example, the writing of reports. Elders of Tanovusvusi, on their part, had to apologize to the whole group of women for the difficulties encountered by the departing administrative officers that had been in charge for the last two years.¹⁷³

It was thus manifest that there was more at stake in the combined fellowship of Tasiriki, and by extension, of the Anrua District, than the desire and pleasure of doing things together. The role of the women in the church I contend is work, and this work was associated with the growth of place as a Christian place.

6.4 Growing into a Christian place, renewal and the Last Judgement

Growing place in Tasiriki is tightly woven with the church and to the Christian teleology and eschatology. The discourse of the elders in the church focuses on the coming of the Last Judgement and the necessity to work towards achieving what Tasiriki was meant to be in the first place: a place of peace, a holy place.¹⁷⁴

The importance of thanksgiving ceremonies have shown two different things: first, the recognition that growth is given by God and thus stresses the importance of people's relation with Him, and second, the importance of giving and circulating wealth which has similarities with kinship focused practices.

Faith is yet another aspect of the Christian life that I develop in Chapter 7 when I discuss how people manage their relations with humans and non-humans alike, especially when things are thought to have gone astray or when confronted with the occurrence of death,

¹⁷³ For two years, the women of Tanovusivusi were in charge of the district office; following the rotation, it was the women of Pelmoli who took charge of the district office for the next two years (2012-2014).

¹⁷⁴ While people always insisted that the coming of the church in Tasiriki was what made the possibility of peace (people taking refuge there as opposed to their hidden places in the bush) (see also Taylor 2008: 56), and that church indeed was the place of peace, peace is not necessary the province of the church. Rousseau (2012: 206) notes that the notion of *kastom* is also associated with the possibility of peace. *Kastom* in this context is understood as the expressions of appropriate social relations, especially those that enable coexistence based on peace and respect. I come back to this aspect when I discuss respect and faith in Chapter 7 and thus the respective positions of *kastom* and church.

illness and other kinds of obstacles that prevent people from “moving forward” or “looking into the future”. Faith and respect are the principles by which the process of growth is sustained, for the church and kinship respectively.

Another important aspect is the idea of renewal. Renewal is something that is also much emphasized throughout people’s experience of Christian life and which is most visible/manifest at the time of Christmas and New Year celebrations. Actually, it appeared that the New Year celebration, in terms of the church attendance, donations, and expectations, had more implications and resonances in people’s lives than Christmas did.¹⁷⁵

I have also focused on the idea of rhythm and cycles in the last two chapters. The yearly church liturgical calendar is one of these cycles that bring a rhythm to people’s lives. I contend that the idea of renewal occupies quite an important aspect in people’s conception of life as well as in the way they conceive of the possibility of growth. The mending of relations and the staging of reconciliations are usually important events (see Chapter 7) as is the idea that one can leave behind what is “rotten” or “rubbish” to bring new life forth. This I explore below.

6.4.1 Closing times: the possibility of renewal

In 1954, Guiart undertook fieldwork in Santo and spent some time in the upper bush of South West Santo (upper Mbuvo, Navaka and Bayalo). At that time, the people in the bush were strongly opposed to the Presbyterian converts. While he toured the small hamlets of these areas, he met with local leaders who were developing projects of “renovation”, in the wake of

¹⁷⁵ It is interesting to note that Thomas asked me several times whether Jesus was really born on the 25th of December. This and the origin of the Three Kings were aspects of the church dogma which seemed to be problematic for him. When I had told him that this date had been discussed years later before it was finally fixed, he almost sent me to announce that in the church on Christmas Eve. Kiki told him that this was foolish and the discussion stopped. On this occasion, I did not have the presence of mind to ask him why it was bothering him so much that Christ was born on that particular day. I can guess that it may be linked to questions of cycles and the link with other aspects of life and growth. Easter, for example, is concomitant with the New Yam Harvest and people renew their communion with Christ at the same time that they eat the first yams of the year. This is only an observation which requires further investigations for it to have any foundation.

the “Naked Cult” started in the early 1950s in the upper bush. The Naked Cult advocated a complete return to *kastom* with a generalised regime of sharing; all that could generate disputes was banned from the villages. Tsek, who was at the root of the movement had tried to impose on his followers a new language called *Mamara* (light, brightness) (1958: 211).¹⁷⁶ The Naked Cult failed but some of the leaders Guiart met in the 1950s were still very much promoting a “renewal” completely divorced from the Christians. All the different visions Guiart encountered converged on the idea that the renewal would require suppressing “*ol doti blong bifo*” (all the old “bad/dirty” practices), and especially the ones related to sorcery (1958: 96, 214). According to Guiart (1958: 222), this desire for social renewal had been characteristic of all movements initiated since the beginning of the 20th century. He observes that in most cases, old practices were abandoned overnight (*ibid.*).

I have already shown in the previous chapters how the idea of renewal permeates people’s understandings of life and the garden yearly cycles. This renewal, be it generational or horticultural, has often be described as a kind of layering (Jolly 2001: 178; Rio 2007: 101; Mondragón 2009: 121). Thus, according to Mondragón (2009: 121), for the Torres, “if generations can be described as constituting part of a body of layered persons (*metaviv*), and the same imagery is borne out in descriptions of yam-piles, which are products of the living earth, then perhaps it is not impossible to conceptualise whole islands as icons for the socio-territorial layering of persons and genealogical depth.”

While this layering can be viewed as a collapsing of time, where, generation after generation, the temporal depth is not made to appear, in Mondragón’s analysis of the Torres, this layering is very much seen as incremental; the layers accumulate and constitute a kind of

¹⁷⁶ Also used as the name for the primary school in Tasiriki (See Chapter 5). The place where the SDA settlement has been established was called Mbul marae (bamboo torch – eel) because it was a place where people used to catch eels at night with bamboo torches. I have already mentioned how eels can be embodiment of spirits living hidden under rocks. The place has been re-baptized Mbul mamara (bamboo torch – brightness) since it is a Christian place. Again, the Christian trope of conversion as the passage from darkness to light is made apparent here (see Jolly 1996: 177; Taylor 2010: 283).

bedrock or rather “soil” which sustains the very possibility of further growth. This concurs with the idea that accumulated decay is the very possibility of a renewal.

Taylor, considering the pig’s tusk, after Rio (2007), observes that indeed the form of the tusk does not simply follow a circle but spirals. When the spiral re-emerges through the jaw in a full circle it does so from a slightly removed point. So, “although the shape of the new growth replicates the original trajectory, it also takes its own course, it is part of the same tooth substance, yet it also travels a path set apart from the original (2008: 106-107).” This image is quite potent in regard to cycles of people’s and gardens’ regeneration, where what emerges is both the same and different. As noted by Rio (2007: 133), though the motif of the spiral is particularly poignant in the practices associated with *kastom* there is still a strong, “interest in keeping the spiral coming back into the community”, in new ways.

Likewise, the temporality of the church also pertains to a cyclic periodicity, the yearly rhythm of women’s work and the repetition of liturgical cycles. The birth, growth and death of Jesus, followed by His resurrection, illustrate the possibility of a renewal. The liturgical cycles, like the pig’s tusk, repeat themselves, yet there is, if not really, but ideally, a kind of “moving forward”, an upward spiralling as it were (see Rio 2007). People work hard, year after year, to grow their church and get ready for the Last Judgement.

This upward motion is set however within a temporality where uncertainty prevails and is, “independent from the causal thrust of the moment” (Robbins 2007: 12). No one knows when the Last Judgement is to come hence New Year is a time where the possibility of starting anew and in the right direction comes to the fore. People are always looking for signs that could announce a renewal. Thus, for example, during the service of the 18th of December 2011, Bubu Jimmy shared publicly in the church a dream he had had about a man who had announced his arrival to him; his interpretation was that it was “*taem blong klerem rod*” (time to clear the road; i.e. to confess) before the New Year came. The pastor’s wife’s, at one point,

also interpreted my presence at all the *kombaen* meetings as being possibly a sign of a coming renewal.

Closing times, by ending a cycle and thus allowing the possibility of the advent of a new one, are therefore important times. The village and district closing ceremonies of the PWMU yearly work, of the Sunday school, as well as the major closing that New Year represents, are all moments where people overtly enact the possibility of renewal. These are usually times where public reconciliations are made and conflicts forgiven. Likewise, before a marriage when people kill pigs to remove all that is not “clean” to “clear the road”, it is both a closing and an opening happening simultaneously, the possibility of the relation. Then, one can exchange, and the live pig and the woman establish *tamata* (peace) and the possibility of further growth and exchange between the two sides.

6.4.1.1 PWMU closings: not just administrative handovers

It was the village closing of PWMU work for the year, and the whole Presbyterian congregation was attending. The women from the former office and their successors were standing in two lines. The latter had brought *salusalu* (flower necklaces) to put around the neck of the women of the incoming office; the outgoing secretary had the incoming one touch the report book; it was to be kept for a while to be completed until the year officially ended at the district *kombaen* closing, the money left from the budget kept in a small container was officially given to the new treasurer and hands were shaken.

A hammer was offered to the pastor’s wife (see above) and the president gave a present to each of her collaborators. However these latter persons had not brought any gift in return. They nonetheless accepted the gift and apologised for not preparing one to offer the president; they were not expecting one. The next Sunday, the treasurer and the secretary prepared a present that was officially given during the service to the president. As usual in

these contexts, the giving and receiving was highly emotional, as was the whole ceremony. Much was expressed verbally and women cried, thus perhaps releasing the tensions and resentments accumulated through the year, and clearing the way for the next year?

I attended the village and district closing ceremonies of 2011. In both cases, the atmosphere was quite tensed because the women from the outgoing office had to account for what they had done over the two years that they had been in charge. In both cases, there had been disputes and criticisms and this had to be acknowledged by the outgoing and incoming groups. Thus there were many debates about who was going to take over the office. Many women were reluctant to take on yet another responsibility.

The president of Tasiriki's branch had had to face quite a number of challenges and opposition sometimes leading to harsh disputes. Nonetheless, the office had completed their work and the budget asked from the branch had been finally fulfilled. In Tanovusvusi, for the district closing, all the problems that had been encountered were similarly exposed and elders asked for forgiveness from all parties. The new office and its composition was proposed and accepted. Women from Pelmoli started to hold the *kombaen* office for the next two years. There were presents given to the departing officers and *salusalu* given to the new ones. When all the difficulties had been acknowledged and gifts exchanged, it was finally announced that the women had overall done a good job, that the outstanding amounts for the district were now covered, and that all villages had completed the allocated budgets.

After the service, there was a "cutting the cake" ceremony. Both the new and old presidents cut the cake. The speech around the cutting of the cake emphasized continuity. Even if the present officers were not in charge anymore, it did not mean that they would not be engaged alongside the new office. It was stated that the change-over was not severing relations and did not show disengagement but rather a continuation of the work of all women together. After many apologies on the part of the former office, the blessing of the new office

by the pastor and the cutting of the cake seemed to serve as a means of leaving behind conflicts, strained relations and everything else that had gone wrong thus making a new start while keeping the same group of women running.

6.4.1.2 New-Year: leaving the dead and bad habits behind, and the possibility of renewal and growth

The themes of the Last Judgement and the coming of the Kingdom of God are recurrent in Sunday's sermons but become increasingly conspicuous as the year comes to a close and in the first weeks following the New Year. Before the arrival of Christmas, the emphasis is put on how unprepared people are for the return of Christ.¹⁷⁷ It is also suggested that Tasiriki has not yet become, or recover, its state as a holy ground. Hence, on the 16th of October 2011, one of the older elders gave a sermon combining Exodus 3: 1-5 (Moses and the burning bush) and Mark 11: 15-17 (Jesus chasing the merchants out of the Temple). According to him, Tasiriki is holy ground, but this has been forgotten. This was the reason why in Tasiriki people were still wearing shoes (referring to God asking Moses to remove his shoes on Mount Horeb) and will continue to do so as long as Tasiriki will be like the Temple where people are just looking after own business have forgotten that the Temple is a place of prayer. Approaching Christmas, on the 18/12/2011, Isaiah 9 was referred to emphasizing that people have been dwelling in the "land of the shadow of death" but that the light was now on them. This was connected to the illumination on December 31st when the whole church was finally lit up to enter the New Year (see below).

¹⁷⁷ For example on the 09/10/ 2011, Matthew 25, the parable of the virgin and their lamps, was used for the sermon.



Photo 6.4 – Tasiriki church on Christmas day, before the service (left), women singing hymns (right)

On the last Sunday of January, the parable of the fig tree in Luke 21: 29-33 was used to announce the coming of the Kingdom of God. Again uncertainty was mentioned to the congregation as they heard that “Yes I tell you this generation won’t pass before everything has happened” (Luke 21: 32). It is difficult to know whether these patterns repeat every year but, it was nonetheless quite clear that there was an expectation about what was to come and also an acute consciousness that people were not yet there.

The expectation of the possibility to start anew is a theme which becomes most apparent in Tasiriki during the New Year. As I have mentioned earlier, people know that they are far from being able to remove their shoes; that is Tasiriki is not yet a holy place. New Year was clearly oriented to what was to come ahead. Strangely, death was much more present and felt at this time. New Year is the time when people count the dead left behind and warn the living that they may not pass another year. Knowing that one’s life is in God’s hands, it was put upon each to take responsibility to engage with God to be saved.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Around the time of Christmas, people say that spirits are much more present all around. One reason might be that it is a time of heat and Malaria and according to people, more death occurs around that time. Knowing that New Year is really felt like a time of rupture, another interpretation could be that people enter a kind of liminal time before the change of year, hence the perception of an accrued presence of spirits and death.

On December 31st, the sermon was centred on the Exodus pointing at the necessity to leave behind a life of slavery and be brave enough to face the crossing of the desert; the only way to reach the Promised Land. There was a clear rhetoric about leaving behind the old habits and the *rabis fasin* (bad ways) to change and move forward on the straight tracks of a Christian life. This echoed earlier sermons which had been centred on the importance of leaving child-like habits behind, and to become adult by living the “*tok blong God*” (Word of God).

It is not incidental that on New Year’s Eve, the church was finally lit. It had been a source of complaints at Christmas, and finally the whole church was lit on the evening of the 31st of December; one bright building shining in the deep dark night of the village. The image may seem a bit simplistic, yet for the people of Tasiriki it was a significant moment. The light was blessed and the amount of money spent for the lighting was announced.¹⁷⁹ After the service, at midnight, everybody went out of the church and looked upwards to see whether the clouds would split into two chunks as the previous year was left behind.

The church building in Tasiriki could thus be regarded as the concrete manifestation of place, being both people’s aspirations while reflecting the state of their place. That in Tasiriki the church building is not yet completely finished denotes that despite the desire of being a place of church, they have not yet been able to fulfil their goal. Yet, the illumination of the church during the New Year celebration was perceived as a decisive step – the light had been brought in and people could start anew. Therefore the church building could be seen as a crystallisation of people’s capacity to grow their church, it is the concrete manifestation of their relation to God and the locus of their projections for their place.

¹⁷⁹ The sum amounted to 400 thousands vatu which is, for Tasiriki, a significant amount of money.

6.5 Conclusion

Eriksen has argued that the church creates social wholes and, by putting forth the female form of relations, creates communities instead of Big Men as embodiment of the hierarchical personification characteristic of the male forms of relations (Eriksen 2008: 10, 119).¹⁸⁰ This idea is not limited to Eriksen's argument. Van Heekeren states that, "attention to Melanesian women's groups has situated the notion of "Christian community" as a discursive feature of contemporary social life in PNG (2010: 184)" (see also Douglas 2002). Indeed, Van Heekeren discusses the problem of the use of the notion of community in Melanesia (2010: 183). The author argues that a distinction must be made, "between a Western Christian understanding of community in which people's shared experiences are those of groups of individual persons and the Melanesian sense in which Being is experienced primarily in terms of pre-existing relationships." The author further notes (Van Heekeren 2010: 180) that for the Vula'a people, the feeding relationship is at the core of their ontology and that combined fellowship not only incorporates such mode of Being but also allows the expression of other modes of Being such as singing together and gift-exchange.

Yet, it is a fact that most of the villages founded around the church brought people together from different kin networks that were thereafter unified by shared membership in a single church. So, in this regard, one could consider the church as constituting a community; the common denominator to all the groups gathered in Tasiriki, and it is indeed on this shared territory that people have decided to come together. One can say that this community is simultaneously instantiated with and through the church; the different groups of kin are one in the church, the common project for the place, but they keep their singularity as *nasara*, thus following the principles of emplaced kinship tied to land.

¹⁸⁰ It is Eriksen's fundamental premise that "gender is not only a characteristic of the individual. [...] More than this, gender on Ambrym is the one difference that organises other differences. When [the author] discusses male and female social structures, forms and values, [she] is not talking about what all women and all men do (2008: 7)."

It is interesting to just note for the time being that, as used to be the case when people left a hamlet because of conflicts, secession from a place or ‘budding’ increasingly happens through a change in the church affiliation while still operating along kinship lines; that of the *nasara*, or brotherhood. In that sense, one can say that the church could be regarded as a social whole – the church making place.

Tasiriki is by definition grounded through and in the Presbyterian Church. Since the foundation of the mission ground, to be a *man* and *woman Tasiriki* has been associated to that church. The actual presence of the NTM Church in the village could contradict this argument. Yet, as I have already mentioned, people do expect that a group of people changing affiliation should live in a separate place (although not necessarily far away). This is mostly the case observed in the other villages of the district. It is worth mentioning though that the majority of the NTM followers live on the other side of the village stream, that they have their own chief and their own activities independently from the Presbyterians.

Considering that, one cannot reduce women’s work and fellowship to the creation or promotion of community. When Thomas affirms that women who marry men in Tasiriki are not just marrying a husband but also a community, it is clear that what he means is that they not only marry a community of kin but also the community of the church. But here, the church is not about creating a community; rather it is the very basis of Tasiriki. As pointed out by Van Heekeren, “there remains a strong sense in which one must do one’s share in order to survive as a member of the village. [...] Sometimes it is a matter of family obligations – building houses, food for feasts, sometimes it is a matter of church obligations – maintaining the Pastor’s house, grounds, and church, and other community work (2010: 187).”

Consider Bolton’s definition of *ples* (place) on Ambae. She suggests that, “it is not so much that *ples* and practice are two aspects of the same thing, but that *ples* implies practice and practice implies *ples* (Bolton 2003: 105).” To be a *woman ples* in Tasiriki, it implies one’s

participation in the Presbyterian Church. One's participation in the Presbyterian Church is what makes a woman part of the place and also what makes place.

Van Heekeren thus notes the sense of obligation which characterizes women's participation in the fellowship (2010: 184, 187). This is something very much at stake in Tasiriki embodied by obligations towards kin and the obligation of work for the church. In the closing and opening of the *kombaen* work sessions, men were highly critical of the lack of involvement shown by some women and the women who took over the new office were almost forced to accept a position which would mean even more commitments. This is not to say that women do not enjoy participating in the association, discussing, organising, meeting, singing and so forth, but when women do things for the church, it is work. It is the relation to God which is maintained and nurtured. Thus, to join the community implies work where work is ultimately undertaken to grow the place. Indeed, what is constantly in the making is place in the form of reproduction of kinship and the growth of the church so as to move towards an ideal of peace and wealth through God.

There is no doubt that the church in Tasiriki is grown communally. But where Eriksen (2008: 119) argues that in Ranon, "the church cannot serve as an arena for male accomplishment and promote individual men's greatness, because the church is based on a much more communal and egalitarian ideology", I would argue that the church in South West Santo can also be the place where individual men are recognized and can stand for the identity of the place and its power objectified in the church building.

During my stay, I witnessed the retirement of an elder of the church in Pelmoli. The way the retirement was conducted was very similar to that of any other thanksgiving ceremony. Elder Soho William is a very important figure; as founder of Pelmoli but also as a figure of the Presbyterian Church. During that ceremony which brought people from the whole district and lasted for more than 5 hours, the history of the whole community, kinship

relations and the state of these relationships were exposed, re-counted and mended. His son did a kind of mea culpa and his brother who had converted to NTM six years before, sung extensively to pay tribute to the retiree, thanksgiving gifts were offered. It is worth noting that his wife was also honored on that occasion. Her work as a midwife was recognized and praised, since many men and women present during the ceremony were brought to the world through her hands.

In this particular case, Elder Soho William's life, commitment to the church and the role he and his wife played in the making and growth of Pelmoli and its church crystallized and embodied the achievements of the place and its church. This "consecration" also further established the filiation with other men of the church in the area, not the least being the Reverend Goodwill to whom the church is a memorial (see chapter 3).



Photo 6.5 – Going to the church service with taro offerings for thanksgiving (2)

CHAPTER 7 – QUESTIONS OF *RISPEK*¹⁸¹ AND FAITH

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, I concentrated on the work involved in growing gardens, kin and the church. In all these contexts I have pointed to the fact that there exist protocols necessary for growth to happen, or, at least, to prevent it from being “spoiled”.¹⁸² Thus it is apparent that work alone does not bring growth to its proper form if its enabling modalities are not respected. As Vevojivoro Tosusu observed to me when speaking about the planting of yams: “*yu mas folem fasin blong hem, supos yu no folem, long de blong harves, yu luk, wok blong hem hemi no stret*”.¹⁸³ The result is a harvest of small, if not stunted and “unsweet”,¹⁸⁴ *osono* (fruit growing belowground, a term used for the new generation of any tubers).

So where the gardens need specific care and attention, especially expressed in the forms of protocols and taboos. In Tasiriki, to refer to the latter term, people use the word *tambu*, used both in the vernacular and in Bislama. Moreover, it is used indifferently for both restrictions and interdictions, which are related to “sacred power” as well as the ones implemented by people. In other languages of the archipelago, there are specific words for taboo in the vernacular. Taylor (2008: 90) notes two different terms for the Sia Raga. One is *suboga* which corresponds to sacred restriction and the other *gogona* which indicates human restriction. In the context of gardens, the restrictions can be traced to a certain extent to the “power” say of women’s menstruation but as noted in Chapter 5, many of these restrictions are based on analogies which evince specific relations or attitudes. There is also a direct

¹⁸¹ Respect

¹⁸² “*Spoelem*” in Bislama is an expression which is employed often to describe an act which wrongs a person or undermines the potential of a person or a thing.

¹⁸³ “You must follow its way, if you don’t, on the day of the harvest, you can see that the work has not been done properly.”

¹⁸⁴ I have previously mentioned this word. “Sweet” food is a food that is tasty and to say that something is “sweet” usually denotes that the food is of quality.

connection made with what is ingested, how it affects the body and then how it propagates beyond it like the smell of meat (see also Chapter 5).

Thus, the proper growth of kin depends not only on the care given to the gardens but it also involves respect towards one's kin as well as spirits – ancestors or otherwise. As for the church, it is not so much “respect” that is required but faith, the ultimate basis for any possible growth to happen in its material and spiritual manifestations. The opposition I make here, between material and spiritual may not actually be most appropriate since growth, in the end, belongs to the “spiritual” even in its “physical” manifestations (see also fn. 171 in Chapter 6). Indeed, the main causes of growth's disruption which manifest as illness and death, a decrease in production, or in the various problems that the community faces, are all traced back to a lack of respect towards kin and spirits, to malevolent intentions, such as *nakaemas* (sorcery), to a lack of faith or a failure in one's moral attitude – like that of “selfishness”, “covetousness”, failing to give back to God the best fruits of one's harvest during thanksgiving ceremonies as well as upholding a “jealous attitude” towards others.

What struck me after spending some time in Tasiriki was the amount of energy and time that people spent to manage relations of all sorts; kin, ancestors, spirits, God, strangers, and so forth... Therefore, this chapter is devoted in part to a few case studies which shows, through dysfunctions, the various and close relations people maintain with humans and non-humans alike and the way these relations must be managed so as to ensure one's health, wealth and growth. These case studies allow me to come back to aspects touched upon in Chapter 4 regarding the vast network of relations in which people of Tasiriki take part and from which the *vanua* as place is made to emerge. I suggested that the emergence of the *vanua* was, to a certain extent, dependent upon maintaining the proper or appropriate distances or boundaries between humans or non-humans alike. What the incursion of illness and death or other problems might make apparent is either the crossing or blurring of set

boundaries, things spilling over, i.e. not being contained anymore, or a blockage preventing people from moving forward.

Looking at the way people manage their relations highlights the respective power of the church and that of *kastom*; here *kastom* is understood as that which does not pertain to anything Christian. While, in many instances the church seems to encompass what people consider to be *kastom*, as way of being and doing which does not belong to the church, it becomes also manifest that the church shows some limits in its capacity to answer or cover some aspects of people's lives. The idea of *rispek* (respect), which belongs and is foundational to *kastom* (see also Bolton 2001: 255; Lerche 2008: 2), then becomes a key concept in understanding many of the difficulties or problems that Tasiriki faces, and thereafter the necessity to bring a visibility to *kastom* in a place where it is thought that *kastom* is not strong.

If one considers *kastom* as a set of ceremonial dances, songs, and material culture which have their origin outside of the church, then, indeed, Tasiriki does not have much *kastom*. If, however, one is concerned by a specific way of understanding kinship and place, and the relationships implied, “a way of being in the world and in relation to others most commonly summed up in the axiomatic principles of peace, unity and respect (Rousseau 2012: 197)”, then Tasiriki does have *kastom*. This *kastom* is most visible at key moments of people's lives, such as marriage, illness and death. Yet, in Tasiriki, the general perception is that *kastom* is decreasing or is undermined for all sorts of reasons to which I come back below.¹⁸⁵ From this results a shared impression of a generalised lack of respect which threatens the community. Thus, it may not be surprising that in the last couple of years, within the chief family were performed two important ceremonies; a pig-killing ceremony and a *roto*

¹⁸⁵ The general feeling that *kastom* is losing ground is not proper to Tasiriki, and is most pregnant in the urban context. The fact that *kastom* is seen as having gone “*olbaot nomo*” touches directly to gendered aspects. Taylor argues that these aspects touch upon cosmological understandings related to ideas of fertility and sacred power among others and thus cannot be reduced to questions of *kastom* vs. modernity or Western/Christian constructions of power (Taylor 2010: 293).

umina (see chapter 5) both of which had not been held in Tasiriki since the arrival of the mission for the former and 20 years for the latter. Moreover, this may be also considered to be very much in line with a certain revival of *kastom* which is part of the national discourse.

7.2 When relations go astray: dysfunctions and the impediment of growth

The way people speak about “dysfunctions” often refers to the reverse metaphors used to explicit the “normal” workings of relations. The use of the metaphor of the road is the most common when relations are at stake – the road is opened or blocked. When the road is crossed, this often means that by following one road, people have crossed over another road (this is a metaphor which operates mostly in the context of kinship and is tied to the idea of respect and by extension it can have to do with bypassing someone’s authority). There are metaphors which suggest containment or non-containment in that case people speak of insides out. Things can be *stret* (straight) or on the contrary *olbaot* (everywhere), this last metaphor is clearly spatial and is also tied to respect. As I define it below, the way respect is comprehended is primarily expressed spatially and it is that space where the respect lies which should be kept at all time; it is the separation which allows the relation to be expressed as it should (see also Hess 2009: 28-30).

Similarly, the terms by which the problems are expressed often make apparent the forms of relations as they should be, forms not always necessarily made visible in day to day life. It is mostly during times of crisis that relations are made to appear the most explicitly. “Crisis” is a strong word and it is indeed an appropriate term to characterise events such as the occurrence of disease and death, it may be less so to characterise the day to day small events, yet, they can be regarded as the “micro-crises” which hint at important relations.

7.2.1 Death and illness: “pollution”, spirits, kin and God

“Although Ranon is a Christian village, the relationships to ancestor spirits are still important. These spirits affect not only people’s well-being, but also happenings in the natural environment, such as the weather and the harvest. When people are sick or the weather too bad, this is often taken as a sign of the ancestors.” Eriksen (2008: 17)

I have highlighted the word “although” in Eriksen’s citation because the author seems thereby to suggest that there is a contradiction between people in Ranon being Christian and the importance people still grant to their relationships with their ancestors. I will show below that the two are not mutually exclusive, at least in the case of Tasiriki.

Considering Christianity and relationships with the ancestors as being antinomic is rather common in the anthropology of Christianity in Melanesia and beyond. It is a fact that with the arrival of the church, and as a condition for conversion, missionaries often asked people to leave behind what were considered to be “heathen’s beliefs”. In some cases, people decided themselves to sever the relations they had had with their ancestors. In some extreme cases, such as in the conversion to Pentecostal Churches described by Robbins for the Urapmin, PNG, people spontaneously abandoned many of their taboos, considering that they had entered “*fri taem*” (free time), a time where taboos even if broken had no consequences, i.e. the offended spirits would not retaliate (Robbins 1995: 216).¹⁸⁶ Robbins argues however that, “the existence of these spirits was not put into question by Christian conversion (Robbins 1995: 218).” He notes that following several occurrences of death, people reintroduced the taboos, thus recognizing the power of spirits and instigating a return to respectful avoidance of them (Robbins 1995: 218).

For Robbins, this state of affairs can be traced to the idea that, “Christian beliefs always potentially conflict with a sense of relationships with nature spirits (Robbins 1995: 220).” Yet, Robbins took the argument in another direction. Considering that, “the realm of

¹⁸⁶ The taboos denote the necessity of restriction imposed by the nature and expected relationships people have with ancestors, spirits, kin and so forth.

spirits is [but] a projection of the social world (Robbins 1995: 220)”, that what these contradictions showed was actually a conflict between the individualistic values of Christianity opposed to the relational values that were dominant in the Urapmin society before their conversion, forcing the Urapmin to experience the moral dilemmas of, “trying to live with the culture that supplies [their traditional grounds – their families, gardens, hunting territories], and another culture, a Christian one, at the same time (Robbins 2004: 314).”

Indeed, most ethnographic material dealing with Christianity in “animist” societies points to the fact that the Christian and animist modes coexist (Barker 1990: 15; Burt 1994 cited in Jolly 2001: 194-195). For Barker, the fact that, “local popular religions consist of both indigenous and Christian ideas and forms (Barker 1990: 11) indicates that Pacific Christians, contra Robbins’s wider arguments, can tolerate considerable ambiguity and inconstancy (1990: 12). Scott (2005: 116) takes a slightly different angle. While not denying the fact that people converting to Christianity find themselves dealing with a share of ambiguity and contradiction brought about by the confrontation of different conceptual and/or ontological systems (Scott 2005: 102, 106), the author still argues, contra Barker, that people not only try to overcome this predicament by integrating, “their indigenous religious traditions with Christianity into systematic schemes” but also that this effort, “indicates that more than one such scheme can coexist without thereby betraying a lack of logical coherence (Scott 2005: 117).”

While Robbins poses the problem in terms of society and cultural values, both Barker and Scott pose their argument in terms of “religion”.¹⁸⁷ Douglas has criticised the fact that Christianity is often compartmentalised in a Western fashion into a separate domain of

¹⁸⁷ Actually, in a 2011 article, Robbins also sets the discussion within a “religious” framework. He argues that although the “nature spirits” are still very much present in Urapmin’s lives, what he calls “ontological preservation”, he also argues that they have been able to survive only by being demonized and thus by being incorporated within the Christian discourse. On this basis he denounces the tendency of anthropologists to resort to “crypto-religious” arguments which contend that people, “essentially practice their traditional religion under the protective cover of a Christian façade” (2011: 421). According to Robbins, this “crypto-religious” tendency is further tied to the anthropological investment in cultural continuity (2011: 420).

“religion” (2001 p.617). However, one could say the same in regards to its usual counterpart, the pre-Christian understandings and practices which have sometimes been referred to as “popular religion” (Barker 1990), or “indigenous religion”, if not “primitive religion”.

It might thus be that it is the very use of the term “religion” which has led to ideas of syncretism or rupture by assuming that we are dealing in both cases with a “set of beliefs” which can either mix or displace each other.¹⁸⁸ It forces the analysis towards a confrontation of systems which involve contradictions and the necessity to solve these contradictions, what Robbins calls “moral hybridities” (2004: 333), lest people be caught in moral torments and the constant feeling of moral failure (ibid.).

Therefore broadening the scope of what Christian and non-Christian understandings, practices and values are and do, locating their contextual occurrences, i.e. when and where people engage with them, attending to their loci of junction and disjunction, might help making apparent the principles which underpin and condition them. This will allow us to leave behind set categories, our set of beliefs, to work with the way people do structure these different understandings and practices in their daily life.

Allerton (2009), in a beautiful and insightful article entitled “Static Crosses and Working spirits: Anti-syncretism and Agricultural animism in Catholic West Flores” (Indonesia) discusses the co-existence of Catholicism and an “animist landscape” that she characterized as a, “lived-in environment” (Ingold 2000: 68), “constituted and animated by kinship connections, ancestral journeys and [...] potent spiritual energies (Allerton 2009: 272).” The author argues that people’s relation to Catholicism and to the spirits inhabiting the landscape is anti-syncretic (2009: 271). Allerton’s argument, which I develop, is not only

¹⁸⁸ In the case of Robbins, religion is often extended to culture/ontology (except in the 2011 article, see above footnote). For Scott, religion is extended to conceptual or ontological systems. In any case, it suggests that “religion” is associated with both an understanding of the workings of the world and what it is to be human and how this translates into the principles underlying sociality.

relevant to this specific section but will prove to be insightful in our understanding of the articulation between *kastom* and church in Tasiriki.

Allerton notes several important points in regards to Manggarai people's involvement with Catholicism and the spirits inhabiting the land. She first notes that in Indonesian discourses, a distinction is clearly established between *agama* (religion) and *adat* (culture/tradition) (2009: 272), a distinction which might be reminiscent of the opposition often drawn between *kastom* and church in Vanuatu. However, the author does not wish to drag Manggarai's relation to spirits, which should not be separated from the wider landscape of places and pathways (2009: p.275), within the domain of "religion". Allerton (2009: 278) remarks that for Manggarai people the rejection of "syncretic practices" is, "not a question of policing the boundaries between two "religious" traditions but rather maintaining a separation between Catholicism and practices of ritual and naming that are thoroughly pragmatic and rooted in a historical landscape (2009: 278)." While most *adat* practices might be flanked with Catholic prayers and speech, and people do, "incorporate Catholic prayers and objects into an armoury of practices protecting them from the more harmful aspects and forces of such a landscape (Allerton 2009: 279)", this does not question the existence of land spirits but confirms, "the more general power of Catholicism as a highly effective means of protection against the spiritual dangers immanent in the landscape (Allerton 2009: 280)." Yet, in Manggarai, Catholicism has showed limits in its capacity to engage with the agentive aspect of the land (Allerton 2009: 285) and people must hold rituals to answer its demands (ibid: 281-282). Allerton also observes that, "Catholicism does not acknowledge the (beneficial) agency of the land itself (2009: 282)." It may be implied in this statement that the Christian landscape is "disenchanted" (Jorgensen 1993 in Robbins 1995: 219). Where the Urapmin (according to Robbins) could take "advantage" to this "disenchantment" (1995: 219), for

people in Manggarai, it clearly sets the limits of the capacity of Catholicism, as outsider (Allerton 2009: 278), to ensure the fertility and growth of their Land.

In Tasiriki, the situation is quite different from that exposed by Robbins and in fact, by Allerton. The co-existence of Christian faith with the pervasive presence of spirits is not at all mutually exclusive. Neither are they consciously kept separate, as in the case of the Manggarai. Certainly, they do not constitute a source of moral dilemma as reported for the Urapmin. This is so for several reasons. First, as I have shown in Chapter 5, God, in Tasiriki, is understood as the very source of growth, and as such, people's faith has much to do with the fertility and productivity of land and place. Yet the realm of spirits, like in Manggarai and for the Urapmin, is most pregnant in people's life and environment, and is tied to kinship, ancestors, and the history of place. Indeed, the importance of the relation between kinship and land has much to do with people's relation to spirits and ancestors inhabiting place.

In the bush, ancestors and spirits are everywhere; "*oli raon yumi*", "*oli lukluk yumi*"¹⁸⁹ and "respectful deportment" (Mondragón, n.d.) towards them is important so as to avoid their reactions, potentially the cause of disease and death. Hence, people's "misbehaviour" or lack of respect towards ancestors and spirits are responsible for their reactions which manifest as illness. As such, according to Thomas, if a person has broken a taboo or done something which insulted or harmed the spirits, she will soon be informed by the spirits themselves in her dreams during the night. He gave an example of an offense, like cutting the snake ropes (vines) which are regarded as being the dwelling of spirits. If then one comes back with a headache, this can be interpreted as a sign that one has done something wrong or offended spirits. Some spirits, however, are intrinsically dangerous. These are the spirits who have died "by blood" and therefore have blood continuously dripping from their body; if one receives a drop, then disease and maybe death will follow. Thus these relations with non-humans are tied

¹⁸⁹ (They are all around us), (they are looking at us).

to the history of kinship and landscape where past deaths linger in the environment and can affect the living.

While prayers have an influence in decreasing the power of place (see section on the power of the church below), it does not exempt one with the necessity to pay attention to relationships with these spirits. Moreover, as I detail below, some relations escape the realm of church and faith altogether and thus fully pertain to a domain which requires *rispek* (respect), which is what people call *kastom*.

While Robbins (1995: 218) observes that Urapmin's claim that, "everything has its own father clearly contradicts the Christian belief that Father God made everything and left it to human use", Thomas's similar claim that there is God, whose garden is the world and who works everything while people are sleeping, should contradict his next statement, i.e. that there is a small spirit in everything. Yet for Thomas this is not contradictory, one statement does not preclude the other. While God is behind all things, this does not preclude that everything, in a sense, is spirited.

This "spirited" environment becomes most apparent at the time of death and illness as the boundaries are blurred between people and the world of the dead. At the time of death, the world of people and that of the dead and spirits becomes much more porous. Boundaries are blurred and people are thought to be much more "permeable" (Hess 2009) and feel much more vulnerable. Special care and many restrictions are imposed upon going to the bush especially for those who are considered as very close kin, like siblings or people of the same matriline.

In case of death, as people flow in to gather around the dead person, very few people flow out. It is as though the dead person acted as a centripetal force, bringing all kin and relatives together deserting the bush left to the spirits who are out to welcome the dead person, now buried in the bush. For the next ten days, where the dead person makes her way

out from the world of the living to that of the dead, people eat and pray daily together at the house of the dead person. Despite the rumours going around about all the possible causes of the person's death, people, during such times, act as one. The commensality and the act of praying closely knit the living together and keep the boundaries between living and dead while assisting the dead person in her transition from one world to another. Indeed, all the different churches take turns to lead the prayer sessions at the house of the deceased person while all contribute food and meat that are eaten together.

7.2.1.1 Restoring health: *kastom* and faith

In times of illness, when people have diagnosed the person to be prey of a spirit, they usually resort to a kastom man or a *kleva* (clever), *sisiro* in vernacular. *Sisiro* means a person who “see-knows” (*luksave* in Bislama) what is “holding you”. These men are able to see the spirit and can battle with him in dreams. The *sisiro* is invited to stay at the place of the afflicted and will be given food and shelter (see also Vienne 1981-1982: 572 for a description of healing practices in the Banks). The *kastom man* called to stay in Tasiriki when Thomas's mother fell sick was Christian. During the week of his stay, the sons could not go to the bush to work. This was part of a number of restrictions which were imposed mostly on her sons. As with death, illness of one person renders all close relatives, in these cases, the children who are “one blood”, vulnerable to the actions of the spirits.

On the last evening of the presence of the *sisiro*, the PWMU women gathered at Thomas's mother's home to pray. The women had gathered in the “sleeping house” while all men were gathered in the kitchen waiting for the praying session to finish. After the parable, where Jesus heals a man already half-dead had been read (see Kolshus 1999: 162), there followed a quite intense session of praying and singing, then food was given to Thomas's mother. After the session, all the women left and stayed outside the kitchen while the *sisiro*

gave a speech upon his departure. He said that he had done what he could do and now his work was done. He refused to be given any money because what he had done/accomplished was God's gift and this could not be transacted.

Hence, in the case of illness, people mobilise the capacities of men who have the ability to see and "fight" spirits therefore having an "immediate" efficacy while also resorting to the power of prayers. In a sense, the Christian *sisiro* embodies people's conceptions of spirits and God as not being antithetical. Thomas, after describing the whole process by which a *sisiro* heals a person, concluded that now people tend to resort to prayers. I will return to this last point when I discuss the power of the church.

The causes of death and illness can be multiple and, while it is true that it is always related to something "spiritual" or "intentional", in contrast to what Eriksen's quote suggests in Tasiriki people usually develop all sorts of different hypotheses to account for the occurrence of death or disease.¹⁹⁰ The "objective" reason is always secondary as it were; the concrete manifestation of an effective "intention". In case a diagnosis is impossible to establish, or Western medicine has failed to operate, the "intentional" act becomes even more evident. Most often, illness and death are traced back variously to acts of sorcery, *nakaemas*, a man's repeated exposure to his wife's menses, the doings of malevolent spirits, or God's calling. Except for the last hypothesis pertaining to God's will and therefore beyond one's agency, the other reasons have much to do with a person's relations with her kin as well as spirits. In both cases, it shows that boundaries have been crossed or that what had to be contained was not. People's death "by blood" is, besides sorcery and "blood spirits", most often associated with the contaminating effect of women's menstruations. What people actually referred to when using the expression "death by blood" were any accidental or sudden occurrences of death.

¹⁹⁰ See also Jolly (1994: 164). The author notes that "no death is seen as natural by the Sa speakers, all death is attributed to some nefarious power, like evil spirits, sorcerers, or as a consequence of breaking a taboo."

Hence, the sudden death of a man in his thirties during my fieldwork illustrates the point in that it triggered all the hypotheses described above. During that time Thomas thus became much more nervous and vocal about the danger of menstrual blood towards men.

In the two following sections I develop the problems of “pollution” and containment. I use the word “pollution” as a contamination of what should be kept separate. Jolly (2001: 187) notes that, “menstrual flows [...] are not seen as defiling or impure.” According to Jolly (ibid.), “the menstrual flow is not a pollution but more amenable to open the roads of the spirits and render [the women] vulnerable.” Indeed menstrual blood can be regarded as a kind of “spiritual power” which, when not contained, present a danger to not only the male body but also the gardens – which could be to a certain extent be considered as analogous to a male body. This is what Taylor (2008: 165) develops when the author considers the notion of *sabuga* – “sacred restriction” for Sia Raga people. *Sabuga* is not restricted to menstruating women or women in the post-partum state, but can also be applied to men who have engaged in pig-killing and thus associated with processes of ancestral regeneration. In Tasiriki, there is no explicit association between women’s menstruation and the opening of the road of spirits. Neither is there an explicit relation made with the regenerative power of women. Yet, women are the ones through which “blood” circulates from generation to generation, from the mother’s body to the child’s, thus contained. However during post-partum or menstruation, this blood is not contained anymore, and women speak of the menstruations as *rabis blad* (rubbish blood), hence a blood which can potentially have undesirable effects.

Moreover, the fact that menstruating women are said to be sick and used to stay in “menstruating houses” denotes a potential connection with “spirits” who are usually the ones with whom “illness” is associated. It is manifest that “women’s blood” is “powerful” and that it presents a threat to men, fathers and sons. In Tasiriki, this threat of women’s menstruating blood is much more emphasized for the gardens than towards men and it is really in times of

crisis, when death has occurred, that these fears become much more conspicuous and are expressed. I therefore keep the word “pollution”, not necessarily in the sense of something “impure”, but rather something powerful which has spilt out of its containment. In that regard, the *kava* manipulated by men poses a similar threat and pollution towards women when not contained; an aspect I discuss below.

I first consider women’s menses and then I turn to *kava*. In both cases, health is at stake and in both cases it makes apparent relational aspects operating outside of the church. In the case of women menses, one can even say that Christianity has actually contributed to foster what people see as vital problems.

7.2.1.2 The danger of women’s menstruation for men: problems of visibility and containment

I have already mentioned the various “taboos” associated to women’s menses in the chapter concerned with the work in the gardens due to their “drying” and thus lethal action on crops. People expressed these through a comparison establishing the equivalence of yams and men where both were endangered by the “smell” of the menstruations. Like the “smell”, the power of women’s blood when released is very diffuse. It leaves traces and tends to endure. This is not only the case for menstruations “pollution” or “power”. As it is shown below, the same problems arise with *kava*. Indeed, once released, the power of the thing released “accumulate” in the environment thus rendering the bodies vulnerable. Moreover, pollution is not only propagated through bodily emanations but also through ingestion and contamination of containers.

Men and women in Tasiriki tend to shower in the same place. By Thomas’s house, on the other side of the road, there is a tap with a cement base. The tap, when it works, is not only the place to fetch water but it is also used as a shower when people come back from the gardens or before going to the church on Sundays. Usually, people just sit on the cement

block, all dressed-up and shower there, under the tap, men and women alike. This didn't seem to pose any problem until a man suddenly died "by blood", it was said, and the subsequent suspicion that women's menstrual blood could potentially be the cause of this death. This changed the potency of the block of cement from "inoffensive" to potentially "lethal".¹⁹¹

One day, during the period of mourning, tired of carrying the basin around from the tap to the house, I took the initiative to bring the dishes directly to the tap and do the washing there. Instead of leaving the cups in the basin, I put them on the cement. Thomas had observed this and, when I brought back the shiny clean dishes, he was very angry at what I had done. For him, since women had sat there, the cement was contaminated. The cups were discarded, thrown in the rubbish hole and new ones were taken out.

Before, when women had their menses, they used to be contained. In some villages, there were menstruation houses while in others there was a special room in the house which allowed women to segregate themselves. Only one of such houses remains in Tasiriki. A menstruating woman was visible because she did not cook on the same fire or isolated herself, besides not going to the garden. This is not so anymore. Jolly (2001: 194) notes that, "there is a pervasive concern in contemporary Melanesia about novel threat to the body, danger for its health and growth in this new epoch, and nervous, deeply gendered concerns about what we may loosely call "the malaise of modernity". Jolly also observes that, "Melanesian traditionalists in many sites past and present see the disruption of ancestral order, the removal of taboos and sexual segregation, the end of male cults and conversion to Christianity as having undesirable corporeal effects (2001: 194-195)."

In Tasiriki, I do not think that these gendered considerations are tied to, "the malaise of modernity", but rather to the realisation, on the part of Christians, that Christianity may have its limits in managing some relations and maintaining them in specific forms considered vital

¹⁹¹ See also Hess (2009: 49) about men in Vanua Lava avoiding the water from the village's communal system as the pipes run under ground and women step constantly over them.

for proper health and growth.¹⁹² Like the protocol and taboos necessary to the proper growth of the gardens, relations between people necessitates taking certain forms. Boundaries must be maintained. The notion of *rispek* then tends to become central or essential to preserve the possibility of society. Thomas acknowledged that with the missionaries, people abandoned some of their ways because they were told that medicine could cure all ailments and that these taboos were in a way “obsolete”. Yet, people continue to die and be ill.

Although people in Tasiriki may express sometimes a feeling of “nostalgia” for the ways of before they do not advocate a return to ways that they had gradually left behind as Christians. However, during my stay, people became increasingly concerned with the way girls dressed. Young girls tend more and more to wear basketball trousers. While it was not an issue at the beginning of my stay, at one point, the elders decided that this was not proper and that girls circulating in the village should always wear a skirt on top of these trousers.¹⁹³ To wear such trousers in front of one’s brothers was also seen as disrespectful. There was a sense that it was the blurring of boundaries and a lack of visibility that made people anxious, as though the sidedness of things was being lost. In the case of the trousers, one may say that it was a problem of sameness which was at stake.¹⁹⁴ As noted by Taylor, in Vanuatu, “productive exchange takes place across a meaningful space of difference, of “sides” (2010: 292).” In this

¹⁹² See also Taylor 2010 and M. Douglas (1995:105) who notes that, “pollution arises when form is affected”.

¹⁹³ Hess (2009: 48) notes that in Vanua Lava the space between women’s legs is taboo. The exposure of skin and shape is proscribed. While in Vanua Lava, this is associated to the necessity to deemphasise women’s sexuality, in Tasiriki, it was rather thought that since women had their whole body covered, especially the breast, this had actually contributed to increase men’s desire. Moreover, according to Thomas, the habit of covering the breast, in use since the arrival of the mission, had contributed to make them grow faster. While the necessity to wear skirts was also associated to the fact that the space between women’s legs is taboo, it was only in front of one’s brothers or when walking through the village that girls had to wear skirts. Young girls often took off their skirts while in the bush.

¹⁹⁴ Hess (2009: 49) notes that by wearing trousers and boots, a woman (in this case a researcher) could achieve a more male or neutral gendered habitus. Because she was not perceived as female, the space between her legs held no danger; Hess to note though that the fact that she was not local and only present for a short time may have contributed to people accepting her “male” behaviour. This is complex, not clear-cut and often context specific and not devoid of confusion. This not only recalls Taylor’s discussion about *kava* and the ambiguities generated by the different identities a woman may assume; in that case the need to show respect to a *Bigfala woman* and offering *kava* to pay respect thus, on one hand going against the fact that only men drink *kava*, while on the other acknowledging her “maleness”, the whole thing creating confusion (Taylor 2010: 285). Jean Tarisesei (in Taylor 2010: 285) conclusion was that, “Today there are many changes taking place and we cannot stay the same all the time, but we try to make the ways of the past – the good ways, all the respect – not get lost.”

latter case, one can say that there was a necessity to visibly gender girls so that the proper distance could be kept between them and their brothers. The interpretation given herein is mine. The fact that the elders took the decision, but that it was grounded in gendered aspects attributed to *kastom*, could also be read as a Christian conception of gender being grafted upon *kastom*. Though I am aware of the extensive and pertinent literature on the influence of Christianity's patriarchal gender order on women in Vanuatu (Jolly 1997, 2000, Douglas 2002, Taylor 2008), it is not an aspect that I consider and develop herein.

As for the anxiety around menstruations, this might not only be a problem of visibility, and therefore the possibility of avoidance, but it also points to the problem of containment. Containment is an important condition for the possibility of producing and engendering as well as controlling power. Anything excessively powerful and thus dangerous is always contained if not segregated, or surrounded by restrictions which prevent a harmful "contamination" and this is so in many different contexts; like the containment or isolation of powerful men (Rio 2007: 128; Taylor 2008: 168), the restrictions for women during the making and dyeing of powerful mats (Bolton 2003: 130), or the avoidance someone may be subjected to after having visited "taboo" places (Hess 2009: 131), are but a few examples.

We might well consider again Jolly's suggestion about the proximity between menstruating women and ancestral powers to understand the anxieties felt by men. In the time of death or illness, people are contained so as to limit their proximity with spirits and restore blurred boundaries necessary to the health and growth of place, likewise, the containment of women at the time of menstruation was a way to contain a "leak of power", or to borrow the expression used by Jolly (2001: 181), "to block the road opened to the spirits".

In today's Tasiriki, people feel that everything is leaking everywhere. *Kava*, a substance traditionally manipulated and drunk by men, is another example threatening, in this case, women's health and their fertility. The threat comes from two different corners of

people's life. One concerns the production of cash-cropping and women's involvement in this work thus bringing them close to a substance that threatens their health. The other concerns the lack of care with which young men dispose of *kava* and its wastes which contribute to saturate the environment with the "power of *kava*" and thus, again, affect women's health.

7.2.1.3 *Kava* as threat to women's health: work and carelessness as culprits

"Women can't drink kava because kava is woman and a woman can't take back a woman."
(Taylor 2010: 291)

In Vanuatu, *kava* drinking is traditionally associated with men and the *nakamal* (what used to be men's house). Although *kava* drinking used to be strongly, "connected to social and cosmological configurations that inculcate[d] ideal relations of gender, generation, rank and ancestry" (Taylor 2010: 279), it is now widely consumed as the national drink throughout the many *kava* bars found mostly in towns. This national, and international, urban market translates, at the village level, as the possibility to increase one's cash income. Therefore, many people in Tasiriki engage in the production of *kava* as cash cropping.

Kava is also consumed locally by men who gather together after a day of work, prepare *kava* and then drink sometimes late into the night. The drink is known for its mild narcotic, hypnotic, diuretic and muscle relaxant properties (Taylor 2010: 280). As Thomas puts it, *kava* has the power to make you quiet and to stop excessive thinking (quiet one's worries). On the other hand, drunk excessively, it is said to contribute to laziness (see also Bolton 2003: 88 fn.10). It is said, and proved to be, that people who drink too much *kava* sleep late into the day and are slow getting to work.

Kava, *malou* in the vernacular of Tasiriki, is associated with women; "*kava hemi woman*" (*kava* is woman). *Kava*, like women, is considered to "*mekem pis*" (make peace), and as such, like a woman who is sent to the family with whom one is in conflict, *kava* must be

present during ceremonies to, “open the door for relationships”. Likewise, as elsewhere in Vanuatu and as shown by Taylor’s quote above, women are not supposed to drink *kava*. According to Thomas, before, women did not drink *kava*, “*blong yu no save drink yu wan*” (because you cannot drink yourself) (see also Taylor’s quote above). Not only, could women not drink it but also touch and pass over it.

Yet, according to Thomas, because *kava* has become a means to earn money, after independence, the taboos associated with the plant have been less and less respected and as *kava* became “money”, the health of women started to be affected. While Taylor (2010: 293) is concerned with the gender issues related to *kava* drinking by women and the implications and insights these convey in terms of, “the relationship between *kastom* and modernity in discourse, gendered identity and embodied practices [...], [the latter] emerging from the complex articulation of these important sites of socio-political contest with more sedimented cosmological understandings regarding fertility, sacred power and the nature of sexed bodies”, the concern, in Tasiriki, is not so much about women drinking *kava* – indeed it is rare that women would actually drink *kava* except for medicinal purpose, but more about women engaging with it or being surrounded by its non-contained power. However, it echoes the issues pointed out by Taylor in regards to the effects it has upon women’s fertility, aspects of sacred power and the nature of sexed bodies (2010: 293).

The effects of *kava* on women are many. Some of them are the same as on a man’s body yet the fact that, “*kava blong woman hemi tabu we tabu*” (*kava* for women is “extremely” taboo), its effects have direct consequences on her “productive” or “generative” body. The effects of drinking *kava* for women described to me are indeed “monstrous” and all “counter-productive”; the breasts are said to become so big that they fall to the knees, because drinking *kava* reduce one’s appetite, the body becomes deadly small, the skin falls apart and the lips are white (spirit-like). If pregnant, it is said that the womb squeezes the foetus and

that the children are born disabled. The contact with, or passing over *kava*, is usually associated with excessive swelling, heaviness and back pains, an ailment called *jajamana* in the vernacular. The only remedy is to bathe in the sea or to eat “dry” food that is things that have only been roasted. The salt and the dried food counteract the excessive “wetness” and associated ailments caused by the *kava*. It may be interesting to note that Jolly (2001: 181) mentions that after birth, mother and child bathe in salt so as to neutralize the state of sacred danger and bring them back closer to the world of daily sociality. This may suggest, in the case of *kava*, that the symptoms associated with it denote behaviours which are, in a way, “a-social”.

Kava in Tasiriki crystallizes a number of issues. The first one is related to the fact that the many commitments people have in regards to money have deleterious effects in forcing people to ignore, at their expense, relations with “powerful” forces. Women are not necessarily happy working with *kava*, yet they have little choice. The “downfall” of *kava*, from a sacred plant to a cash crop, suggests the “downfall” of the relations that it embodies.¹⁹⁵ The consequence is seen as dire to the health and productivity of place despite the monetary wealth it brings.

The other problem is the handling of *kava* by young men. Women regularly complain that young people do not take care nor dispose properly of *kava*’s wastes, throwing them anywhere. These young men also borrow dishes from the house to prepare their *kava* instead of having their own. The result is that *kava*’s wastes pile up and accumulate in the surrounding environment of the village slowly penetrating women’s bodies with heaviness and pain. Mishandling *kava* might be, in a way, a mishandling of the relations with women.

Again here, people are faced with the problem of a lack of containment and the subsequent consequences. *Kava* and women’s menstruation are two examples which structure

¹⁹⁵ Maybe the word “downfall” here denotes a vocabulary that may sound very Christian. What I mean here by “downfall” is a kind of “deconsecration” of a sacred and powerful plant into a commodity.

relations lying beyond that of the church but vital for the health and growth of the place. *Kava* is spirited and should not be handled without *rispek* lest people suffer consequences. These two examples thus show a conception of sociality that falls beyond or besides the Christian sociality and the power of the church. Yet these aspects are of importance if one considers their implications in terms of people's health, thus, to a certain extent, possibly positing a threat to the possibility of proper growth. What they tend to reveal then is that there exists specific relations, outside the domain of the church, which should be maintained in proper forms to prevent stunting growth. Thus, the paradox one can note here, in the case of *kava*, is that, being as much a source of monetary wealth and a threat to women, it tends to embody the very ambivalence of people's position in regards to monetary wealth; something that is sought while being intrinsically dangerous.

7.2.2 Pelmoli and Tasiriki: kin's forgiveness and unblocking the road to the future

The settlement of Pelmoli was cleared by the beginning of the 1970s by Elder Soho William and his family.¹⁹⁶ This happened after they had left (or rather fled) from Tasiriki, because a member of their family had "stolen" a woman from Tasiriki. The two villages are close geographically and in terms of kinship.¹⁹⁷ The two places, both Presbyterian, often organize joint thanksgiving ceremonies. The pastor for the district, a man from Ambrym, is hosted by Pelmoli. People from Pelmoli now live on the ground which used to be occupied by the Vulua people and some claim Vulua descent.

The Vulua's history is also tied to that of the mission at Cape Lisburn. It is said that the first missionary, Reverend Goodwill, was chased away by the Vulua. In the 1960s, some of the Vulua were settled near the plantation of a Welsh planter called Lewis (see also Guiart

¹⁹⁶ Elder Soho William is not from the area. His mother is from Santo but his father is from the Banks, Mota Lava. He came to Tasiriki to join the church in the 1950s.

¹⁹⁷ Women from Tasiriki are married in Pelmoli, yet few women of Pelmoli married men in Tasiriki. Kiki is the only woman from Pelmoli married in Tasiriki at the moment and she is actually from the *nasara* of Vuna-Ur on the other side of the Tira River.

1958 and Chapter 1). After several conflicts with this planter, they had to flee the place and it is said that it is for this reason that they took refuge in Tasiriki. They stayed there for 10 years.

The people of Pelmoli are very much involved in activities pertaining to the church.¹⁹⁸ Their Church building is named the “Vulua Goodwill Memorial Church”, thereby claiming their filiation with both the Vulua and with the first missionary who set foot in South West Santo. Unlike in Tasiriki, their church is a finished building. During the ceremony organized for the retirement of Elder Soho William it was said that, like Moses, he had opened a road to the foundation of a promised land on Pelmoli’s grounds.

During my stay, the people of Pelmoli asked Tasiriki whether a ceremony of reconciliation could be held so as to “straighten” their relations with them. Indeed, according to Thomas, if the current inhabitants of Pelmoli had been able to stay together as a group and reproduce, it was thanks to the hospitality of Tasiriki, yet this had never been acknowledged publicly. Moreover, they had left Tasiriki after having wronged the very people who had saved their lives.

A debate was held in the church after the service to define the contours and content of the ceremony. While the people of Pelmoli had asked for a reconciliation ceremony and a shaking of hands, Thomas suggested that it should rather be organized as an acknowledgement ceremony, *serupe* (thank you) in vernacular.

Thomas insisted on the necessity to call the ceremony “acknowledgement” and not “reconciliation” because, according to him, the latter implied that the two parties were at odds with each other.¹⁹⁹ If there was to be “reconciliation”, this would only concern the two families involved in the conflict over the woman. As a whole, Pelmoli was coming to say

¹⁹⁸ In July 2011, they received a group of the “Youth Challenge” for three weeks. It was a group of a dozen of young people, ni-Vanuatuan and Australians, who came to “teach” local people things related to the church, development and the environment.

¹⁹⁹ Thomas used the English word in this context.

thank you and acknowledge the fact that they had been able to survive and endure as a united group thanks to the protection and shelter they had received from Tasiriki.

Thomas made this point repeatedly. It was also decided that they would acknowledge this in the church before God to show their sincerity and that a “*smol kakaē*” would complement their acknowledgement (their speech) and thus makes it *heavier*, “*kakaē hemi mekem toktok i hevi*” (the food makes the speech heavy).

Why were people only asking for a ceremony now? Thomas contended that for all these years they had been looking ahead, but realizing that they were still stuck now they were looking back.²⁰⁰ The road had to be cleared by looking at their past actions and mending them. And that was why, Thomas thought, they were asking for the ceremony to be held. The *serupe* ceremony, as it was finally called, was to be held on the 13th of October 2011, but the chief postponed it.

Pelmoli’s demand and Thomas interpretation of their demand evidence several important points. First, the demand from Pelmoli is that of “reconciliation” and, as I develop in the next section, the themes of “reconciliation”, as well as “forgiveness”, are important aspects of social life. Conflicts and disputes arise all the time, if not every day, and this goes against people’s expectations of achieving “peace”.²⁰¹ Reconciliations are also important technologies to initiate the possibility of renewal through leaving the old behind and starting anew (see next section and also Chapter 6 on renewal).

Yet, Thomas opposed the idea of “reconciliation”. For him, if something needed to be mended between Tasiriki and Pelmoli it was a lack of recognition on the part of Pelmoli towards the nurturing that Tasiriki had provided. What Thomas was asking was a

²⁰⁰ It was suggested that despite Pelmoli’s efforts they had never managed to have people securing a job within the administration or with the government.

²⁰¹ Rousseau (2012: 208 fn.2) notes, after Taylor’s material on Sia Raga concept of *tamata* (peace) that, “in Vanuatu, [peace] is perhaps more closely tied also to the ideas of balance and reciprocity, enacted in exchange [...]” This is very much what seems to also be at stake when people say that in case of conflicts between two families women are sent as vector of peace. The acknowledgement ceremony called by Thomas may very much be inscribed in a similar understanding of peace as re-establishing balance and reciprocity between people.

thanksgiving ceremony, the acknowledgement of care and nurture without which Pelmoli would not have been able to grow. Hence, in Thomas's perspectives, two things were at stake and being dealt with in the ceremony, the "straightening" of their relation to their "Father God"²⁰² and the recognition of the nurture provided by Tasiriki, thus putting Tasiriki almost in a position of "fatherhood" towards Pelmoli. The fact that the ceremony should be held in the church while involving an offering of food to the people of Tasiriki points to this double dimension. For the people of Pelmoli, if one takes the point of view of Thomas, unblocking the road necessitates two actions; first, acknowledging a kinship dimension, that of nurture, and then exposing one's heart to God.

Thus, kin, spirits and God can all be source of blockages. To re-open the roads, many routes are possible depending on the source. Moreover, on the path to growth, if organized Christianity can be considered as one of the main roads (Taylor 2008: 77), another valued road is access to administrative and governmental power, yet the key still lies in the hand of God.

7.3 The politics of reconciliation: pig's blood and Christ's blood

"§17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new. §18 And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation. §19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation."

Corinthians II: 5, 17-19 (King James Version)

7.3.1 The ministry of reconciliation

This passage of the New Testament from the Pauline Epistles was read during the service on December 11th 2011 before a sermon focused on the necessity to forgive. All the elders, from Pelmoli and Tasiriki, as well as the pastor, were present. A man I had not seen previously was

²⁰² It was suggested that the blockage could have come from further away and was tied to the misbehaviour of the Vulua ancestors towards the Reverend Goodwill (see above). This offense towards a missionary is assimilated to an offense to God and therefore the need to mend this relation too.

standing in a row with all his family. It happened that this man lived in Luganville and had stayed in Tasiriki earlier in his life. He was there to be reintroduced as an elder and started his speech with a *mea culpa* about having done his work as an elder only “half/half”. He thanked the church, Lulu Varkiki and the Rev. Bowie who had brought the Good News allowing Tasiriki to become a place of the church. He was thankful to Chief Sara for having been able to use the land and to have hosted his family and thus saved their lives.²⁰³ He further apologized for leaving Tasiriki for almost two decades, not honouring his obligations and thus blocking the relations with Tasiriki. He then apologized at length in the name of all his ancestors and promised in front of the pastor to bring assistance, once reintroduced as an elder, to the work for the church despite living in Luganville. The ceremony ended with the shaking of hands of the whole family by the elders. They then stood in a circle, joining hands, praying over the reconciliation.

It seems that the church has become an important locus for reconciliation and thus the opening of roads and renewal. It is also the place where the acknowledgement of people’s filiation to the early missionaries hence their church, as well as their kinship roles, are the most often staged. As I noted earlier, in Tasiriki, conflicts tend to arise regularly. Usually, the first to be sought to solve these conflicts are close kin, then the elders of the church or the chief, the last resort being the pastor, considered and regarded as the most powerful (see below).

Not all reconciliations take place in the church though. In some cases, settling the disputes may require the killing of a pig. I have discussed the use of pigs, especially in the context of the *wolwol*, the *kastom* marriage, where pigs, dead and alive are involved (see Chapter 5). Pigs close and open roads and this is so in many circumstances.

²⁰³ The Chief Sara is the first chief of Tasiriki from the Kererara *Nasara* after Moli Peipei had died (*Moli Peipei* means Chief Book. He was the first chief of Tasiriki once the place had become mission ground. “Book” refers here to the Bible). Chief Sara was chief until 1952 (date of his death).

7.3.2 “*Blad blong pig hemi klerem rod*”: the power of pig’s blood²⁰⁴

Pigs are important throughout Vanuatu, yet their status is slightly different from one place to another, depending on their position in the ceremonial economy. In some places, like for the Sa speakers of Pentecost, pigs are regarded as quasi-human and pig sociality is thought to persist into the after-life since pigs are reputed to have souls like humans (Jolly 1994: 174). This quasi-equation between pigs and men is not so explicit in Tasiriki despite the important role they play in marriage.

Also, as I noted in Chapter 5, they are raised and nurtured with utmost care and attention. Like the yams, children, and to some extent the church, the relations that they crystallize as wealth, potential for growth and prolongation of life through reproduction, are commensurate (Strathern 1988: 159-160, Jolly 1994: 80).

Pigs are mediators, opening and closing roads. Rio (2007: 187) interested by the tension he found between the gift and exchange in Ambrym’s society, defines the gift as something which promotes the giving of life, growth and opening roads. Live pigs, alongside care and mats, belong in this context to the technology of gift. Conversely, “prestations” involving the killing of pigs and money make out the counter-gift to signify something that is, “reciprocated, finished, materialised, and settled (Rio 2007: 187).” In Tasiriki, there is a similar distinction made between live and dead pigs, but these are not necessarily associated with a process that distinguishes gifts from exchange.

I am concerned mostly with what the killing of pigs does and this has much to do with the power associated to the release of their blood. As mentioned above, pigs are most visible at the time of *wolwol* when both dead and live pigs are present. On this occasion, as I have noted, what the pig’s blood does is to wash away all that is not “clean”. In the context of

²⁰⁴ “The blood of pigs clears the road”, Eliane, Vuna-Ur, December 2011.

marriage, it is a matter of settling all that is not “straight” and could potentially be a source of conflicts between the two families.

Pig’s blood can thus be regarded as a substance whose power is to “erase” former relations so that new ones can start. In the case of adoption for example, the killing of the pig at once seals the new relations, and blocks the old ones. With the pig-killing it is a transfer and a translation of the configuration of relations from one family to the other. The pig’s blood ensures that the prerogatives of the former kin are transferred to the adopting kin thus quieting any claim from the former kin.

This capacity of closing and opening roads by releasing pig’s blood is a process which is used to manage the relations not only between people but also between people and spirits. Therefore, when removing a restriction (taboo) or intervening in places where the spirit of the dead person lies, a pig has to be killed to block the road of the dead and open that of the living. Hence, for example, in Tasiriki, people have started to put cement on graves as a sign of care and respect, thus “tying” the dead to a specific place and solidifying its presence. This is understood as a mark of respect. The grave is usually fenced and the cement is put on the grave only two years after the burial when it is said that the ground has solidified again. To enter the fenced area, a pig has to be killed so that the spirit of the dead won’t take offense for the intrusion.

The killing of a pig is also an important aspect in fixing relations after a conflict. According to Thomas, once the blood runs between the two persons, the cause of the conflict is finally erased, it cannot resurface. It is important not to step over (to cross) the road opened by the pig’s blood otherwise the two persons will be engaged in conflicts with each other for the rest of their life. So it is the pig’s blood running that is considered to be effective in repairing, even washing contentious relations. Pig’s blood straightens things and joins two conflicting parties by opening a clear space in between, putting the respect back in the middle.

One can say that the flowing of pig's blood is equivalent or analogous to the flowing of relations.

The act of killing pigs is also an act of establishing one's power, like in the case of grade-taking ceremonies or the establishment of chieftainship (see below). Again the change in status of a person acts by a transfer of power which is performed by the pig-killing. This is a "transfer" of power which takes place by sacrificing the power of production of collective work onto one person. Indeed, the person's new status is established upon the destruction of the production of a collective work of accumulation. The change of name which accompanies such transfer is important. The pig killing changes the person, she has weight and her name is "heavy". In Bolton's words (2003: 148), she, "becomes a person of greater substance, worthy of respect".²⁰⁵ Again, the act of killing pig performs an "erasure" of the former relations while establishing new ones through the change of status.

7.3.3 The power of Christ's blood

"§9 But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. §10 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. §11 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."

Romans: 5, 9-11 (King James Version)

In a conversation I had with Thomas where he explained the effect of pig's blood, he made an analogy with Christ's blood saying that, in *kastom*, the effect of pig's blood could be regarded as performing a similar effect as that of Christ's blood. Yet, according to Thomas, the capacity of pig's blood is not and cannot be as powerful as that of the Christ.

The killing of a pig, as practiced within *kastom*, is for people to witness that the situation has changed, that the road between the two parties has been cleared. Yet the sin

²⁰⁵ Bolton in this case is speaking about a woman's change in status upon dyeing a *singo* mat. In Ambae, *singo* are powerful mats which enter in the ceremony of *huhuru* whereby women acquire a higher status.

present in the heart of the one who is sacrificing the pig can only be washed by faith in Christ. Thus, for Thomas, an animal cannot wash or clear people's sins or heart, and this, for him, while not diminishing the importance of pig-killing, is where its limit lies.²⁰⁶

This statement establishes the respective position of *kastom* and church in Tasiriki. They act at different levels and thus are both necessary. Reconciliation can happen/ be staged in the church (see above) but this does not necessarily diminish the importance of pigs. As occurred in the case of Thomas's requirement that the people of Pelmoli, besides pronouncing a thanksgiving speech in the church, also bring food to add weight to their speech. Likewise, the act of killing one's pig, one's wealth, has a weight, that a speech, even in the face of God, or a shaking of hands, do not have. The act of reciprocal nurture and the incorporation of food may be what that gives the "*smol kakaē*" its full weight.

One could say that the killing of pig is for all to see while one's faith is only for God to judge. There also transpires a difference in the efficacious temporalities and visibility of *kastom* and church. The killing of a pig is powerful in its overt immediacy; it is for all to see. By the materiality of the death, the destruction and sacrifice of one's wealth, the person does something to straighten the strained relations. In the church, while the person also publicly acknowledges her wrong-doings,²⁰⁷ as far as the person's intention or that of God is concerned, things remain much more covert and uncertain. In the first case, the relations are straightened right away and this is seen as independent from the person's consciousness or sincerity of heart; these latter aspects are left to her relation to God, and this, people cannot see.

²⁰⁶ This touches upon aspects of morality and consciousness brought about by Christianity going beyond matters of policing relations and the social. These aspects have been much debated within the anthropology of Christianity (see the introduction in Cannell 2006) and would be worth of due consideration in further research.

²⁰⁷ "hemi mas admit hemi mekem wan samting i no stret"

7.4 The respective power of the church and *kastom*

The thing that struck me during my stay in Tasiriki was the disparity between the state of the *nakamal* (= the common house or the chief's house) and that of the church. The *nakamal* was falling apart, so much so that it was not considered safe to gather the whole village there to eat the Christmas meal. A year after I had left Tasiriki, I spoke with Thomas who told me that the *nakamal* had finally be repaired and built anew. Yet, the impetus for doing so came from the pastor who had criticised Tasiriki for the state of its *nakamal*. This might be too much of a temporary situation to elaborate any structured argument around it, yet it seems that it serves as a good metaphor for the current situation in Tasiriki in regards to the respective powers of *kastom* and church.

To introduce this discussion, it is important to get a perspective on the notions of leadership and “power” in the area of South West Santo before the arrival of the mission and since.

7.4.1 Pigs and chiefs

In Tasiriki, the chief, “*jif*” in Bislama, and *moli*, in vernacular, is considered to be the embodiment of “governance” at the village level.²⁰⁸ As I have noted previously, he is the one who is supposed to know all the history of the people established in the village and thus all matters related to land. He has the authority to take decisions over land disputes. The chief also looks after the community and should be able to solve and settle any conflict arising within the village or with the surrounding villages. Finally, he is the one who decides who can stay and settle within the boundaries of the village.

The definition of *jif* in Bislama has been discussed extensively in the ethnographic literature of Vanuatu (Guiart 1958, Allen 1984, Lindstrom 1997, Bolton 1998), especially in

²⁰⁸ “*Hemi olsem gavman blong ples*” (he is like the government of place).

regards to its colonial and post-colonial nature. Indeed the position of “chief” does not necessarily reflect any form of political systems or leadership that existed before the colonisation and the imposition of Western forms of administration and governance (Bolton 1998: 181).

In the late 19th Century, the missionaries and other Europeans looked for leaders. They found influential individuals and described them as chiefs (Bolton 1998: 182). After the Condominium was established in 1906, adopting a system of leadership already introduced by the Presbyterians, the administration created the position of chief who was to represent the community in negotiation with outsiders (Bolton 1998: 183). Lindstrom notes that since Independence in 1980, *jifs* have flourished (1997: 211, see also Hess 2009: 176).²⁰⁹ Yet according to Bubu Rara Tosusu, anyone now can call himself chief, but, in his opinion, a man who has not killed pigs can parade with a name but cannot pretend to any real status and a full legitimacy.

In the northern region of Vanuatu, before the arrival of the mission, leadership had often been associated with, “participation in rituals concerned with status alteration”, or grade-taking; these were not determined by kinship (Bolton 1998: 181). Yet, one’s grade could not guarantee that one’s leadership would last, hence, the graded, to exercise authority, had to establish and maintain legitimacy by other means (Bolton 1998: 182).

Guiart notes that, in South West Santo, there had been a tradition of grade-taking but that the practice had probably been abandoned by the late 1920s except for the area of the Bayalo where the tradition was still alive at the time of his expeditions in the area (1958: 162, 164). Guiart still managed to gather the names of the different titles used by the Navaka, the Bayalo and the Vulua. The titles differed from one group to another triggering Guiart’s interpretation that the practice, because introduced more recently (1958: 166), may not have

²⁰⁹ Hess (2009: 176) notes that in Vanua Lava, “approach to chiefly offices is a very pragmatic one; they are added or withdrawn as need arises.” This not the case in Tasiriki at all where only the village *moli* is considered as *jif*.

been as well anchored as in other neighbouring islands such as Malakula or Ambrym (1958: 164). Besides, the author notes that the system was probably not well adapted in regards to the small size of the settlements. Already, in 1954, the people who had the title of *Moli* were not graded anymore, and their authority was limited to the village. Guiart also notes people's defiance towards any designation of a chief who would represent them.

Today, in Tasiriki, the only titles still known and in use are those of *moli* and *livusi*.²¹⁰ Since the foundation of the mission ground, the title of chief has always been hereditary and therefore tied to kinship. For the son designated as the one taking over his father's title the hand-over happens at the time of the funerals of the former chief. After the funerals are held in the church, as the coffin is taken out, the chief-to-be passes under the coffin of the former chief and takes his title. Since the foundation of Tasiriki as mission ground, there have been four chiefs, three of them from the Kererara *Nasara*.²¹¹

The current chief took over from his father in 1979 following this procedure. But in 2010, a Pig-Killing ceremony was organised and he acquired on that occasion the name of *Moli Sara Noso*.²¹² According to Bubu Rara Tosusu, to become *moli*, a *kole* – a fully grown tusked pig – has to be killed at the end of the ceremony involving altogether 14 to 20 pigs while, if one was to obtain the title of *livusi*, it would mean killing a second *kole*. The number of pigs denotes and demonstrates the capacity of the chief to accumulate and raise pigs. It is only by killing them that he can acquire his title, *moli* or *tai moli*. This last expression means that one man is raised above the others by being put on a step.²¹³ Chiefs proclaim their name, kept secret all along, as they kill the last pig. Only after that does the name acquire any

²¹⁰ Guiart (1958: 164) notes that three titles used to give access to "taboo fires" (*ambutambu*), in vernacular, these were *tari/moli/livusi*, the last two still being used in Tasiriki, one for the village chief (*moli*), the other for the pastor (*livusi*).

²¹¹ Bubu Rara Tosusu compared the generations of chiefs in Tasiriki to that of the British Kings and their numbers (I, II, III etc...) thus affirming the hereditary quality of the title in Tasiriki.

²¹² The first chief of the Kererara *Nasara* was *Moli Sara*, and the second, the father of the current chief, *Moli Noso*.

²¹³ See Bolton (1999) on respect. See also the section on *rispek* below.

weight, i.e. legitimacy. Upon going to another place, the chief will wear the *namele* leaf (*Cycas circinalis*) as a sign of his status, and receive due respect.

That the chief decided to kill a pig after 30 years of “office”, and that his son is preparing to do so when he takes over his father’s position, is significant. This may be tied to a will on the part of Tasiriki, and maybe mostly on the part of the Kererara *Nasara*, to remedy “a lack of *kastom*” that people feel is undermining their place. The lack of *kastom*, in this context, has to do with the potential disruption of kinship relations and problems over land which remains essential for the sociality of Tasiriki to endure. This also touches on the limits of the church in taking care of specific relations and its ability to appropriately maintain relations in the face of conflicts or other threats (see also Eriksen 2008: 120).

7.4.2 The power of the church: pastor as *livusi* and the “pigness” of the church

7.4.2.1 The pastor: high chief of peace

The pastor is called in the vernacular, *livusi*. This is a direct reference to the highest grade used in the area when grade-taking was still practiced.²¹⁴ The reason why the pastor has been given this title has less to do with “leadership”, although this may be one of its consequences, than that of “power”. As noted by Rio (2007: 128-129), grade-taking had much to do with power, and with “spiritual power”. As a man climbed higher in the hierarchy of grades, the closest he got to the power of spirits and ancestors. When he reached the last grade he had to be removed and isolated from the village because he had become too powerful.²¹⁵ The *livusi* then was a man with special power, and so is the pastor.

²¹⁴ In Tasiriki, *livusi* is considered to be a higher grade than that of *moli* and this is consistent with what Guiart notes for the information he collected for the systems of the Bayalo and the Navaka already abandoned in the 1950s. For the Vulua, *moli* seems to have been the highest grade. Guiart notes the high discordances, a fact he attributes to the fact that the systems were very different from one place to another (Guiart 1958: 162-165).

²¹⁵ Rio (2007: 128) notes that, “It is said that these men could do anything they liked. They were almost like spirits [...]” They had control over all social realms of Ambrym life.

Indeed, the pastor is the only one who can perform the sacrament and therefore occupies a specific position between men and God. According to Thomas, the pastor is also like a high chief who has the ability to make peace.²¹⁶ So the pastor is a high chief at the level of the church and his position is higher than that of the chief at the village level (see also Tonkinson 2004: 193). What I describe here is the situation that I observed within the Presbyterian context. The pastor's authority in the church operates at the level of the district (the Session). It is interesting to note that among the reasons given to me to explain the conversion of the Bayalo people to the NTM Church was that they did not want to have a higher authority above them.

Nonetheless, the authority and legitimacy of the *livusi* does not immediately follow from holding the title. This is very much in line with what Bolton (1998, see above) noted about the fact that the title did not mean that one could maintain a long-lasting leadership, or that one's legitimacy and authority was definitive. This was clearly expressed by Thomas who affirmed that if you are highly considered (“*valiu blong yu hemi big wan*”), but you don't behave accordingly, then your name becomes meaningless.

As stated by Thomas, respect exists only in between two sides and it is the respect which keeps the balance. If the respect is driven away (*drivaot*), then one has to bring it back to the place where it belongs (“*putum rispek bak long stret ples blong hem*”). Only then, will the person be considered a chief again. This is as valid for the pastor as it is for the village chief.

It is nonetheless a fact that in Tasiriki, the pastor and the church do have power, both institutionally and spiritually. If in Ranon, Ambrym as noted by Rio (2007: 134), “ceremonial life absorbs all aspects of daily life and [that] every observed activity, be it gardening, cash cropping, working with carvings will be found to be pointing into the ceremonial sphere”,

²¹⁶ “*Pastor hemi olsem wan hae jif blong mekem pis; hae jif long level blong joj; jif blong pis.*”

then one can say that this ceremonial sphere, in Tasiriki, is mostly the church (see Chapters 5, 6 and above). Even that what people call *kastom* ceremonies are “bracketed” by Christian prayers. One could almost say that because these latter ceremonies are involved in the making of place, they also somewhat point indirectly to the church.

It is therefore worth noting that the church is also sought to settle conflicts over land, this usually pertaining to the prerogative of the chief.²¹⁷ Although the church intervenes mostly on a “moral” basis, the pastor is also recognized as a pacifier. On October 2011, after the destruction of gardens due to some conflicts, the pastor gave a sermon based on the Gospel of Matthew 5, where the Apostle recounts the parable of Jesus chasing the merchants from the Temple. This parable is quite commonly used in the sermons in Tasiriki. Usually it serves to stigmatize people’s obsession with money and business and leads to the conclusion that if Tasiriki is indeed to become a holy ground, people should refrain from indulging in chasing after money. However, on that day the message of the parable was taken in a slightly different direction. The pastor extended the theme to problems of property misuses and the necessity to respect people’s land throughout the parish. This extension is significant. It was made explicit that not only should the house of God, the church building, be respected but so should be all lands belonging to the parish, since these too were part of the house of God. The sermon ended with the fact that in the end people would have to be accountable of their deeds when the Last Judgement comes upon them.

Referring to the Last Judgement is quite common (see Chapter 6 and above). And this brings to the fore the temporality of the church. By always ultimately leaving it to God to judge upon people’s actions, the church seems to inscribe relations and people’s actions in longer and more abstract terms; that of the unknown time of the Judgement and one’s moral consciousness. This abstraction may sometimes prevent the church from dealing with and

²¹⁷ Hess (2009: 142-144), looking at the doctrines used by two parties during a land dispute meeting, notes that both Christianity and *kastom* can serve to justify the claim of the respective parties. In this case, references to the Bible are a strong argument to point to what has always been there, since the world is world, so to speak.

solving the problems at stake in a visible and more immediate manner. It may be one reason for the increasing feeling that things are “falling apart” and people’s subsequent desire to restore *rispek* (respect).

It is also true that in Tasiriki there is quite a strong conflation and interference between problems which should belong to the sphere of kinship (and land) and that of the church. While all the village problems are usually announced and discussed in the church, there are also disputes over kinship and land that enter the affairs of the church and lead to the suspension of elders, thus bypassing the rules fixed by the Presbyterian Church constitution.

In Tasiriki, it is quite clear that the village leadership cannot be separated from that of the church. Most of the announcements regarding village’s life are made before the service while the problems that the community face are often discussed in the church after the service. The chief in Tasiriki is most visible within the church and he made it explicit that he had the “word of God” with him. This conflation between the chief and the church and the identification of the *vanua* with the church is also rendered visible by the fact that the NTM followers have now their own chief (see below).

7.4.2.2 The “pigness” of the church

From the analogies drawn between the pig’s and Christ’s blood or that of the pastor-*livusi*, one can postulate that the power, previously attributed to pigs, has been, to a certain extent, transferred onto the body of the church. Is it possible, though, to postulate any further and significant analogy between the church and pigs? The analogy may have its limits. However one can note some shared aspects which are of interest because they make apparent commensurate relations structuring the different spheres of people’s life and posits the church as an embodiment of place.

Much of what the church is and does parallels what can be said of pigs, but also, to a certain extent, yams and children. I have shown how in Tasiriki, the church is grown like gardens, pigs and children, and thus is a product of the work of place. Place is thus analogous to the two-sided house namely being both male and female but acting as one. In this regard the church appears as commensurate with the produce of the two-sided house, likewise objectifying relations (Strathern 1988: 169). Besides, these objects all contribute to further the reproduction and growth of place (Jolly 1994: 176). Now, if one considers pigs as representing the “power” and “wealth” of place in the context of the grade-taking ceremonies (see Rio 2007: 125 , Eriksen 2008: 85), then the church can likewise be seen as the locus where the expression of the wealth and power of the place is most manifest.

The church is key in establishing a relation with the vital spiritual power that God is. While pigs were vectors of relationships with the ancestors (see Jolly 1994, Eriksen 2008: 85), the church is the place of worship where the relation with God is played out, where people bring the wealth they have produced so as to ensure further health and wealth to their place. The money given to the church follows different roads. Hence, all that is not invested for the workings and building of the church in Tasiriki leaves the place and, in a sense, disappears from the place. In a material sense, it opens the roads that link Tasiriki, and the other churches of the Anrua district, to the national and international levels of the Presbyterian Church, while, in a spiritual sense, it is the road to the Promised Land and the Last Judgement that is paved.

7.5 The limit of the church and the necessity to bring *rispek* back

7.5.1 *Kastom*

I have already discussed the definition of *kastom* in chapter 2, showing the complexity, polysemy and highly contextual nature of the concept. Bolton (2003: 52-53) has noted that

actually, “the term *kastom* is applied in normal parlance to any set of practices.” In Tasiriki, naturally, *kastom* does not escape this polysemy. But when people say “*hemia kastom blong mifala*” (this is our *kastom*), it is quite clear that they refer to the “way of their place”, the way they do things in Tasiriki, as opposed to Pelmolli, or other places, as a marker of difference (Bolton 2003: 25).

Within Tasiriki, each *nasara* also has a different way of doing things, its own stories. Kiki, who is from Vuna-Ur came with her own ways, and these are now part of the way of Tasiriki. Yet, because Tasiriki is a mission ground, and as such, all the different *nasara* who joined the place at the beginning of the 20th Century had to leave their own ways at the door so to speak, what endures is therefore very much akin to an enfolded past which emerges in the present, linking spatial and relational horizons. It takes a specific form in its emplaced present which then unfolds in a new set of relationships giving its impulse to future trajectories, what Rousseau (2004) has defined as an “achievement of simultaneity”.

Kastom is at all times fluid and contextual, but even more so generationally. Thomas expressed it beautifully when he said that, “*kastom* has two ends. It is like an open-ended rope. You hold tight one end of the rope but on the other side, it is open and free, it can change, you cannot block it, you cannot stop the changes but you can control them (Thomas Jimmy, Tasiriki, February 3rd 2012).”²¹⁸ This was said while we were discussing the 10th day feast which had just been held in the village to end the mourning for his FZ. Thomas’s father had expressed his discontent with the way it had been conducted. According to him, the way new generations performed the ceremony was in complete contradiction to what it actually meant. While Thomas agreed his father’s words, he also made the point that times were

²¹⁸ “*Kastom hemi gat tu end, hemi olsem wan rop, yu holem taet wan end blong rop ia be long narafala end, i open, i fri, i save jenis, yu no save blokem, yu no save blokem jenis be yu save kontrolem.*” Thomas, Tasiriki, February 3rd 2012.

changing and there were ways which were not relevant anymore. For Thomas, the important thing was that, whatever form it took, as long as there was respect, *olo'olo*, it was alright.

Thus, when people keep saying that, “*bifo kastom i plente, rispek i stap*” (before when *kastom* was “abundant”, there was respect), or “*long Tasiriki rispek i go daon be long ples i gat kastom i gat rispek long man*” (in Tasiriki there is less and less respect, but in places where there is *kastom*, people respect others), what seems to be deplored in these expressions is that people may be losing the other end of the rope, the one end that people should be holding tight to before things completely go *olbaot* (astray).

The “*olbaotness*” of Tasiriki often indexes behaviours whereby people pay less attention to the way they address kin, do not respect appropriate bodily deportment, are careless, or oblivious of the proper ways to acknowledge a recently dead kinsman as well as how to handle spiritual forces. All these, as I have demonstrated above, have consequences upon the health of people and their place.

This indicates that *kastom* is intricately tied to the idea of “respect” and that the absence of one has as consequences the absence of the other. This in turn affects vital aspects of sociality that is maintaining appropriate relations in regards to kinship, *kastom* leadership, i.e. respect towards, and legitimacy of the chief, and by extension, land.

The joking relationship that one can have with distant kin or with other people (*mere vavono* – a different person) is called *veivei jajara* which literally means “make rubbing”, also translated as *tok fani* (making jokes) in Bislama. The vernacular expression suggests that with specific persons one can ignore the usual “gap” which denotes “respect”. “Respect” is indeed that which separates, so that the proper relations between persons are made to appear or are maintained as they should be.

Respect is most often expressed through spatial metaphors and is thus likewise embodied spatially that is keeping the right distance with specific kin and places (see also

Hess 2009: 28, 29, 30). A current expression is to say that *rispek i stap long medel* (the respect lies in between). A lack of respect is seen as “crossing over” and as I have shown above, this is thought to have serious consequences. Respect is also expressed by the manner one addresses a person, or the topics that can be discussed. Not addressing someone properly, usually the appropriate kin term, is felt very strongly as a lack of respect. For example, the use of the proper name instead of the kin address is perceived as an offense. When things are done with the appropriate respect shown to a person, it is said to be *stret* (straight), *tataolo* in vernacular. Likewise, this lack of respect is also manifest in people’s handling of gardens. As I have already mentioned, the increasing lack of attention and non-respect given to garden taboos, coupled to the many commitments people have towards money, thus investing less time in their gardens, is perceived as having direct consequences in regard to garden productivity. People also reckon that they spend less time teaching their children about all these aspects of life with the same consequences.

“Respect” works therefore like an index of the good functioning of social relations while the state of the place, its capacity to grow in a certain form, its productivity and choices are indexical of people’s attitude. Thus like a lack of faith, a lack of respect is felt to be at the root of a sociality which disintegrates.

7.5.2 Bringing *kastom* back and the visibility of *kastom*

It is said that women bring the spirit of *kastom* back to Tasiriki. While women, upon marrying, are supposed to join the church and its activities, they also bring ways of other places. Hence, the ceremony of *roto umina* performed by the chief’s son relied primarily upon his wife’s relatives who brought back the ceremony to Tasiriki thus introducing the *kastom* of Ipaiao as *kastom* of the place. This is an important point. Eriksen has shown how women contributed to bring the church in Ranon (2010: 99). It seems that what is happening in Tasiriki is rather that women are bringing back *kastom*. It may not be just chance that Thomas,

who was raised among a Christian *nasara*, married Kiki who came from a family who converted very late to Christianity (her father never converted). The pig-killing ceremony organised by the Chief Sara Noso in 2010 might also index a will to make *kastom* more visible and to re-establish his legitimacy outside the church.

I have noted that the church, despite organising most of Tasiriki's life, has also shown its limits in managing specific relations, especially that what touches upon the founding principles of kinship, land and people's relation with other-than-human beings. Faith is a necessary condition but not a sufficient one, and the end of the rope that people have to hold tight has much to do with relations which do not fall within the scope of the church. And this is so even if the church plays an important role in regulating relations by addressing the problems arising around money.

7.6 New trajectories of growth: changing church affiliation

The main churches on Santo, like elsewhere in Vanuatu, had traditionally been the colonial Anglophone Presbyterian Church, the Anglican Church – although to a lesser extent, the SDA (who had first arrived in 1917), and the Francophone Protestant and Catholic missions. After Independence, and in recent years, a multiplication of small churches has developed and people leave their former affiliations to join new churches.

This phenomenon has increased after the independence (also noted by Tonkinson 1993: 601, Curtis 1999: 65; Eriksen 2008: 109 and Hess 2009: 160 quoting Curtis 2002: 154). In the article "Healing the Nation", Eriksen notes the rapid growth of New Pentecostal Churches in Vanuatu. The author analyses these new churches as representing a break with the colonial ones (2009: 70). Eriksen's main argument is that each of these churches has a common ambition that of becoming the church for the Nation, yet regularly breaking apart

and splitting into new churches (2009: 75).²¹⁹ Eriksen explains this phenomenon by showing that what is happening is not a fragmentation, rather they show, “different levels of the whole or different levels of unity (2009: 77)”, like parts of a whole. The author’s conclusion is that in these churches, where healing is emphasized, there is a pervasive idea that healing the person is healing the Nation (2009: 78). The author then pushes the argument to show that these churches, each in their singularity, attempt to bring a space for change and more independence, thus healing the Nation (2009: 79).

This analysis, which concentrates on urban settings and the New Pentecostal Churches does not seem however to be adequate to describe the situation found at the village level in SW Santo. The only point that I follow in her argument is to consider that these changes in church affiliations are as much social as they are religious (2009: 67). In Ranon and its neighbouring area, like in Tasiriki, different churches are present. The NTM Church, again like in Tasiriki, arrived in the early eighties after the Independence (Eriksen 2008: 104). Eriksen notes that participation in one church excludes one’s participation in the other, thus, “church defines community (2008: 105).” But that what is most important is that the author shows that, “the borders between the different church communities are not random and the breakaway from the Presbyterian Church and the establishment of the NTM Church in Fantor [a neighbouring village of Ranon] is significant (Eriksen 2008: 105).” Eriksen then concludes that, “there is a connection between the complex compositions of villages today on Ambrym, and the establishment of new church communities (2008: 108)”, and that, “to a certain extent it seems as if the church, or rather the specific church one belongs to on Ambrym, works like an idiom for conflicts and difference (2008: 109).”

²¹⁹ Robbins (2014: S163) reviewing the different recent works done in the anthropology of Christianity dealing with processes of separation, suggests that, in regards to the multiplication of sects, schism, as a process, could actually be regarded as a specificity of Christianity for bringing about social change and, “as a key Christian process of “group formation”.

This situation is very close to that of Tasiriki. The NTM Church is still present within the village, yet located on the other side of the stream. The NTM, as I have previously noted, are mostly Bayalo people who arrived in the 1920s, twenty years after the founding of Tasiriki as Presbyterian mission ground. The reasons the Presbyterian gave for these people changing affiliations to the NTM Church were not overtly about conflicts, but rather it was said that they did not want to have someone higher than their own chief. They refused the authority of the pastor.

In the other traditionally Presbyterian villages of Pelmoli, Vuna-Ur, Tanovusvusi, similar changes of affiliations have taken place in the last thirty years. Yet, in these villages, the new churches have moved out. The NTM branch of Pelmoli was established by one of the brothers of Elder Soho William. Their settlement is quite small and on the outskirts of the village of Pelmoli. The SDA settlement of Tanovusvusi though neighbouring the village is well separated from it by dense vegetation. Kiki's brother founded a SDA settlement at Mbul Mamara, a former ground of the *nasara*.

It is indeed understood that if a group of people wants to change affiliations, they can do so as long as they move out and find a former ground belonging to their *nasara* to settle. This seems to support my proposition that there is a conflation between the church and the vanua, and therefore that the church could stand as an actual embodiment of the vanua.

In Tasiriki, the NTM followers have not moved out, therefore the situation is a bit anomalous. While the two churches do not interact much, each keeping with their own things, the current relations with the NTM in Tasiriki are not a source of open conflicts, unlike what Eriksen describes for Ranon (2008: 104).

7.7 Conclusion

In this long and apparently heterogeneous chapter, I have attempted to bring together the different aspects which re-inscribe the vanua within the wider network of relations in which it is embedded and being made to emerge. This network of relations, i.e. what constitutes the given of Tasiriki's sociality, was extensively described in Chapter 3, in both its a-temporal, that is mythical, and historical dimensions.

The previous chapters had shown how people make the vanua emerge through and by their work, i.e. growing their gardens, kinsmen and their church; each domain feeding into the other while being grown along similar principles in both a cyclic and linear manner. Hence, through work, people continuously contribute to the emergence of the vanua in a specific form which could be seen as the point of intersection between the horticultural yearly cycles and the generational cycles, punctuated by the yearly liturgical cycles which inscribe the vanua within an ideal trajectory of growth and peace whose ultimate perspective is to be prepared for the coming of the Last Judgement.

However, in the previous chapters, I had already hinted at, and pointed to the fact that, despite the importance of work and despite the ethic that work may convey in and by itself, this was not sufficient to bring about the vanua in its "ideal" form. The vanua, to come into proper/ideal form, needed faith, objectified in people's full involvement for and in the church.

Yet, in this chapter, I have also set to show that faith may also not be sufficient, and this for two main reasons. The first is that the church has contributed to upset some relations, still considered vital, and thus remains unable to manage these as they stand beyond its scope. The second reason is tied to the temporality of the church, and the uncertainty attached to this temporality. The way and the time God actually manifests are unknown; it could be any time and it is therefore timeless. Likewise, one's relation to God remains something that is not

tangible. Indeed, the abstraction of faith can translate through speech and acts, but its agency remains suspended to the a-temporal manifestation of God.

Hence, in this chapter, while I have argued that the church now unequivocally embodies a strong and uncontested spiritual power, I have also drawn its limits. I have discussed how, the power of pigs had been transferred onto the church; pigs and church being, in a way, commensurate in their being the objectified results of people's capacity to harvest, respectively, the spiritual power of God or that of the ancestors, and the expression of, as well as the locus for, their relation with God or the ancestors. This translation from one locus of power to another is made visible in its translation at the political level and, as such, touches upon the legitimacy of the Chief; that is where the Chief stands in regards to the church, his relative position and prerogative in regards to that of the Pastor, the "High Chief".

Yet, as the first part of the chapter makes apparent, while God and therefore the church is being considered the main locus of power, this does not deny, or even, cannot dispense people with paying attention to the efficacy of the power of *kastom*. Indeed, the power of *kastom*, although no less covert in its manifestation than the power of God, is understood to be efficient in the here and now; it has an uncontested immediacy, it allows dealing with all social relations, be them human or non-human, as well as all the array of powers intrinsic to these relations, in a much more visible and tangible way.

As such, these aspects of *kastom*, which do escape the scope of the church, are increasingly reconsidered as being crucial in organising and managing the relations within the vanua, and especially gender ones, as well as in regulating the relations which extend beyond the vanua – here mostly land and ancestors. This regulation is translated through the idiom of respect which thus remains a key value in maintaining people's health and a desired form of sociality; one of the necessary conditions for making growth possible. Indeed, as I have attempted to show in the first part of this chapter, people do equate the lack of respect with

“stunted” growth or non-growth, i.e. the various ailments and anomalies touching people and gardens, possibly leading to sterility and, in some cases potentially lethal (death/drought).

The “growth” of a place, however, is not only tied to respecting relations and forms, it is also tied to the connections people are able to make, i.e. to roads being opened. I have already shown in Chapter 5 that women, through marriage, remain the main vectors for opening roads that is connecting places. In this chapter, I have been mostly concerned with the different factors which can impede growth; disease being a major one, conflicts and the severance of relations another, and being stuck yet another. In the latter two cases, people tend to resort to the metaphor of a “blocked road”, thus the necessity to “clear” (“klerem rod”) it so as to open it.

The reasons for a road to be blocked are many, but it is always a matter of “missed” relations, be it one’s relation with God, spirits or kinsmen. As such, I have devoted part of this chapter to the theme of “reconciliation”. I have argued that these were processes necessary to unblock roads so as to allow people to move forward. Processes of reconciliations are now mostly staged within the church but these also usually involve the sharing of food and might require the killing of pigs, thus mobilising forms of relations and power which are usually thought as pertaining to the domain of *kastom*. Similarly, in the case of disease, the process of healing demands both the power of faith and that of *kastom*. So, though they may be kept separate temporally and endorsed by different people, they are mobilised together so as to achieve the desired outcome, i.e. the recovering of a relational integrity.

Yet, again, the two domains seem to pertain to, and address, two complementary dimensions, i.e. the visible and the invisible, the tangible and the non-tangible. For a *sisiro*, when he confronts the spirit within a diseased person, the spirit is visible and tangible; it is the condition for him to battle with it and therefore heal his patient. Not only is this ability of the *sisiro* to “see”, and thus to confront spirits, ultimately considered to be a gift of God but, for

the diseased, the very possibility to heal, or survive the disease, is also ultimately put in the hands of God, and as such is a matter of faith.

Therefore, while one could argue that to ensure the proper growth of the *vanua*, as a healthy, wealthy and connected place, church and *kastom* are more than often acting in complementary, and non-exclusive, ways, yet, as the section on pig's blood/ Christ's blood demonstrates, it is asserted that, ultimately, healing and "repairing relations" can only be regarded as complete, beyond one's visible social and moral attitude, through one's faith in God, thus affirming the supremacy of God's power over that of the human.

To conclude and exemplify this last statement, I would like to come back to the figure of Thomas Jimmy. One could say that Thomas is quite an archetypical embodiment of Tasiriki. An elder in the church who is deeply Christian, he is also a fieldworker. His interest in *kastom* is strongly tied to the idea that through *kastom* people keep their connection to land, to one's *stamba* (root). For Thomas, a man always comes back to his place because it is where "real life" lies.²²⁰ Yet Thomas is also someone who is turned towards the outside, always trying to look beyond place so as to better understand his place. It may not come as a surprise then that Thomas is both an elder of the church, and, as such, often travels to take part to church meetings, and is also a fieldworker attached to the VCC. In that regard, his discourse is very much influenced by the church, on one part, and that of the position of the VCC towards *kastom*. One of Thomas's best companions is his little radio. This also connects him to the national discourses where these issues are constantly discussed.

As a person, Thomas is characterized by openness. He often told me that one can learn from anyone, and could gain insights from any conversations with any kind of person. He is always looking for new understandings, especially in regard to the Bible and its exegesis. He

²²⁰ See Bonnemaïson (1986: 192) and also Bolton (1999: 46) in "Women, place and practices" where she quotes the ni-Vanuatu scholar Selwyn Aruntangai who said that, "All ni-Vanuatu feel that land is everything, it is basic to their identity... Traditionally land is not only the source of subsistence [...] it represents life itself, both material and spiritual."

thinks that reading different versions of the Bible is necessary to gain insights so as to give sermons which can be more relevant to people's lives and needs.

Thomas can also be quite critical to the changes that the church has brought. Although he often told me that the power of prayer had been very important in decreasing the power of "taboo" places in the bush and that, because nowadays people pray, they can do without resorting to many magical practices anymore; he still reckons that the church has contributed to push into the background ways of being, doing and understanding which are fundamental to one's relation to place and the relationships that the term implies. Thomas thus stands at the cross-roads of these different ways or roads, leaving them all open, he is not torn between them, rather he pulls them all in so as to make them his, to emplace them all, while holding tight to his open-ended rope.

CONCLUSION

The Banyan Tree: the processes and emergence of the vanua

“But what is clear is that in conceptualizing their different ways of life as two alternative roads ‘kastom’ versus ‘skul’ the degree to which ‘kastom’ has been transformed by colonialism and ‘skul’ accommodated to ancestral practices have been obscured.” (Jolly 1994, p.21)²²¹

The Word of God came ashore²²²

*The Word of God came ashore
Brought by a man Mbuvo
Here on the shore of Tasiriki
They all came from the places where they were hiding*

*The Word of God was brooding
Today in Tasiriki
His Word, like a standing Banyan tree
That Lulu came here to plant*

*The news reached all
That all things good were in Tasiriki
All came to be saved
To follow the road they had lost*

Chorus

*They all came out from Navaka and Mbuvo
They all came out from Tanvusvus
They all flew in like birds
They all came from their hiding place*

In this thesis, I have described the making of a place that is called Tasiriki. I have done so through a standard ethnography, looking at what constitutes ‘the given’ of the vanua, the kinship system that is a part of it, as well as its foundation as a mission ground. Through a

²²¹ The words in bracket ‘’ were italicized in the original text.

²²² *Loeni Moli te mai ta hoso* (Written by L. Soro Moli) (My translation for the English version with the help of my aunt VeVojivoro Tosusu for a first translation in Bislama) from Hymn (*Vetei Ure Ure*) # 325, p.275 in *Hai-Tolui Pepei Susuhi Vete* (A book of Prayers and Hymns in the two languages Mbuvo and Tanvusvus from South West Santo, Vanuatu, 1988: Bridge Printery, Rosebury, Australia)

description of people's daily preoccupations revolving mainly around work and the church, I have attempted to show that while the *vanua* is very much embedded in the church in every day practices and vision, it still needs to rest upon a grounded and connected kinship. This way of emplaced kinship is what people call *kastom*.

Laying out the entanglement of the church and *kastom* as it manifests in Tasiriki has allowed me to rethink their interplay in dialog with the different approaches developed in the literature on Vanuatu. Although, this work is not specifically anchored within the anthropology of Christianity, I hope that it can bring some useful insights that can contribute to its theoretical development.

In the last part of Chapter 2, I had laid out the arguments that Rio (2007) and Eriksen (2008) had respectively developed to account for Ranon's sociality on Ambrym. The main reason for me to do so was to show that these two perspectives on the same place, presented as separate, thus tended to keep apart, on one hand, the aspect of growth – embodied, in Rio's description, within the customary expression of kinship, yam gardening and grade-taking ceremonies further objectified in male items, and, on the other hand, the role of the church, as embodiment of female relations characterised by communality and whose main object was to make visible a social form of relations promoting community.

What I have attempted to show throughout this work is that, in Tasiriki, not only is the process of growth not separate from the institution of the church, but that they are intrinsically tied to each other. The church, in Tasiriki, is not gendered, in that it does not objectifies a specific type of relations that would be male or female, but, rather, objectifies the joint work of both men and women. Like the two-sided house, the church can be thought, at the level of the *vanua*, as both the source of growth as well as its objectified outcome.

In the last chapter, concerned with the relation between power and growth, I have considered the "pigness of the church". The use of this expression has allowed me to sum up

the fact that the objectified manifestation of growth and its power had been, to a large extent, transferred from the body of pigs to the church and was now thus conditioned by the church – here to be understood as the place of objectification of people’s relation to God, therefore ultimately tied to God’s power and will as the very source of growth to be worked upon.

While I have clearly stated in the introduction of Part II that the idea of “growth” developed in this thesis was somehow a connection I made, an interpretative gloss on the material which could efficiently draw together, as well as accurately express, the diverse activities that constitute people’s daily life and their motivations, this interpretation, again, is not something that is arbitrary. As already mentioned, not only is the theme of “growth” pervasive throughout Melanesia, but, in regards to the ethnographic material collected in Tasiriki and exposed in this work, it is legitimate to consider “growth” as the very stuff with which people work, on which people work as well as the dynamic at play in the making of the vanua.

While the Chapters 4, 5 and 6 describe at length “growth” in its concrete and cyclical aspects – a growth brought about through work in the gardens, the making and nurturing of kinship as well as people’s physical and spiritual investment in the church, the Chapter 7 makes more evident the way by which “growth” can also function as an ideology. Indeed, in this last chapter, looking at the emergence of the vanua through the perspectives of power and morality finally takes the concept of “growth” within its ideological and rhetorical dimensions. This rhetoric of growth, mostly present in the sermons, also made most apparent during thanksgiving ceremonies, as well as through women’s many obligations (see Chapter 6), could also be seen as being underlain by, as much as supporting, a morality tied to patriarchal control.

If people may not always directly resort to the term of “growth” when they speak, this concept can still stand as a general gloss for people’s voiced concerns and expectations. For

example, people often talk about “divlopmen” (development) or stress the importance of “openem rod” (to open roads). These expressions point respectively to the possibility for the amelioration, mostly through Western infrastructures, and the extension, through connections, of their place. As noted earlier, and as I have developed extensively in the last chapter, “growth” also appears implicitly through people’s concern about its non-happening, hence the stress they put on respect and faith, so as to prevent or overcome the possibility of “non-growth”.

Indeed, throughout this work I have discussed some of the key metaphors with which people work, and they all somehow take us back to “growth” and the conditions of “growth”. These are often expressed through idiosyncratic forms. Some of these are actually pervasive to the archipelago (and possibly beyond). The most compelling forms are, on one hand, two-sidedness which organise most relations, most apparent in the productive two-sided house, as developed in Chapter 4. In a given situation, the two sides often exist in a sort of tension, yet they constitute a necessary condition to each other in order to be productive (Bolton 2003, Taylor 2008, Hess 2009, Eriksen 2010). With the concept of *rod* (roads, trajectory)²²³ which expresses the possibility of connection, these two metaphors thus do make apparent the concept of *ples* (place) as connected emplacement.

Another potent image is that of the spiral which has been described extensively by Rio (2007) and whose most pervasive icon across the archipelago is the circling of pig tusks. This circling, which denotes the repetitive periodicity of cycles of life that always come back a bit sideways, is closely tied to the idea of growth and the possibility of renewal (Taylor 2008).

The metaphor of the banyan that I offer now can be seen as another metaphor within the array of metaphors involving the image of the tree, or parts of the tree found in Vanuatu.

²²³ Here following the translation given by Taylor 2010, p.283.

The use of the tree as metaphor of place has been developed extensively by Bonnemaïson and Taylor (see the Introduction of Part II).

How does a Banyan grow?

Thomas once told me that banyan trees were lazy as much as the kingfisher was. Neither took the pain to make its own home, they took advantage of what was already there, a built nest for the kingfisher, a well-grown tree for the banyan.

If Tasiriki is a banyan, I would say that it has the church as its crown and *kastom* as its roots. This bi-polar image seems to contradict the actual entanglement of the church and *kastom*. Yet, while expressing a duality, it also indicates the organic relation between the two. This relation finds its expression through the main and lateral trunks of the banyan which support the crown, allows it to grow while being sustained by it. The banyan has also the particularity that it grows as much vertically as horizontally. Hence, to grow upward it has to be grounded downward and vice-versa. The banyan is very much emplaced yet it is the direction of its lateral trunks – where they take root – that gives the banyan its shape. The banyan functions as an organic yet open whole therefore it offers an image of structured fluidity (see Taylor 2008:195).

As already sketched in the introduction of Part II, I suggest that this image of the banyan can illustrate well the process of emergence of Tasiriki and how it is continually made to emerge as it continues growing. Indeed, the organic nature of the banyan brings a double temporality to the metaphor; a diachronic one expressed through the way it has grown and is still growing as well as a synchronic one through the way it appears at a specific moment in time.

Now, how does this metaphor operate in the light of the material presented in this thesis and thus possibly offer an adequate description of what is going on in Tasiriki and neighbouring villages?

The mission is foundational to Tasiriki, in the sense that Tasiriki exists because of the mission. Yet the seed of the mission had to grow on something that was there so to speak. In Chapter 3, I have described at length the extensive network of relations from which the *vanua* is made to emerge. I also considered the matrilineages and the *nasara* as givens and the foundation of sociality. These are the extensive connections through women to the environment while the *nasara* expressed the connections between people and land through time. In this sense, one can say that the mission grew on this relational substrate very much rooted in the land.

To grow the mission required a number of things from the people who joined. First, the ways of place to a large extent had to be left at the door, while people settled within a new type of social configuration. The different *nasara* were brought as one by the church which “grafted” on former expressions of the place enlacing them by fitting their shape while introducing its own forms – the Christian house and new possibilities of growth.

While the former expressions of places dwindled, the church had taken root. Yet these roots had to be anchored in place that is anchored in the very conception of kinship and land embodied in the kitchen, the node of paternal emplacement and maternal connection. I have shown in this work how the concept of growth is central, as well as how the ways gardens and kinship are grown are also fundamental for the growth of the church. Yet the church could only be nurtured through money and therefore it required that the land upon which people stand be transformed so that it could nurture kin on one side and the church on the other.

I have shown that in Tasiriki, the church, as an objectified relation between people and God, is both at the root of growth and its end product. God is growth but in order to grow

things in a specific and expected form people need to not only work but cultivate their faith, that is, their relation to God further expressed by their investment in “*wok blong God*” and offerings. However, if the church has become the main expression of the *vanua*, it can only endure through, and by being rooted in kinship and land. I have also shown that the church cannot by itself ensure the health and wealth of its roots as it were.

Indeed, there are relations that cannot be managed through the church or that the church has contributed to unbalance. While the church may provide a Christian template for kinship relations, there are aspects of kinship which conform to and require principles and schemes not belonging to this framework. Likewise, where the church’s power has been able to overcome other spiritual powers, these other powers are still very much present and active. The spiritual power of the church is a powerful ally yet it may show its own limits in handling specific relations.

If many of the former ways of the place have dwindled, for the church not to collapse, it needs to support itself with a stable root system. The church has been essential in the making of the place but it cannot endure without people’s efforts geared towards supporting it. Thus I have shown that although in Tasiriki *kastom* is said not to be strong, there is a general feeling that Tasiriki people cannot do without it either. Place in Vanuatu needs to be emplaced but it also depends on roads and connections that nurture the way of the place. These connections may operate through the church or other institutions inscribed within much larger networks – national or international – but most of them are opened through kinship.

Women remain the main road openers so to speak. Women upon marrying into, bearing children to, and working for a place, become women of the place (see Bolton 2003). Yet women also bring changes by incorporating the ways of their place. Some women in Tasiriki say that they bring back the spirit of *kastom* to a place that has lost it. This was indeed

what happened when Louise organised the *roto umina* for her sons, it was the way of Ipaiato which was brought and reintroduced in Tasiriki.

But women are not only vectors of *kastom* they can also be vectors of the church. Hence the union of the pastor's girl with a boy of Lovenue further contributed to the implantation and consolidation of the work of the pastor and his wife in the district. However, in contrast to what Eriksen has shown (2008, chapter 5), women marrying in Tasiriki cannot be the vector of another church denomination. Upon marrying women have to adopt the Presbyterian Church as their church and this is true for the other denominations as well; women upon marrying adopt the denomination of their husband. This, I suggest is related to the fact that the church, in places like Tasiriki, has come to be or has always been synonymous with place.

Yet, the church cannot stand for the place on its own; the crown does not stand without its roots. Therefore the organic aspect of the banyan is quite important in understanding the relationship between *kastom* and the church in Tasiriki. Indeed, it allows taking into account the aspect of growth and mutual nurture. In this work, I have attempted to show that the produce of the growth of one sphere of life contributed to the growth of another sphere; each sphere building on the other yet being in the meantime the very condition of the other. Ground and God, as principle of life and growth, are what makes gardening possible. Yet the growth of gardens and the money harvested from plantation work depend as much on kinship as on people's relation to God, expressed in thanksgivings and faith.

Land and kinship work as one, they are the root of the place anchored in the ground, while the possibility of growth lies in what God provides and one's attitude toward Him. Since Tasiriki, ground belongs to the mission, therefore the memory of the routes followed by the different *nasara* in the nearby bush become a key aspect in delimiting people's access to land and thus access to production to sustain their church and thus their place.

The church is the manifestation of the *vanua*, yet like the crown of a banyan, it relies organically on its stump and adventitious roots, and as such is very much grounded in kinship and land as connected emplacement.

But how does the historical development and current position of the church in Tasiriki further inform the anthropology of Christianity in Vanuatu and beyond?

To answer that question, I would like to come back on the notions of continuity and change that have been so pervasive in the discussions engaged in that field. This is important because it allows me to come back to notions of temporality, and thus aspects of rupture and renewal as perceived and lived by people, as well as to notions of immanence and transcendence which seem to equally be at play in the interrelationship between *kastom* and the church. This latter aspect could show a way out from ideas of hybridity, syncretism or cultural displacement as well as account for a situation of entanglement while the duality of *kastom* and the church is not lost.

Robbins (2007, 2011) has criticised anthropologists for not taking into account rupture in two dimensions. First by a tendency towards continuity thinking whereby anthropologists tend to look for continuity within changes, and second, by ignoring, in the case of the anthropology of Christianity, the intrinsic Christian message which emphasises the idea of rupture brought by the coming of Christ, i.e. the definitive rupture with the past that happens upon conversion.

In the hymn presented above, the whole process of the making of Tasiriki is exposed. It brings to the fore some of the important and foundational aspects in regard to how the people in Tasiriki perceive their own place. It recounts the arrival of the Good News on the shore of Tasiriki, yet, as the hymn says, the place was already waiting, it was brooding. People were in the dark, hiding in their respective places. But Lulu Varkiki, transformed

through conversion, brought the Word of God – the seed for all good things. He planted the seed which grew like a banyan.

This account can be read as a kind of rupture – Lulu’s conversion and the arrival of the Good News coupled to the Christian trope of passing from dark hidden places to a bright refuge.

Considering the situation peculiar to Tasiriki one could then take on Robbins’ argument that, “a religion like Christianity might provide the core that underlies a superficial and coerced play with tradition (Robbins 2011: 414).” Yet, if Christianity rests at the core of Tasiriki’s sociality, one cannot say that it underlies a “superficial play of tradition.” Besides, the problematic aspect of the term “tradition” in this quote seems to be referring to pre-Christian or non-Christian ways, i.e. aspects of people’s lives that people would probably recognize as *kastom*. In Tasiriki, as I have shown, *kastom* is tied to kinship and land which constitutes as much the basis for Tasiriki sociality as their claim to be Christian does.

Yet it is also said in the hymns that the place was waiting for this arrival. Taylor has shown how the idea of “rupture” and the succession of new eras were very much present in indigenous understandings of time and that at least for the Sia Raga, the coming of Christianity was just the beginning of another era, another branching so to speak, whereby the ways of place were then put on a par with the “exogenous” ways within the productive dualism characteristic of Vanuatu (Taylor 2010: 283).

I have already noted that the dualism between *kastom* and church has often been organised along lines of “relationalist” vs. “individualist” modes of sociality, “tradition” vs. “modernity”, and following from this perspective, the effect of Christianity upon the “dividual” person and in fostering the emergence of an “individual” personhood (Hess 2009). However, as mentioned earlier, this dualism escapes easy classification (see Chapter 2 and Douglas 2002).

Eriksen's argument is very useful again in this regard since it shows that if the church has brought important changes in Ranon, this is done within a hierarchical framework of values which had always been there so to speak. Therefore, in her argument, the church only contributed in bringing to the fore forms of relations which had been kept in the background before the mission. For Eriksen, the Christian ethos of sharing and communalism was very similar to the female ethos in the pre-Christian society. This is why women took over the church and foregrounded the type of relations that were previously backgrounded by the individualist hierarchical personification of *kastom* namely the male forms of relations (Eriksen 2008: 118).

With this argument, Eriksen shows that the church could be adopted because it echoed forms of relations which were already present, and that these relations were not those of "individualism" but rather "communalism". The problem with Eriksen's argument is that the church is reduced to forms of relations somehow excluding the spiritual aspect of church. This excludes, for example, the reasons why such an important ceremony as the Yam Harvest, has been included within the church when it used to be a manifestation of male capacity to grow their gardens and thus their place. As Rio (2007) has shown that the whole society in Ranon rests upon the logic of reproduction and growth, one could inquire into how the Christian message and the church are involved in the promotion of the growth of place. How has the church endorsed the spiritual aspect of *kastom* formerly embodied in the *mage* (grade-taking ceremony) which is now lost.

I would argue that in Tasiriki, the church has brought changes but it has very much been inscribed within cycles of renewal as found in kinship and the gardens. The church has become an important locus to ensure this renewal in both a material and spiritual manner. Moreover, to ensure this renewal people grow their church and this, I argue, is done in a way

parallel to that of the house. The church as produce of place is the embodiment of a joint effort of both men and women.

Although the church's organisation and the work for church, most visible in that of the women's fellowship, can be very much described as "communal", this does not reduce the church as a mere maker of "communities". As I have shown in Chapter 6, the community is instantiated at the moment the church was founded, and the purpose of the people then via the church is to grow the place into a specific form. The spiritual dimension of the church then cannot be left aside.

Rio (2007) has shown that the power of the *mage* was to produce men who would transcend society. This spiritual power was, according to him, the manifestation of the power of society as a whole. While the *mage* is not practiced anymore, it is possible to think that the church is now the locus of this spiritual power. People's conversion to Christianity thus has somehow "desacralized" one form of power and "sacralised" another (see Mosko 2010: 233). As I have shown in Chapter 7, the power of pigs may have been transferred onto the body of the church, and the pastor endowed with the "spiritual" capacity had been given the title of a high chief, could this transformation be similarly thought in terms of a sacralisation of the church to the detriment of *kastom*?

This is not so straightforward. And it is clear that *kastom* still deals with spiritual aspects of people's lives such as their relations with spirits and ancestors as well as magical practices. The power of pigs is still relevant and important in the management of these relations. So even if Christianity is mobilized in the same contexts, with the idea that ultimately prayers are more powerful than any magical practices, and with the church thus very much framing anything spiritual, I have also shown that some relations cannot be dealt through the church.

We might here suggest that *kastom* and church operate through a different temporality, and moreover, that *kastom* and church may be understood in terms of immanence and transcendence, respectively.

I have already suggested that the temporality of the church was quite different from that of *kastom*. Although the workings of *kastom* practices can be covert and uncertain in their effects, often uncovered a posteriori, there still is immediacy in the way they manifest – in their failure or success. On the other hand, Christian practices such as prayers or thanksgiving ceremonies, and Christian expectations such as the coming of the Kingdom of God, may be efficient immediately but exactly when and how God is to manifest remains highly uncertain. The coming of the Kingdom can occur anytime and therefore requires a constant attention so as to be ready, however time also stretches out beyond people's temporality (see also Mosko 2010: 232).

One could say then that while both *kastom* and the church have an immanent quality, both being mobilised to manage relations in the here and now, the church also inscribes people's lives in a temporality which transcends these relations.

I would like to come back to Bonnemaïson's vision of the tree where rootedness is very much emphasised and where the crown is only there to nourish the root as it were (see Introduction of Part II). In contrast, I would argue that the banyan's rootedness is also very much directed towards the growth of its crown. If, as I have tried to show, the church is the manifestation of the *vanua*, its wealth and health, and thus its growth made visible, then the crown and the roots stand in a position of mirror and entanglement where one constantly sustains and generates the other. And as the banyan continues to grow, it is not sure that people in Tasiriki do not think of their crown as the trajectory of growth that takes them higher in a place of light.

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Glossary of the main Bislama and vernacular terms used in the thesis

A

Ae (vern.) – it can mean water or *Kava*. In Tasiriki, the term is mostly used for water or to designate waterways. It is used for *Kava* on the West Coast.

Ambu (vern.) - Fire

Aruana (vern.) – translated as “*fren*” in Bislama, meaning friends in general. Also meaning a pair; from *rua* which means two. It is an important concept especially when used in the context of kinship and matrilineages. It is interesting to note that it is used to refer to the two “friend lines” which are like “sisters” and also to the pair of yams always planted together as male and female to produce offspring. Thomas defined it as being almost like brothers and sisters, best friends (man and woman) and finally as designating “father and mother”. The fact that husband and wife are in a sibling like relation is interesting. While they become effectively gendered at the time of marriage (separation with one’s siblings and change in behaviour), in marriage their relation is “almost like” that of siblings yet they have to be sexually differentiated to produce children. This looks very similar to what Leach (2003:143-144) describes for Reite, PNG. There women upon marrying become “siblings” within the *Palem* of their husband. The relation between husband and wife is different yet they themselves become a social unit where internal differentiation is hidden. See also Strathern (1988: 259). She notes that, “Individual spouses form a pair in that they combine their distinct part in a single enterprise.”

Ato (vern.) – Tree name for *Metroxylon sp.*, known as natangora in Bislama, can be translated as Sago tree.

B

Burao – *Hibiscus tiliaceus*, often used to make ropes and when dried it remains the main source for firewood.

G

Givae – Dry taro garden

I

Ima (vern.) – House

J

Jajara (vern.) – To rub. Used in the expression “*veivei jajara*” – meaning to joke, also “tok fani” in Bislama. It is used to denote a specific kind of relations with one’s kinsmen.

Jara (vern.) – Place

Jara tambu (vern.) – Taboo place – a place with restricted or forbidden of access. The restriction can be related to the presence of spirits, or it may be a powerful place. It can also be used in the case of a simple access restriction to a particular spot imposed by people for various reasons, and as such, is not necessary permanent (ex: seasonal hunting or fishing restrictions).

Jara tei (vern.) – Bad place. It is often associated with disease.

K

Kaena (Tasiriki vern.)- Blood

Kam (vern.) – Yam, *Dioscorea* spp.

Kava (Bisl.) – Known as *Malou* in vernacular, the botanic name is *Piper methysticum*. It is a plant from the Western Pacific which has always played a very important ceremonial role in the cultures of this area.

Keren (or geren) (vern.) – Can be used as a radical or as a word. It is used to indicate the end or the bottom of something.

Koko (vern.) – Sky

L

Laplap (Bisl.) – Traditional dish found across Vanuatu whereby tubers (mostly yam, wild yam and manioc) are grated into a paste which is put to cook wrapped in leaves within the stone oven and thus producing a kind of pudding which is eaten with coconut milk.

Lovlov olo (vern.) – coconut plantation

Lovtau (vern.) – Forest

M

Malou (vern.) – see Kava above.

Matua (vern.) – Island cabbage ou *aelan kabij* in Bislama. The botanical name is *Abelmoschus manihot*.

Meae (vern.) – The space between land and sea

Moli (vern.) – The title used for the village customary Chief (*Jif* in Bislama), see Chapter 7 for a full definition and historical perspective on the term.

N

Nakamal (vern. and Bisl.) – The same term is used in vernacular and in Bislama. It designates the communal house or can also be considered as the Chief's house.

Nalot (vern. and Bisl.) – A traditional dish which consists of cooked tubers pounded on a wooden plate into smooth and quite elastic dough. It is often eaten with coconut milk (see p.140).

Namele (vern. and Bisl.) – *Cycas rumphii* or *circinalis*, known in English as “queen sago palm”, is important as symbol of power and is also used as an index to signal taboo places. It figures on Vanuatu's flag as two crossed leaves and symbolizes customary power.

Natavo (vern.) – *Terminalia catappa*

Natora (vern.) – *Acacia simplex*

Nangaria (vern. and Bislama) – *Cordyline* sp.; it is a woody monocotyledonous flowering plant native to the western Pacific Ocean. It used to be an important ceremonial plant, still used today in ceremonial circumstances and is also widely used ornamentally.

Narave (vern.) – Hermaphrodite pig

Narove (vern.) – The *nalot* plate. It is the wooden plate where the traditional dish called *nalot* is eaten.

Nasara (vern. and Bisl.) – It designates the genealogical paternal line. The Nasara is tied to people's historical trajectory through land. In the village, it is emplaced and it designates the

paternal core. In Tasiriki, there are four different nasara who joined the church in the beginning of the 20th century and who originated from different places in the bush.

Navara (vern.) – The spongy part which develops at the centre of a sprouted coconut in place of the coconut water.

Nga (Pelmoli vern.) – Blood

O

One (vern.) – The ground

Osono (vern.) - Fruit growing belowground, referring to the new generation of any tuber.

P

Peipei – *Polyscias sp.*, flowering plant. Used as ornamental plant, delimiting houses and can also be used as an edible plant in traditional dishes.

Pete (vern.) – Taro (*Colocasia esculenta*)

Po (vern.) – Pig (tuskers)

S

Simboro (Bisl.) - The *simboro* are like small *laplap* made in the saucepan. The tuber to be used is grated and then wrapped in the leaves of *Hibiscus abelmoschus*, thus making little wrappings the size of a big finger. They are then put in the saucepan in coconut milk.

Sisiro (vern.) – A traditional healer, *kleva* in Bislama.

T

Talui kam (vern.) – The yam garden (talū – garden/ kam - yam)

Talume (vern.) – That what leaves the body after death and referred as “*spirit*” in Bislama. It is also the term used in vernacular to designate the Holy Spirit, known then as *Talume Vurea*.

Tamate (vern.) – Literally “the one who is dead”, and can be translated as “*devel*” (devil) in Bislama.

Tano (vern.) – Now mostly used as meaning the world, usually opposed to *tuka* (vern.) which is the word used for heaven in the Christian context and which used to designate the world of the dead below ground.

Tan-vanua (vern.) – Former *vanua* or ancestral place, in Bislama “ples blong ol Bubu bifo”, the place of the ancestors.

Tarapene (vern.) – The term for the corpse after the spirit has left after death. Also used to designate the yam planted/buried from which will grow new yams.

Tasi (vern.) – The sea

Tavui (vern.) – Banana (*Musa spp.*)

Tetei (vern.) – Bad (as opposed to the term *vurea* - good)

Tuka (vern.) – Initially the world of the dead (underground), now used in the Christian context as meaning “heaven”.

U

Uta (vern.) – Place outside of the village. In Tasiriki, it designates the strip of land between the beach and the hills and where one can find pandanus trees, medicinal trees and plants, palm trees, banana trees and a grove of Burao used for firewood.

V

Vanua (vern.) – Inhabited space, i.e. the space where people live, the place of sociality (as opposed to the bush which can be a social place but which involve relations with non-humans too), *ples* in Bislama. Cf. Chapter 3 for a full discussion of the concept.

Vare (or *varea*) (vern.) – Horticultural garden, by extension, it designates the work place.

Vun (vern.) – Place for work outside of the *vanua*, mostly used in the expression “*matavun*”, “*mi go lo bus*” in Bislama and which is what people say when they leave the village for the bush or even when they go on business to town.

Vun (vern.) – Matrilineages, *laen* in Bislama (see Chapter 3 for a full description).

Vurea (vern.) – Good. It is used, in the Christian context, as the term to translate the word “holy” into vernacular.

Vusvus – Beach

W

Wolwol (vern.) – The customary form of marriage, “*pem gel*” (to pay the girl) in Bislama