USE OF THESES

This copy is supplied for purposes of private study and research only. Passages from the thesis may not be copied or closely paraphrased without the written consent of the author.
Ways of the Place

HISTORY, COSMOLOGY AND MATERIAL CULTURE
IN NORTH PENTECOST, VANUATU

John Patrick Taylor

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of the Australian National University
October 2003
This thesis is the result of original research carried out by the author except where otherwise cited in the text.

John Patrick Taylor
Department of Archaeology and Anthropology
Faculty of Arts
The Australian National University
For Ruben Todali

(Vira Livlivu)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am first and foremost indebted to my family at Avatvoltu, especially Ruben Todali (Vira Livlivu), Eileen Mutona, and their children. The knowledge that Jif Ruben has so generously shared with me is a gift for which I am truly humbled. My sincerest thanks also to Kolombas Todali, and the privilege of his enduring friendship, support and trust. I am particularly grateful to Robinson Todali and his wife Marie, Haggai Todali and Miriam Mongoia, and their children. Likewise, Anika and Justin, and especially the hard work of Eileen and Agnes Toa, and also Rachel, are greatly appreciated. (And not to forget Leo Vanua). Thank you also to Marsden Lolo and Nesta Mohinge, and especially James and Tatu, as well Willy Lolo and Melka Rovona, Hega, Freda, Joveal, Emily and Wairuhi.

My sincere appreciation to everyone living at Labwatgongoru, Lagaronboga, Atumu and Ataleva. I particularly acknowledge John Leo Tamata, for his guidance, generosity and wisdom. Also, Simon Godin and his insatiable enthusiasm and thirst for knowledge, and willingness to share it; Noel and Joko for their kind hospitality; also Bernard and Moli, John Tahi, Joshua and Samuel. Thomas Aru and Lynesse Huri, Vira Loli, Rachel Murongo, Nelson and Ata Aru, Joan and Hilda, Michael, Oddison Binihi, Peter Gnau, Annie Mutau, Robson, Michael, Derrick and Noel, Cecil Suvwa and Nesta Huri, George Aru, Mary, and also Desmond and Janet. Thank you all.

I would like here also to acknowledge the generosity of Ifraim Boe, Ezekiel Bonga, Thomas and Edgar Budongi, and their families, for so kindly welcoming me into their homes – often without warning! My thanks also to my S. P. R. friends Wesley, Franklin, and Stanley Bonga, and to everyone involved at the Abwatuntora Youth Centre, including Joe, George, Marsden, Lesley and Austin. To Richard Teona, Mama Mark Gaviga, Mama Robin Siro, Bishop Harry Tevi and Ben Tamata, for the benefit of their knowledge, tabiana gaivua maraga.

I am appreciative of institutional support at the Australian National University: including especially the Centre for Cross-cultural Research; the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology (faculty of Arts); the Gender Relations Centre, and the Department of Anthropology (Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies). This research was funded via an Australian National University, Arts Faculty Doctoral Scholarship and fieldwork grant.
For friendship and generosity during time spent in Port Vila, I thank especially Jean Mitchell, James and Aleks Collingwood-Bakeo, Ralph Regenvanu and Katriona Hyslop. I am also appreciative of the staff at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, the National Library, as well as Heidi Tydmers, Emily Niras and Sam Obed at the Vanuatu Yang Pipols Projek. During time spent in Vanuatu, and after, Michael Morgan and Stephen Zagala have been constant sources of inspiration and encouragement.

This thesis has benefited greatly from the encouragement, practical assistance and intellectual input of several people. I am especially grateful to the invaluable support of Lissant Bolton and Mary Patterson, both of whom spent long hours reading and commenting on drafts. For technical assistance I thank John Carnes, Kay Dancy and Jenny Sheehan at the Cartography Unit, RSPAS. Ian Bryson helped with scanning images, and has been a great source of encouragement. Natasha Dwyer came through when time was short to help make the photographs pretty. Simon Strong kindly helped with printing. I am also grateful for the input of Don Gardner, Darrell Tryon, Klaus Neumann and Alan Rumsey, and also to Greg Rawlings and Tim Curtis who gave me valuable advice and helped to calm pre-fieldwork nerves. To my supervisor, Margaret Jolly, I owe my deepest gratitude. Thank you very much for your patience, for your intellectual nurturance, and for the many hours you have sacrificed to ensure that this has become the thesis that I wanted to write.

Finally I wish to tender my heart-felt appreciation and gratitude to my friends and family. My mother Patricia Taylor has been unwavering in her support, as have my brother Richard and sister Christine. Thanks also to Amanda Surrey, Kalissa Alexeyeff, Ray Madden, Benedicta Rousseau, Ben Dibley, and to Wayne, Allison and Freya Scott. My girlfriend, Astrid Scott, has shared in all the hard and good times of this project, from start to finish. For her constant encouragement, patience, light-hearted spirit, and above all inspiration, I owe Astrid a debt far greater than simple words of acknowledgement can express.
ABSTRACT

Ways of the Place explores social, spatial and historical consciousness among the Sia Raga people of North Pentecost. In doing so it seeks to convey a sense of the intimate relationship between past, present, place and person that characterises this region of northern Vanuatu. Core arguments centre on the analysis of an apparently isomorphic structure that permeates across Sia Raga interpretations of history, cosmos and social practice, such as are made apparent in local written and oral texts, biological understandings and material culture. Rather than appearing as merely static, images that echo this structure incorporate aetiologies of growth, change, conflict and re-generation. The analysis of these central Sia Raga concepts, images and critical strategies bears relevance to ongoing anthropological debates concerning structure and history, and the relation between languages of time and space.

For the Sia Raga, trees provide a key narrative device to understandings of history, both recent and “deep”, particularly as these relate to notions of social and physical space. The narrative qualities of trees are further manifested in the profound social and cosmological knowledge that adheres within the architectonics of houses. Trees (and houses) embody qualities of autochthony and foundation, but also of growth and trajectory, and thus incorporate both solid and fluid qualities within the same image. Knowledge of the shaping of trees, involving the upward growth of a central trunk from which branches bifurcate on each side, is central to Sia Raga interpretive strategies. The notion of “sides” (tavalui) reflects the important Sia Raga idea of ambivalent dualism – a tense relation between equal and opposing sides – that is articulated through the concept of wasi: to be “tightly bound”, “entangled” or “stuck”. Wasi is implicated not only in relation to indigenous divisions – of moieties, male and female, the “lived world” and “other-world” – but is extended to reflect crucially on social and political-economic relations between Sia Raga and foreigners (tuturani), and of the relation between what are viewed as locally authentic “ways of the place” (alengan vanua) and the ways of outsiders (alengan tuturani).
# Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ iv
ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................... vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS .......................................................................................................... vii
LIST OF IMAGES .................................................................................................................. ix
GLOSSARY OF RAGA TERMS .......................................................................................... xi
MAP OF VANUATU .............................................................................................................. xix

PROLOGUE: Notes on Sia Raga Language and "Kastom" ........................................... 1

SECTION ONE: INTIMATE HISTORIES ................................................................. 17

LOCATING THE ANTHROPOLOGIST, DEFINING THE FIELD ................................ 18
- Canberra ......................................................................................................................... 20
- Port Vila ......................................................................................................................... 23
- Tagabe ............................................................................................................................. 30
- Asaola ............................................................................................................................... 33
- Melbourne ......................................................................................................................... 44

THE STORY OF JIMMY ............................................................................................... 47
- The Story of Jimmy ......................................................................................................... 48
- Branches on the Evergreen Tree: Jimmy “Historicised” ............................................... 52
- Amua ................................................................................................................................ 56
- Isles de la Pentecôte ........................................................................................................ 62
- The Canoes of Stealing ................................................................................................... 65
- Mama Matthias and the Curse of Asiula ......................................................................... 74
- Converting the Tuturani: Jimmy’s experiment in comparative religion ...................... 79
- Lost Gold and Pigs of Peace, in the Land of Love: cross-cultural transactions ........... 84
- Reflections of Jimmy ...................................................................................................... 90

SECTION TWO: INTIMATIONS OF STRUCTURE ........................................... 96

THE WAYS OF THE LAND-TREE: SIA RAGA COSMOGRAPHY ...................... 97
- The Clean Ones, the Drinkers, and the Voice of Daniel ............................................. 98
- Halana: the ways of the land-tree .................................................................................. 106
- Abanoi: the other side of the leaf .................................................................................. 113
- Tauva: the generations of atuan vanna ........................................................................ 116
- Welena: a pathway to the ancestors .............................................................................. 119
- Bwamatana: the foundation diverges ........................................................................... 125
- Tavalui: the divided world ............................................................................................ 130
- Aleñan Tuturani: the ways of foreigners ....................................................................... 133

FLUID TECHNOLOGIES: PATHS OF RELATIONSHIP, SPIRALS OF EXCHANGE .......................................................... 137
- The “Raga System”: a brief ethnographic history ...................................................... 138
- Relationship Terminology ........................................................................................... 143
- Same-moiety Relationship Terminology ...................................................................... 146
- Cross-moiety Relationship Terminology ...................................................................... 147
- Vara and hou .................................................................................................................. 148
- Spiralling Within: same-moiety relationships and the reproduction of the matriline .... 153

vii
SECTION THREE: DWELLING .............................................................. 186

SHIFTING HABITATS AND DYNAMICS OF SPACE: GENDER AND THE SACRED IN SIA RAGA SOCIAL PRACTICE .......................................................... 187
Rahuana: Sia Raga landscape and “settlement” .................................................. 188
Colonial Transformations in the Gendered Space of Imwa and Gamali .................. 211
Imwa .......................................................................................................... 211
Gamali ........................................................................................................ 217
Imwa and Gamali: blurring the boundaries ...................................................... 223
Ancestral Regeneration and the Sacralisation of Space ..................................... 227
SIA RAGA ARCHITECTONICS: KNOWLEDGE AND AGENCY OF HOUSES .......................................................................................................................... 237
House Construction ...................................................................................... 240
Gamali and Imwa architecture ....................................................................... 244
House, Tree, Body ......................................................................................... 247
Listening Posts .............................................................................................. 254
Conclusion .................................................................................................... 258
EPILOGUE: AND STILL THEY GO TO THE MOON ........................................ 260
BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................................................................... 268
LIST OF IMAGES

Image 1: Ruben Todali and Richard Leona ................................................................. 1
Image 2: Map of North Pentecost ................................................................................ 3
Image 3: Pattern drawn by Ruben Todali ................................................................. 14
Image 4: Kolombas Todali prepares an oven fire in the aging gamali at Avatvotu. 16
Image 5: Simon Godin of Gaiware Bulvanua leads a demonstration of a boy’s dance during a youth fundraising event at Labwatongorou .............................. 26
Image 6: Kolombas Todali outside the “Habai Gara” nakamai in Tagabe ........... 30
Image 7: Watched by Eileen Todali, Watrahu, and Ruben Todali, Haggai Todali rehearses gonato ritual procedure outside the gamali at Avatvotu ....................... 35
Image 8: With Robinson Todali and Joveal Lolo, the author prepares a laba (coconut shell cup) of mologu (kava) ........................................................................ 37
Image 9: The view south from Ifraim Boe’s house on the point at Abwatuntora. 41
Image 10: Ifraim Boe ..................................................................................................... 42
Image 12: Clement Leo leads Willy Dogo, Kolombas Todali and Robinson Todali in circling to receive pigs during a boobiloli at Avatvotu ........................................ 61
Image 13: Sketch-map of Raga showing “Christian villages”. From the diary of Reverend Colin Wilson, 1899 ........................................................................... 71
Image 14: Photograph titled, “Rowboat from the “Southern Cross” at Lamalana, N. Pentecost.” J. W. Beattie, 1906 .............................................................. 73
Image 16: Untitled photograph of the chapel at Lamalanga. Probably J. W. Beattie, 1906 ........................................................................................................ 81
Image 17: Eileen Todali dancing havwau at Avatvotu ........................................ 82
Image 18: Bales of Gilau kava for export to Port Vila, Loltong Harbour .......... 86
Images 19 and 20: Photographs from the opening of the Mologu Company headquarters .......................... 87
Image 21: Echoing violent images from elsewhere in Melanesia (above), a “devil” (atmate) guards a dance troop from South Pentecost ........................................ 90
Image 22: The author performing gonato ................................................................... 93
Image 23: Land-tree figure one, drawn by Ruben Todali .................................... 98
Image 24: Receiving the Holy Sacrament at Amatbobo Anglican Church ........ 103
Image 25: Land-tree figure two, drawn by Jif Ruben Todali .............................. 107
Image 26: A newly re-built individual grave (right), an older grave (left), and an ancient collective bwaru left to overgrowth (behind), at Avatvotu .......................... 108
Image 27: Lineal segmentation from a unity ................................................................ 111
Image 28: Serial bifurcation at specific nodal points ............................................. 111
Image 29: Land-tree figure three, drawn by Kolombas Todali ........................... 112
Image 30: Simon Godin demonstrating an uli (“sand drawing”) of Vatun gele, the “door to paradise” (Photograph by Stephen Zagala) .................................. 142
Image 31: Schematic diagram of ideal Sia Raga marriage flows, based on terminological equation ............................................................................................... 143
Image 32: Four line matrilineal prescriptive system with symmetric terminology, based on the “Dieri model” ........................................................................ 144
Image 33: Table of Sia Raga relationship terminology ........................................ 145
Image 34: Matrilineal relationships, parallel-cousin emphasis ............................ 146
Image 35: Matrilineal relationships, cross-cousin emphasis ............................... 147
# Glossary of Raga Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raga</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>abanoi</td>
<td>“paradise”, mirror-world located metaphorically “on the other side of the leaf”. The dwelling place of “ghosts”, ancestors and other atatun vanua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aboa</td>
<td>husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aleña</td>
<td>way, style, mode of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aleñan vanua</td>
<td>ways of the place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aleñan tuturani</td>
<td>the ways of whites/foreigners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alo</td>
<td>circle, to circulate, the sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aloa</td>
<td>Sisters’ child (male classificatory kinship term)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amare</td>
<td>above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ate amare</td>
<td>heaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amua</td>
<td>before, at first, time before the arrival of tuturani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>atamani</td>
<td>man, male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>atatu</td>
<td>person, people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>atatmaita</td>
<td>white person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>atatmato</td>
<td>black person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>atatun vanua</td>
<td>“people of the place”, ancestors and other “spirit”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>atmate (also tamtena)</td>
<td>soul, spirit of dead person, “ghost”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>awe</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>av, avo</td>
<td>speech, talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baño</td>
<td>shark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ban, bano</td>
<td>to depart, to go across (neither up or down), to depart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bano</td>
<td>a deep or bottomless hole in the ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bari</td>
<td>small plaited pandanus textiles used for exchange, usually died red. <em>bari</em> are also worn by women, wrapped around the waist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baribari</td>
<td>the act of wearing <em>bari</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bebe</td>
<td>butterfly, moth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>binhi</td>
<td>thought, thinking, meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>binthiva</td>
<td>meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>binibi marahi</td>
<td>respect, literally to “think heavy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bolololi</td>
<td>ceremony during which men exchange and kill pigs with the aim of ascending through a system of graded titles to marry into one’s own moiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bona</td>
<td>to give birth, to happen, to split or divide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bora</td>
<td>to give birth, to happen, to split or divide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bul</td>
<td>to be or to bring together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bulbulu</td>
<td>togetherness, unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bule</td>
<td>one of two moieties (also Tahi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bulena</td>
<td>wife’s brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bwaliga</td>
<td>wife’s father, daughter’s husband (male classificatory kinship term)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bwana</td>
<td>long plaied pandanus textiles used primarily for exchange, usually died with red patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bwara</td>
<td>grave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bwat</td>
<td>Foundation, base, starting point, trunk, stump of tree, head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bwatun vanua</td>
<td>ancestral foundation place, place of birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bweta</td>
<td>taro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dabagilu</td>
<td>to return</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daga</td>
<td>blood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dam, damu</td>
<td>yam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dam raño</td>
<td>the “yams are dry”, name of the time of year at which yams are ready to harvest (April/May)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dari</td>
<td>to put, to appoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dari balana</td>
<td>to “make a road”, to negotiate, to conspire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>danlato</td>
<td>young unmarried woman or girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dau</td>
<td>to put, to place, to create</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dantan</td>
<td>to put in order, to appoint, to decree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dantanu leu</td>
<td>“original” ancestral laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dodo</td>
<td>tree, rain cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>davoña, davoñana</td>
<td>memorial, proof, pattern or likeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dura</td>
<td>sow (female pig)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gabi</td>
<td>fire, earth oven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gai</td>
<td>support, instrument, post, a stick or branch of wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gaimabaña</td>
<td>central posts of house, the “support that diverges”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gaibubwe</td>
<td>ridgepole, the “support that joins”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
gamali  meeting house, “men’s house”

gan  to eat, to consume, to corrode

garigi  today

garigari  supernatural beings or animals associated with specific hou (matrilineal descent groups).

gida  we, us (in Bislama, yumi)

gita  to look, to see

gogona  “taboo”, restricted (by human decree)

gogonai  to be/treat as “taboo”, to be respectful, to be quiet

gogoniva  day of preparation before a ceremony

gonata  ritual in which males sacrifice fish, crabs and other sea life

gonato  ritual in which males sacrifice chickens

garia  cordyline, croton

bai  up, above, to go upwards

babwe  husband’s sister, brother’s wife (female classificatory kinship term)

bala  way, road, trajectory

balatena  the “road beneath”, to stoop when passing people who are in conversation as a show of respect

bantai  bad

batwa  dance performed by women at bololo

bivo  down, below, to go downwards

bogosi  opposite-sex sibling (including classificatory opposite-sex siblings)

hou  in sequence, generation, “family”, social group defined largely through the reckoning of matrilineal descent.

hubwe  to merge, to join

hun  to formally exchange bwana by first placing one end upon one’s head

hunhuniana  the act of hun

huri  for, because, about, concerning, to follow, also father’s sister’s husband

ibwiri  front “canopy” of gamali
ilo  to know, knowledge (especially technical knowledge)
Inau  first person singular pronoun, I
ihan  name
ihan boe  literally “pig-name”, graded name or title
imwaa  domestic dwelling
kun  like, as
lagi  to marry
lagijana  marriage exchange ceremony
lagi  to walk, to go
labaa  coconut shell cup used for drinking kava
lai  to give or receive, to exchange
lala  scared, wild, to avoid particular kin
lalanu bwana  exchange of bwana by women at bololo
leo  law
libi  to exchange or purchase
liu  to leave, issue forth, to grant or allow
linia  component of pig and textile exchanges at lagijana
(marriage)
lin  to surpass, to overtake, in superlative degree
livo  tooth
livoala  circle tusked tooth
logo  laplap, “pudding” of grated tuber or banana that is
wrapped in large leaves (maŋoo) and cooked in an earth
oven.
lulu  hole
lulu bantai  “bad hole”, toilet
lumute  moss, seaweed
mabi  kinship term denoting people of marriageable
categorisation within one’s opposite moiety (especially
for men). Also the more commonly used term for one’s
paternal grandchildren (also sibiveve).
mabi vere  paternal grandchildren (including those people so
defined in classificatory terms)
mahalu  exchanges at mateama (funeral): siblings and mothers’
brothers of the deceased give pigs, textiles and money to
the deceased’s fathers and children
| **mabana** | to diverge, part or split |
| **mai** | to come |
| **mala** | hawk, peregrine falcon |
| **malomalo** | plaited pandanus textiles worn by men. |
| **maqo** | heliconia indica, also the large leaves of this plant that are used for wrapping and cooking food. |
| **maraha** | generic name for textile wealth |
| **marahi** | heavy |
| **mata** | eye, source, hole, outlet, critical component, precious |
| **matangabi** | sacred fire |
| **mataisa** | wisdom |
| **mataisaoga** | wise person |
| **mate** | dead |
| **matana** | funerary exchanges and burial |
| **mologu** | kava, the plant *piper methysticum* |
| **mua** | informal term for *ratahi* (mother) (including all classificatory mothers) |
| **mulei** | again |
| **mwalaqelo** | young unmarried man |
| **mwasi** | true, correct, straight |
| **mvasin welen** | “true road to the ancestors” |
| **mwei** | supernatural creature that takes human-like form, may be either benign or malign, usually more playful than harmful. Usually associated with the coastline (see also sarivanua). Term of endearment to one’s daughter |
| **mwele** | cycad palm (*cycas circinnata*), the leaves of which are indicative of chiefly authority and are also used as a counting instrument |
| **mwin** | to drink |
| **nitu** | child, (including classificatory children) |
| **Raga** | language of North Penetcost, and in that language, the island of Pentecost |
| **ramuna** | hair, tassels, especially of exchange textiles |
| **rau** | leaf |
| **ratahi** | mother (including classificatory mothers) |
| **ratabigi** | male person of authority, leader, “chief” |
rawe  hermaphrodite pig
rño  to hear, to apprehend
roroño  power, energy, spiritual power
sabu  holy, set apart, to sulk
sabuga  “taboo”, sacredly powerful or dangerous
sara  “dancing ground”, ceremonial field
sarivamua  supernatural creature that takes human-like form, may be either benign or malign, but usually more playful than harmful. Usually associated with the bush (see also mwei)
savagoro  to dance, performance of all-night dance and song following a ritual
serava  krip (creep), to secretly seek or engage in sexual activity at night.
sese  to pull apart or disassemble, to kill ten pigs at bolololi
sia  earthquake
sibi  kinship term denoting people of marriageable categorisation within one’s opposite moiety (especially for women), also one’s paternal grandfather and siblings (ie. sibi veve)
sibi veve  paternal grandfather and siblings (including those people so defined in classificatory terms)
sibida  matrilineal ancestors
silv  voice, law
silo  “laws of the place”
simaño  a young coconut
sinisiini  tam tam, slit gongs.
subwe  male grade-taking system and associated graded titles, more commonly bolololi
surai  to steal
surasura  theft, stealing
Tabi  one of two moieties (also Buie)
tabiana  “thank you”, gift of appreciation, gifts given to bride by member so her own family
tağure  sago palm (*metaxyylon warburgii*), the leaves of which are used for making sections of roof thatch, an individual section of roof thatch
tai  to cut
tai simaño  to “cut the young coconut”, a pre-natal ritual procedure which aids in the development of the foetus father (including classificatory fathers)
tama  father
tata  informal term for father
tamata  peace

tanbona  porch-like gamali frontage

tanbunia  large basket used for storing textile wealth

tano  ground, soil

tarabe  mother’s brother (including classificatory mother’s brothers)

tasala  wife

tatari  to sacrifice

tauta  generation, epoch

tauruen bibiliana  “gift of dirting”, cash component of volin vavine (“bride price”)

tavalu  side, half

tavalui  side of, moiety

tavalun imwa  one side of a house

tavaluran (also tavaltena)  “the other side of the leaf”, metaphor for the location of abano, and name of spectral creatures that reside there

tavoha  good

toa  chicken

 tua  same-sex sibling (including all classificatory same-sex siblings)

tuaga  older same sex sibling (or classificatory same-sex sibling)
tibi  younger same sex sibling (or classificatory same-sex sibling)

turtura  outer struts or posts of house

tuturani  white person, foreigner (especially of western or Asian descent)

udurugu  uncastrated boar

uli  design, pattern

uliuli  to draw

uma  garden

ureure  world, or more specifically, the lived world of human experience

ute  place, location

ute gogona  “taboo” place, place of humanly imposed restriction

ute sabuga  “taboo” place, place of ancestral or sacred restriction to clear, to clean

vagaha  to “clean the road”, to settle and argument, feud or quarrel

vagaha hala  

xvii
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Varina</th>
<th>place, area of land, island (particularly in relation to social or ancestral identity)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vara</td>
<td>newly germinated coconut, sprout, social group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vatu</td>
<td>stone, rock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vatun tama</td>
<td>“stones of peace”, piles of stones which act as a kind of sanctuary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vavine</td>
<td>woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vev, Veve</td>
<td>speech, talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vevburi</td>
<td>history, story, explanation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vāgāga</td>
<td>“angel”, winged creatures that occasionally descend from amare (“heaven”) and teach morality to people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vīra</td>
<td>flower, male graded title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vīl</td>
<td>to purchase, payment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viol vavine</td>
<td>“payment [for the] woman”, bride price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vora</td>
<td>to split, to divide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vwarwa</td>
<td>father’s sister (including all classificatory father’s sisters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wai</td>
<td>water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wai tuturani</td>
<td>alcoholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wāga</td>
<td>canoe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wasi</td>
<td>tightly bound, tenacious, stuck, difficult, tension, “social entanglement”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wehi</td>
<td>to strike or hit, to kill by delivering blows (sacrificially or otherwise)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welena</td>
<td>“pathway to the ancestors”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MAP OF VANUATU

On a sunny afternoon, in the shade of a canopy of corrugated iron, beside a smoking fireplace upon which green bananas were slowly roasting, my *tuma* (father) and *ratabi* (“chief”) Ruben Todali talked to me about the history of Pentecost Island. He told me that in the past, many centuries before the arrival of *tatorai* like myself (whites, foreigners), 1 the people of North Pentecost could not speak. They communicated by way of designs that they described into the ground with their fingers. Instead of people,

---

1 The Raga word *tatorai* is translated as “wait until morning” (also see chapter three). Its origins are attributed to a common practice of Anglican missionaries during the late nineteenth century. According to Sia Raga historians, the mission ship *Southern Cross* would anchor offshore at the mission station at Lamalanga in the evening, but the missionaries would wait until the morning of the next day before coming ashore. As Kolomias Todali first suggested to me, the phrase also reflects the pervasive metaphor of Christianity’s arrival as rendering a transformation from a time of darkness to one of light. Keeling’s argument that such imagery carries the added connotation of racial hierarchy imparted by white missionaries might also be appropriate here (Keeling 1992: 228-233). But see Jolly (1996: 253-254) for a critique of this connection. Today, while *tatorai* is usually understood to refer to Europeans, the word more properly encompasses any person who is perceived to be an *alutafika* (literally, “white person”). This includes, for instance, members of the South-East Asian populations resident at Luganville and Port Vila. By contrast I was told that the category *tatorai* should not be used to include Indians or Africans, since such people are seen to be *alutafiko* (“black people”).
the sentient and mobile rocks and stones were talkative.  

The dark soil of the hills and valleys also spoke. So too did the winds, the rains, and the salt water that lapped against the sand and coral of the island’s coast. But some time ago this situation reversed, so now it is people who talk, while the land, winds, rain and sea remain wordless.

Nowadays, said Ruben, Sia Raga people sometimes say of their island, “we must speak for the land, because the land cannot speak for itself.” (From an interview with Jif Ruben Todali, Avatotu, May 1999).

This intimate connection between people, land and language – of language as having somehow vacated the environment for the mouths of people – is echoed in the Raga words “Sia Raga”. Raga speakers use this pronominal phrase when they wish to express a shared identity of language, land and aleŋan vanna (ways of the place). The word “sia” means “earthquake”, and in this specific context refers to a seismic jolt known to have taken place many millennia ago, that caused the island’s emergence from under the sea. “Raga” refers to the Raga language, and also, in that language, to the island of Pentecost itself.

Like most islands of the Pacific, the island that is now most commonly known within “official” discourse as Pentecost, has been known, and is, by a great many other names: Araga, Whitsundite, Pentecost, Uretabe, Aroaro, Los Portales de Belens, to name only some. The Raga’s name, Raga, is also contested by those people who live to the south, and who speak other languages – Apma, Sa, Seke, and Sowa. For the purposes of this thesis I use the term “Sia Raga” to designate the Raga speakers of North Pentecost; those people who share ancestral connections to bwatun vanna (foundation places) within the region of North Pentecost, and who express those connections through shared links of land, kinship, language and culture.  

Where then is this place that has so many names? Pentecost lies in the north east of the archipelago now known as Vanuatu, at approximately 168°, 10’ degrees east,

---

2 This is a common historical theme throughout all of Vanuatu, and for instance provided the title to John Layard’s book, Stone Men of Malekula (1942:18-19).

3 The Raga language, too, has been given different names by different people, including: Bwatvenua, Qtvenua, Lamalanga, North Raga, Yunnarama, and more recently Hano (meaning simply “what”), by the American-based “Rosetta” language archive project and The Bible Society in Australia.

4 It should be pointed out that there is no single term that is habitually used by the people of North Pentecost to distinguish themselves as a group. Upon my enquiry, however, the term “Sia Raga” was suggested to me as being an appropriate name for the Raga speakers of North Pentecost by several young men who live in the region’s Gilau district. This is the area in which I lived and carried out the bulk of my research. I cannot guarantee that all Raga-speakers would approve of the term. But see also Yoshioka and Leon’s Raga/English/Bislama dictionary in which “siaraga” is glossed as “people of Pentecost” (1992: 30).
and between 15°, 27' and 15°, 70' degrees south (see map, page xx). It is a long narrow island that stretches some sixty-three kilometres north to south, and is twelve kilometres across at its widest point. The island’s east coast, usually the first to be met by hurricane-bearing winds, provides a thin yet rugged barrier to the Pacific Ocean. In this direction it is eight hundred kilometres to Fiji, the nearest eastern neighbour. Stretching northwards, a mere six kilometres away, lies the even more razor-thin island of Maewo. Twenty kilometres across the placid westward sea, and lying in the water like an upturned canoe, is the ever-present island of Ambae. Further off, on very clear days the much larger islands of Malakula and Espiritu Santo are also visible. Pentecost, Ambae and Maewo collectively make up the Penama province of Vanuatu.

Image 2: Map of North Pentecost (modified from Haberkorn 1989).
The area of Pentecost in which Raga is the defining language extends approximately twenty kilometres southwards from the northern tip to Tasvarongo (Yoshioka, 1987: 3). It is also spoken in areas of South Maewo. The least elevated part of North Pentecost is called Ahivo. Here in the north more than 1,200 people reside in an area of around six square kilometres, making it by far the most heavily populated region of the island. The majority of other people live in villages or hamlets of varying size. These may consist of as many as two or three hundred people, or a single household. Settlements are mainly dotted along the western coast, particularly within the Hurilau and Lolkasai districts, or across the inland plateau of Aute. At altitudes of between two and three hundred metres above sea level, many hamlets command stunning views that stretch for miles across the ocean. People also reside on the alluvial regions of the eastern coast, called Aligu, on either side of the main village of Renbura. Generally speaking, within the Raga-speaking region hamlets are encountered with lessening frequency the further one travels southwards (“upwards”, in local idiom), especially inland beyond the crescent west coast Bay of Loltong. Here the terrain becomes increasingly rough, and overland travel more difficult.

As of the 1999 Vanuatu National Census, Pentecost’s total population was 14,057 (Vanuatu Statistics Office 2000). This was the fifth-highest island population of Vanuatu behind Efate, Santo, Tanna and Malakula (in that order). Of this figure, the census counted 5,255 North Pentecost residents (Bakeo-Collingwood to Taylor, 2000: personal communication), although the actual figure was probably somewhat higher. The bulk of my fieldwork was carried out in Gilau, a subdistrict of Hurilau. At this time more than one hundred and sixty people lived in six hamlets. The hamlet in which I lived is called Avatvotu. Perched high up in the hills overlooking the island’s west coast, Avatvotu and its “twin” hamlet of Lolbubulusi together consisted of five households (see chapter five).

In line with the island’s topology, there is a common tropological association of inland areas with the Bislama stereotype of man bus (bush people), rough and ready.

5 In this thesis I distinguish broadly between “hamlets”, such as Avatvotu (comprising of small household clusters generally located on a single, individually named runna) and “villages” such as Abwatuntora (comprising two or more hamlets that are nucleated across several adjacent, individually named runna). It should be noted, however, that no such distinction is made in Bislama where any group of household dwellings is referred to as a nipa. For further discussion, see chapter five.

6 The North Pentecost census figures are misleading in that households and their members from several distinct hamlets appear to have been lumped together as one (In Gilau, Lagaronboga, Amumu and Ataleva have been collectively counted within Lamatongorou, for example). Also, some substantial villages are completely absent from the survey (eg. Nambwarainuit, Arasa). The reason for these discrepancies is unclear. The total number of villages listed, forty six, is therefore undoubtedly incorrect.
traditionalists, as against the more cosmopolitan and educated coastal dwellers. This
distinction has as much to do with socio-economic geography as it does with the history
of colonial incursion. Today’s coastal dwellers frequently bemoan the difficulties
inherent in maintaining garden land in the hills above. On the other hand, a common
complaint of people living “on top” is differential access to infrastructural links of trade
and politics, as well as proximity to schools, health centers and other services. With the
sudden growth of the kava industry over copra (see chapter two), and the concurrent
development of inland roads and transport, such services are becoming more accessible
to inland people. There is, however, an emerging distinction between central inland
agricultural producers and coastal entrepreneurial consumers.

Gardening is central to life on North Pentecost, and for most Sia Raga people
agriculture is the main source of sustenance and income. Of particular importance to
subsistence is the cultivation of taro, yam and manioc. A range of other garden produce
supplement these staple crops, including a variety of banana species, nuts, coconuts,
local cabbage, breadfruit, sugarcane, Malay apples, pawpaw and mango. Other recently
introduced exotics include citrus and stone fruits, along with avocados, corn, beans and
marrows. Domesticated pig, cattle and chicken provide the main sources of meat
protein. These are supplemented by wild game, such as fruit bat, local birds, lizards,
reef fish and various sorts of crab and other shellfish, including the now somewhat rare
but succulent coconut crab.

North Pentecost is recognised as one of the best kava producing areas in the
country. With a sudden increase in demand for kava in both domestic and international
markets throughout the course of the late 1990s, kava fully replaced copra as the island’s
main cash crop. In the immediate area in which I worked (with the exception of
members of clergy) every adult male was cash cropping kava. At the same time, signs of
an intensification of engagement with the cash economy were apparent in the flurry of
stores that were opening during the time of my stay. Rice, noodles and tinned fish are
in increasing demand, along with the ubiquitous Peter Jackson cigarettes, especially for
those for whom kava production takes precedence over subsistence gardening, or where
the population is under demographic pressure. Such is the case in the extreme north of

---

7 The international kava market fell significantly following my main fieldtrip to Vanuatu. As a result of
preliminary research carried out in Germany, linking the consumption of kava to liver disease, many
European countries, including France and Britain, have banned its sale. When I last visited Pentecost in
November and December, 2001, the island’s primary exporter The Mologu Company had fallen into
receivership.
the island where one church leader told me, “here, education must now be our garden” (Interview with Father Mark Gaviga, May, 2000).

Five distinct vernacular languages are spoken across Pentecost as a whole. Of these, Raga is represented by the highest number of speakers. Apma, the language of Central Pentecost, is the next highest (approximately 4,500), followed by Sa in the south (approximately 1,800). The declining languages Seke (300), and Sowa (25), are also spoken in the central region (Tryon 1998: 170). Many people are able to speak several indigenous languages, and this reflects the considerable movement that occurs between the geographical spaces within which these languages are defined. For Sia Raga people, varying degrees of fluency in Apma and Lolowai (the language of Northeast Ambae) is particularly common. Furthermore, only a few adults that I met were unable to speak Bislama, the national lingua franca. English and French are the official languages of education in schools, and are also spoken with varying degrees of proficiency, especially amongst younger people.

Tryon (1998) identifies Raga as the southern most example of a major subgroup of the Oceanic group of languages that stretches east to Malo and north to the Torres Group of islands. While its immediate neighbours over land are the Central Pentecost Apma speakers, Raga's closest linguistic affiliations are in fact with the languages of Merelava in the southern Banks group, Maewo, and especially Northeast Ambae (Tryon. 1998: 176). Despite the existence of numerous published texts, the orthography of Raga has yet to be firmly established. In this thesis I follow the orthography employed within what is the most widely known and circulated of these published texts, especially locally, this being the Romi Tavoja non Jisai Kvae, a translation of the Good News Bible (The Bible Society of the South Pacific 1988). The authors of this text use essentially the same orthography that Yoshioka has employed in his many publications (see especially, Yoshioka 1992, 1987, 1988).

During the course of my fieldwork I communicated with people in both Raga and Bislama, and this has been reflected in the writing of this thesis. (Throughout the text, Raga words are italicised (such as aleńan vanua) while Bislama words are both italicised and underlined (kastom)). Before leaving for Vanuatu I undertook the study of

---

8 Note that Tryon's estimates were calculated several years before the national census, hence the discrepancy in total population figures.
9 Tryon suggests that there is a "likely possibility... that the languages of Vanuatu belong to a single higher-order Vanuatu group which splits into two major subgroups, North-Central Vanuatu and Southern Vanuatu. The North-Central Vanuatu group divides into Northern [including Raga] and Central Vanuatu (Tryon 1996: 170).
Bislama with the help of Tyron’s *Bislama, An Introduction to the National Language of Vanuatu* (Tryon 1987). Often described as a form of “pidgin English”, Bislama developed during the course of the nineteenth century as a means of communication between ni-Vanuatu and the *tuturani* (white, foreign) traders, missionaries, and beachcombers who sought profit from their land, resources, bodies and labour. Today, through Bislama, English-speaking researchers visiting Vanuatu for the first time – also in search of profit, we might say, from their bodies, knowledge and hospitality – are able to quickly gain access to communication with ni-Vanuatu. While the grammar and syntax of Bislama is essentially Austronesian in form, its vocabulary is primarily derived from English (Tryon 1987: 3). This word store is supplemented with nouns taken from the many vernacular languages of Vanuatu, of which there are more than a hundred, as well as French, and to a lesser extent Vietnamese (Crowley 1995: 28).

For people undertaking research outside of the primarily urban contexts in which Bislama is the main language spoken in public, reliance on Bislama becomes a curse as well as a blessing. A result of my early acquisition of Bislama I was quickly able to engage in one-to-one conversations, but soon found that people in North Pentecost prefer to speak amongst themselves in their vernacular tongue. This often meant that I was cut off from the many conversations taking place around me. Indeed, the negative consequences of choosing to communicate in Bislama became doubly apparent when I began to notice that, where two or more people were present, even the conversations I instigated in Bislama were as often as not soon switched to Raga.

For this reason I decided to learn Raga, especially after it became clear that my research would remain focused within the region of North Pentecost (see chapter one). In this effort two resources were invaluable to me: Leona and Yoshioka’s vocabulary including Bislama translations (1992), and a dictionary compiled by Marion Hardacre over more than twenty years of Anglican missionary service in the area until 1929 (Hardacre, n. d.). It was always a disappointment, to my interlocutors as much as myself, that I never properly mastered the local language to the extent that I was able to adequately engage in full-flowing conversations, even if I understood what was being said around me. Nevertheless, by mixing Raga with Bislama, I spent a considerable effort examining Raga words and expressions, with conversations about the various meanings of key concepts such as *wasi, welema, binihi* or *hala* often stretching throughout

---

entire afternoons. Furthermore, with the additional aid of various word lists compiled by myself and others I have been able to undertake the translation of Raga texts to such an extent that I believe I am able to go some way towards capturing the poetic nuances of that language.

One such conversation took place on the 23rd of June, 1999, a date I know from my field notes and diary. I had walked to Abwatuatoria for the services of North Pentecost’s only National Bank of Vanuatu branch, and the co-op store. This was a journey I made most weeks. I would use money from the bank to buy food, soap, kerosene, and cigarettes – for my family, as tabiana (gifts/“thank you”), and for myself. My friend Ifraim Boe was sitting on the grass outside the bank, in which he worked. It was his lunch break, and so the bank was closed until early afternoon. Ifraim was talking to another friend of mine, David, who was coach of the Abwatuatoria football team. I sat down to join them. Knowing that my Raga was still not good, Ifraim and David graciously switched to Bislama.

Ifraim filled me in on the topic of their conversation which, he said, had been traversing familiar topics concerning the relative importance of aleñan vanua (literally, “ways of the place”) – or now, in Bislama, “kastom” – and its appropriateness and efficacy within contemporary Sia Raga life. Ifraim, dissatisfied, turned to me and asked, “what does kastom mean?” Since I was in the area as an anthropologist, and was therefore obviously an expert on kastom, Ifraim assumed that I would be able to provide a clear and succinct definition for the term. This was especially the case since Ifraim considered kastom to be a tuturani, or white person’s word. After protesting that the word was ni-Vanuatu as much as tuturani, I gave my explanation using some even more recently introduced Bislama terms; “bistri, kalja mo tratisin blong manplies” (“history, culture and tradition of the people of [a particular] place”). Little did I realise that I was echoing a similar tripartite phrase, “kastom, kalja mo tradisin”, that throughout preceding decades had gained considerable currency throughout Vanuatu following their incorporation within National Radio programming, Arts Festivals, and in various contexts associated with the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (Bolton 2003: 31). After further thought and discussion about the possible differences of meaning between these additional words, Ifraim came to the conclusion that the term kastom was inadequate in describing those aspects of Sia Raga life that are referred to in Raga as “aleñan vanua”. This was because, rather than simply referring to locally derived “cultural” practices in the present, aleñan vanua encompasses a more deeply felt sentiment of correctness in
human behaviour and thought, one that is importantly merged with place; “ol strek faisin mo tingting blong plei”, as he told me then, in Bislama (“all the correct ways and ideas belonging to place”). Bislama was by negative contrast, he told me, “albaut name”, “just all around”, “loose”, or “scattered”.

The term aleñan vanua encompasses particular Sia Raga social ideals; like tamata (peace), binibi marabi (respect), and bulinuluana (togetherness). Such ideals are themselves a part of a deeply felt sentiment and ethos of located being. While many Sia Raga will attest to the usefulness of Bislama, the fact that it is known to be introduced av tuturani (white people’s talk) lends to it an inferior status. Clearly for Ifraim, part of the problem with the term kastom was the fact of its introduction from another language. It was not a “true” (mwas) Raga word, not a part of the ways of the place (aleñan vanua), and therefore not an authentic part of the land. It thus didn’t resonate with the intimate Sia Raga conjuncture of person, place and language that I have alluded to above.

Since independence “kastom” has become a rhetorically important, though in many areas largely ineffectual concept within national legislation (see Rawlings 2002). It has also been developed as a crucial idiom for the mobilisation of culture-related projects at a national level (Bolton 2003: 31, 1997; Philibert 1986: 3). The term kastom has also been useful in serving ethnographic interests, just as much as it has served those of ni-Vanuatu Bislama speakers, in conveying a particularly local understanding of “culture”. To choose what is merely the most recent example from many, Bolton has written that: “kastom is the word that people in Vanuatu use to characterize their own knowledge and practice in distinction to everything they identify as having come from outside their place” (2003: xiii). While I certainly agree with this definition from the national perspective from which it is written – and in which Bislama more comfortably operates – in terms of the kind of ideas about language and place that were expressed to me by Sia Raga people like Ifraim (above), there is also a somewhat paradoxical, if not contradictory element to such interpretations. Kastom is itself known to be a colonially imposed concept (see Bolton 2003: 1-25). For many of my Sia Raga interlocutors, this fact rendered the term unsuitable for use in discussions of their ways of the place.

In deference to these issues raised by Ifraim, I generally try to avoid using Bislama terms within the primarily Sia Raga contexts of this thesis. Where they do appear, they are either direct quotations of people’s words (spoken or written), or correspond to the more urban or trans-lingual contexts in which Bislama is most commonly spoken. One other context in which I use the Bislama term kastom, as
opposed to *aleñan vanua*, relates to discussions of Christianity (such as in chapter two). In North Pentecost the concept of *kastom* is used in certain contexts in opposition to the church, primarily on the basis of very tangible differences of ritual practice, spatial focus, and social hierarchy. By contrast, the concept of *aleñan vanua* incorporates certain aspects of Christianity that are seen to correspond with local moral and ethical principles. In this way people often told me that the Sia Raga were always Christian, even in the pre-contact time of *anuau* ("at first"). This reflects the perception that the basic teachings of the Church are essentially the same as those local and antecedent ways of the place.

Denominationally, the overwhelming majority of Raga speakers today are Anglican (around 84%). The most notable exception are Roman Catholics (10.5%), most of whom reside in the village of Latano. There is also a Seventh Day Adventist presence around the west coast area at Abwatuntora (1.4%), and many of the people of Lamuruntoa are members of the Neil Thomas Ministry (1.4%). The Baha’i Faith is becoming increasingly popular throughout the area. This is particularly the case amongst younger men and women, many of whom are seeking an alternative to Anglican autocracy. Part of the appeal of the Baha’i faith is a denominational inclusiveness that allows its followers to remain affiliated with other churches, and is at the same time seen to provide a positive framework for the coexistence of *kastom* beliefs and a more loosely interpreted Christianity. This probably provides the reason for its lack of impact in the 2000 national census. However Baha’i does probably account for most of the 1.6% that are lumped in the category “other”.

This thesis represents a very particular attempt to grasp some of the meanings of Sia Raga *aleñan vanua*, or “ways of the place”. My choice to use this phrase as the title of this thesis also pays homage to my supervisor Margaret Jolly’s ethnography of South Pentecost, *Women of the Place* (1994). That her work and guidance has been so crucial to my own research and analyses will be readily apparent to readers of this text. The Raga word *vanua* is here translated as “place”, after the Bislama word *ple*. *Vanua* intersects with numerous other Raga words in communicating ideas of location, space, or place. In particular, *vanua* is closely related to the word *tano*, which may also be used in the identification or description of particular areas of land. In contrast to *vanua*, however, *tano* pertains more specifically to the physicality of the land, and in this way it can be

---

11 Statistics taken from the 2000 Vanuatu national census (Collingwood-Bakeo to Taylor: personal communication).
used to mean “ground” or “soil”, and appears in constructions such as *tanoqa* (muddy) and *taniatu* (ashes). *Tano* also sometimes appears as a locative prefix – such as in *tanon alhahuni* (west) and *tanon bağbaço* (handle). In this way it overlaps with the more commonly used term, *ute*, such as in *ute maragasi* (hilly place) or *ute gogona* (restricted place). Unlike both these terms, however, wherever the concept of *vanua* is used it always carries with it the profound sense of identity that the Sia Raga feel in relation to place, and the importance of the experience of place as lived social space (for cognate Ambae terms, compare Allen 1969: 132, Rodman 1987: 35, Bolton 2003: 132; also see Patterson 2001a).

Though the word *vanua* may be used somewhat loosely to refer to any area of land, a hamlet or village, or indeed to a whole island, in Raga it more specifically pertains to the hundreds of individually named pieces of land into which the whole region of North Pentecost is divided. Individual *vanua* are usually little more than an acre or two in size. Indeed, larger contemporary villages often span several *vanua*. These land segments provide a key category for the regulation of rights to utilise land as gardens (*unua*), household dwellings (*imua*), or in any other capacity. Although anyone may be granted rights to utilise the land of a particular *vanua*, these rights are usually maintained by individual descent groups. Just as the members of these descent groups are dispersed across the Sia Raga population, each retains custodianship of many individual *vanua* that are scattered throughout the North Pentecost landscape. Some *vanua* are identified more specifically as *bwatun vanua* (literally “source”, “foundation”, “head” or “roots” of the *vanua*). The prefix “bwat” is probably related to what Fox describes as “the Proto-Austronesian term *puquq* meaning ‘tree’, ‘trunk’, ‘base’ or ‘source’” (Fox 1993b: 19). *Bwatun vanua* represent the specific origin places of individual descent groups, with which they share names, such as Anserehubwe, Gilau or Atabulu (see also Yoshioka, 1988: 21). Each *Bwatun vanua* is characterised by the existence of *hpur* (grave sites) containing the resting places of primordial and subsequent ancestors, the *atatun vanua* (people of the place).

While many *vanua* do not contain any significant features, some are distinguished by stones (*vatu*), cycad palms (*mwele*), or other significant historical markers that provide *dowana* (memorial, proof) of the acts by which ancestors have in some way merged with the earth of that place, especially through the performance of pig sacrifice. Through the ritualised spilling of pigs’ blood and the subsequent appropriation of ancestrally defined *ihon boe* (pig names), people continue to affect the absorption of
essential ancestral qualities, and through these processes land, ancestors and people become merged. The ability to identify ancestral grave sites and these other markers and to trace one’s descent through the chronological recollection of those ancestors that they contain is important in claiming rights to utilise land contained within individual vanua. Individuals are able to claim links to a great many vanua, and do so strategically.

\textit{A\text{\text{\&}leng (-an is a possessive suffix, “of the”) is typically translated as fasion (“fashion”) in Bislama. My translation as “ways” is meant to evoke the numerous meanings that adhere to that English word. The eight nouns used to define “way” that are provided in the Concise Oxford Dictionary include five that are apposite to the broader themes of this thesis: “a method, style, or manner of doing something…”, “a road, track, path or street…”, “the distance in space or time between two points…”, “a particular area or locality…”, and “parts into which something divides or is divided” (Concise Oxford English Dictionary (Tenth Edition) on CD-ROM 2001). Throughout the course of this thesis I set out to explore some of the similarly multiple and related Sia Raga meanings of \textit{ale\text{\text{\&}n vanua} – of past and present, being and place – such as are expressed through guiding epistemologies of trajectory and division.

In the concluding chapter to \textit{Art and Agency} (1998), Alfred Gell tackles the issue of how made objects, whether they are part of a given cultural milieu or the oeuvre of a particular artist, may be seen to operate within networks of relatedness, both to other objects and to people, and through both time and space. Two key theoretical inspirations behind his analysis are Husserl’s model of “time-consciousness” (1966) and Strathern’s ideas about the partible nature of Melanesian personhood (1988). Through the former he demonstrates how particular “collections” of objects may be perceived holistically as demonstrative of cognitive process; his two main examples are the artistic work produced by Marcel Duchamp over the course of his lifetime, and, \textit{via} Roger Neich (1993), the permutations of design amongst Maori \textit{wharenui} (meeting houses) in Aotearoa New Zealand over the course of colonial history. Individual objects in this analysis, having been produced in reference to similar objects already in existence (or memory) through the creativity of meaningful agents, are seen to transcend their specificity within the present. In so far as both the creation and contemplation of objects involves movements of memory that reach down into the past, they may also be seen to “retain” a sense of that past (retentions). Objects are also representative of the movements of their maker’s aspirations, and in this way are always unfinished business (protentions) that probe towards an as yet unrealised or unrealisable future (Gell 1998:...
258). Put more simply, as it is by Thomas, “artworks at once anticipate future works and hark back to others” (Thomas 1998: xii).

The theoretical work of Marilyn Strathern offers Gell a way of looking at objects in terms of their relatedness through space. (Yet just as space and time are inseparable concepts he clearly considers the theories of Husserl and Strathern to be kindred). Put crudely, Strathern’s (1988) analysis of Melanesian personhood is one in which the self is defined as a multiple entity that is composed of an array of significant relationships. People in this view might be said to exist “inside each other”, with each at different times both absorbing and producing their relationships with others. Following on mainly from the ideas of Strathern, Gell offers the insight that both persons and objects might in this way be considered as “distributed” amongst each other through time and space. And so, he suggests, “images of something (a prototype) are parts of that thing (a distributed object) . . . [this also being] the idea that sensible, perceptible objects, give off parts of themselves – rinds, skins or vapours – which diffuse out into the ambience and are incorporated by the onlooker in the process of perception” (Gell 1998: 223).

Keeping Gell’s ideas in mind, in this thesis I suggest some of the ways in which certain patterns and styles permeate Sia Raga minds and the material culture that they create and exchange. During my time in North Pentecost, my interest was continually lured by what I perceived as an “isomorphy of structure” (Gell 1998: 222) between certain aspects of Sia Raga historical consciousness, social practice and material culture. During the first month of fieldwork I began to ponder the relationship between bwana (the beautiful long textiles used as exchange items) and the architecture of imwå (household dwellings) and gamali (so-called “men’s houses”). Perhaps it was merely because these seemed to be the two most pervasive items of “traditional” material culture that prompted me to subject them to comparative scrutiny. My curiosity was heightened by what I perceived as marked similarities in various aspects of their formal design: a structure of “ribs” branching out evenly on either side of a central supporting spine. Shortly after, excited by the idea that I’d made my first important anthropological “discovery”, I began considering the possibility that this basic analogic pattern represented some form of reified objectification of persons and social relations. Indeed, the structure also seemed to correspond with a series of diagrams drafted by the anthropologist Masanori Yoshioka (see image 34), who had carried out extensive research on the subject of kinship in North Pentecost during the 1970s and early 1980s (see Yoshioka 1985, 1988). Some weeks later I found the pattern replicated once again,
though this time in more abstract form. This was a diagram that Ruben Todali drew on
the ground during a demonstration of the general classification of the island’s diverse
 crab species. In a more recent trip I was told that this same pattern is sometimes
tattooed into the flesh of men’s and women’s calves as a representation of the
symbolically important raun mwele (cycad leaf).

![Image 3: Pattern drawn by Ruben Todali.](image)

While these connections continued to occupy my thoughts for some time, it
wasn’t until a tree-like chalk diagram appeared on the small blackboard, in the back
room of Avatvotu’s gamali (“men’s house”), that my interest was fully aroused (image
23). This diagram, also drawn by Ruben Todali, clearly resembled the kind of
abstraction I saw in the architecture of bwana (textiles) and imwa (houses), and which
Ruben had already employed to explain the relationship between different varieties of
crab. Amazingly to me, this interpretation of my original ribbed spine image into a tree
introduced an organic, temporal dimension of growth in what I had previously
considered to be a static, spatial representation. I was also astonished to recognise the
names of various hamlets on the diagram. These were positioned in association with
the figure’s branches, in the manner of the “family trees” by which Western ancestral
reckonings are pictured. In short, the image displayed an intriguing treatment of
spatialised time. As well as representing a pointedly temporalised history – of origins
and ancestry, just like a family tree – it also incorporated atemporal, or static
cartography – the mapping of named places on landscape. Ruben’s depiction was
headed with the words V‘anu totu deti - bwatu touwa, which may be translated as follows:
“Here is a tree of place - foundation of generations” (see chapter three).

If these connections were not merely products of an overly zealous graduate
student’s imagination, then they certainly evoked a range of anthropological problems,
particularly relating to Sia Raga conceptions of the relationship between time and space,
but also long-standing debates concerning the relationship between history and
structure (cf. Sahlins 1976, 1985, 1991; Biersack 1991). The combined weight of these
conceptual and material images suggested intimations of a structure that permeated
broadly throughout the Sia Raga cultural environment, and that helped to locate their sociological and cosmological understandings in space and time. Rather than appearing as merely static, many of the images that I found to echo this structure also incorporated aetologies of growth, change, conflict and re-generation. They also related directly to what have now become classic subjects in anthropological writings about Vanuatu, not the least of these being metaphors of the tree and of rootedness, and the relationship between ancestors, time, place and personhood. I felt sure that the missing key to understanding these connections lay in my inability to clearly comprehend Sia Raga kinship terminology and practice as an holistic, integrated “system”.

It was always a great frustration to me that while in the field I was neither able to elicit what I considered to be an adequate “anthropological model” of kinship and marriage prescription from my Sia Raga interlocutors, nor that I could subsequently “complete” such an understanding from information gathered in piecemeal fashion (this is the main subject of chapter four). Nevertheless I felt hopeful that following post-fieldwork analysis of my own data, along with a thorough and sustained examination of Yoshioka Masanori’s many writings on the subject (Yoshioka 1985, 1988, 1993), I would eventually be able to “crack the code” and thereby reveal Sia Raga culture to be in some way patterned according to an underlying cultural logic. This was not to be. Just as in the field I was unable to find any single overarching or definitive system of Sia Raga sociality – material, symbolic, or otherwise – now, in writing, I must confront the partiality of my own understanding of that sociality.

Perhaps this is as it should be. As Battaglia has put it, cultural process is defined by a problematic reality: “that reality itself is culturally organized and disorganized, not discovered; that the meanings we give to our perceptions and experiences are constructed (rather than passively observed); that these meanings are alternately deconstructed as we recognise new differences and ascribe them significance” (Battaglia 1990: 3). Culture, like our understandings of it, is an ongoing process that is always messy. If the connections that I “discovered” while in the field did conform to some sort of pattern, it was always elusive, being at parts overdrawn and at others incomplete. This is how I have come to understand it, and such an understanding may never be adequately represented except through the scraps and fragments by which it was apprehended, that is, intersubjectively.
The understandings and ideas presented in this thesis are nevertheless organised into six chapters, and these are grouped into three sections. Each chapter develops upon the main argument of the thesis: that particular patterns permeate Sia Raga historical and social consciousness, kinship and spatial practices, and items of material culture. These patterns are not static, but demonstrate emergent and regenerative processes connecting ideas of place and time through biological idioms of movement and growth. The chapter sections begin with the historical, move through the more abstract and sociological, and end by considering the physical embodiments of dwelling and houses. Despite the apparent rigidity of this narrative scheme, throughout the thesis I try to avoid isolating, and therefore privileging, any single aspect of Sia Raga sociality or culture. To do so would not merely reify the crude dissection techniques of a more traditional anthropology. As I see it, it would also give lie to the profoundly ambivalent sense of connectedness that characterises the Sia Raga cultural environment.

Like gunali interiors which on clear days remain partially illuminated by the many shafts of sunlight that penetrate through tiny holes in their leaf thatched roofs, and that trace paths of brightness across their rafters and earth floors, here I aim to intumate a sense of my own partially illuminated understanding of the connectedness of Sia Raga ways.

Image 4: Kolombas Todali prepares an oven fire in the aging gunali at Avatvatu.
SECTION ONE: INTIMATE HISTORIES
LOCATING THE ANTHROPOLOGIST, DEFINING THE FIELD

Where there is anthropology, there is always the presence of an anthropologist: the anthropologist defines his or her “field” by in some way inhabiting it. Yet the definition of anthropological field sites and of the knowledge and practice pursued therein is rarely, if ever, the sole choice of a lone anthropologist. Why, then, has the theme of the anthropologist “stumbling” upon a research locale or topic—most famously dramatised and mythologised in Malinowski’s “accidental discovery” of long term fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands—become such a frequently recurring trope in ethnographic writing? One answer to this question lies in the capacity of such narratives to suggest what Clifford has described as the “evocative and utopian image” of the ethnographer as castaway, whereby the authority of the anthropologist is asserted over that of the “mere traveller” (Clifford 1986: 38). Such images are also complicit with the anthropological tendency to distance “the field” as a transparent and naturalised setting for the discovery of difference (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 9).

Tropes of “accidental discovery” in ethnographic texts not only serve to mystify anthropologists’ own agency in arriving at particular fields of research, but, far more seriously, they also occlude the agency of local people and institutions in directing or influencing the attentions and intentions of anthropologists. Likewise, narrative emphasis on the dramatic effects of serendipity within fieldwork carry with them a tendency to minimise, if not make invisible the fact that in most cases anthropologists travel along the same roads as wider processes of imperialism and missionisation, and global flows of goods, capital and culture. In doing so, then, they also tend to eclipse those important connections that link the world of the anthropologist with that of the

---

12 To cite two examples from the ethnography of Vanuatu: in the preface to his Knowledge and Power in a South Pacific Society (1990), Lamont Lindstrom suggests that, upon arrival at Tanna, instead of having his attention drawn towards “counting pigs, coffee trees, and sewing machines” as he had expected, he was startled to discover that he had in fact “waded ashore into a field of knowledgeable talk” (1990: xi). However, his subsequent explanation for this shift of perspective from materialism to discourse as a way of understanding our own “emerging information society” does nothing to explain the reason or context for his change of interest “on site”. Similarly, in a lone sentence we read that the village in which the ethnographer and his wife would reside was not to be chosen by them, but was instead “picked out... long before we had even arrived in the country” (1990: x). The answer to the important question of why and how this location was chosen, and by whom, is simply left for the reader to imagine. Margaret Jolly’s “arrival story” in Women of the Place: Kastom, Colonialism and Gender in Vanuatu (1994) begins by stating that the location of her site of study in South Pentecost was “more a result of fortune than design” (1994: 1). Nevertheless, this statement is immediately followed by a lengthy and detailed account of how the geographical location and subject position that she came to assume in the field was dynamically shaped, initially through a series of collegial prompts prior to her arrival in Vanuatu, and finally through negotiation and discussion at public meetings held locally (1994: 3-5).
“site” of research. Such techniques therefore dangerously downplay the wider social and political contexts in which the specific research projects are carried out, thereby also eliding important questions concerning how field sites come to be “located” through complex and multiple processes of negotiation.

As Margaret Jolly has written in her South Pentecost “arrival story”, in producing ethnographic texts:

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).

The constant redefinition of my own project – a geographical movement from Vanuatu’s south to north, but also along a continuum of relative ethnographic “authenticity”13 that began with “Tourism on Tanna”, moved through “Young People in Town”, and eventually settled with the present study in North Pentecost – was clearly no simple work of fate. Looking at how the field of research that is addressed by this thesis was negotiated forces me to acknowledge from the outset that what I encountered in North Pentecost was not a discrete space of radical difference, but rather a milieu to which I was always/already connected through diffuse social and political networks. The continual flow of information through these networks ensures that the research project continues to be negotiated even as I write.

The essentially cartographic definition of the field as “site” – typically located within the introductions of ethnographic texts, especially through the conventional inclusion of maps – fails to account for the fact that fieldwork itself is an embodied process that actually involves a mixture of travel, observation and dialogue (see Clifford 1997: 56-58). Gupta and Ferguson’s (1997) critique makes clear the importance of considering the social implications of fieldwork itself, as a historically contingent and relationship-bound process of knowledge formation that occurs through both space and time. In this way I feel compelled to consider how the knowledge and insights, to which I was privileged while living in Vanuatu, were grounded, structured and received through specific social relationships that “took place” within “the field”. Through such reflection it becomes possible to see how the field of research is shaped as much by the so-called “subjects” of research as it is by the researcher.

---

13 A “hierarchy of purity of fieldsites”, as Gupta and Ferguson have put it (1997: 13).
It is towards a consideration of the emergent definition of the field of this research, and to some of the extraordinary relationships and situations that took place therein, that I now turn. In so far as the redefinition of this project occurred through a halting process of mutation rather than simple replacement, it is possible to discern how previous formulations informed the fieldwork as it eventually began to "take place" in North Pentecost, Vanuatu. Keeping in mind that much of the information presented in this thesis was received by way of collaboration between specific interlocutors, in this chapter I aim to take their interested participation in directing the course of this research seriously by tracing the formulation of this research topic: by describing how, as well as where, "my" field of research became located.

Canberra

My interest in Vanuatu was first sparked in 1995 when I read an undergraduate essay written by a friend and classmate at The University of Auckland (Rousseau n. d.). The essay compared the then recently published ethnographies on Tanna by Bonnemaissen (1994) and Lindstrom (1993). I recall reading both books as my first taste of Vanuatu ethnography. I was fascinated by these very different accounts, and impressed by the possibilities that both approaches to localised histories and knowledge systems seemed to offer. However, in so far as I pursued a different course of study over the next two years, Vanuatu withdrew from my interests. It wasn't until 1998 when I enrolled in a doctoral course that I began to consider the place once again.

In the intervening years I completed a Masters thesis which considered issues relating to tourism and the production of cultural authenticity in New Zealand from a historical perspective (Taylor 1998). For my doctoral research I hoped to take some of the ideas from that research into a "small scale" Pacific setting, where one might expect to find the kind of "incommensurability of difference" promoted by tourism, as explored by Gewertz and Errington (1991). What better place, I thought, than Tanna, a "Treasure Island" for anthropologists and tourists alike; radiant kastom, bizarre cargo cults and the world's most accessible volcano, along with hotels and guest houses, and a brand new "international" airport. However, soon after my arrival at The Australian National University (ANU) where I was to take up an Arts Faculty scholarship my proposed research topic was transformed. There was a general feeling amongst some
members of my advisory panel\textsuperscript{14} that such a project might be problematic on both political and methodological grounds, especially with regard to the difficult and ambiguous subject position – between tourists and locals – that such an ethnographic study would entail.

Throughout this time I was also alerted to important issues regarding the predicaments facing young people in Vanuatu’s urban contexts, such as were being raised through the work of Jean Mitchell. Jean, a Canadian doctoral candidate with a background in foreign aid programs, had recently instigated an important donor funded research project centred on the problems facing young people in Vanuatu’s capital, Port Vila. In what is a groundbreaking approach for Melanesia, the \textit{Yang Pipol’s Projek} (YPP), as it is called in Bislama, encouraged and trained young people living in Port Vila’s settlement communities to undertake this research themselves.\textsuperscript{15} Several months before I left for Vanuatu, Jean Mitchell made a short visit to ANU, at which time she suggested that I reformulate and situate my own research in conjunction with the YPP.

In order to undertake research in Vanuatu foreign nationals must attain government authorisation. Permission to carry out social research, which is accompanied by the issue of a long term visa, is acquired from the Vanuatu National Cultural Council. This is typically achieved through negotiation with the Vanuatu Cultural Centre who itself contributes to the development and implementation of the policies governing foreign research (and of which the YPP is a part). There are several conditions that must be fulfilled prior to governmental approval of research in Vanuatu. Central to these is the stipulation that the researcher provide a product of “immediate benefit and use” to the local community with whom the researcher works (Government of Vanuatu, Vanuatu Cultural Research Policy n. d.: Appendix 1). Jean’s suggestion that I redesign my research in terms of the \textit{Yang Pipol’s Projek} therefore seemed to overcome a number of difficulties. Not only would its social networks provide important links from which to begin my own research, it also offered a framework within which to make an appropriate return to the local community, whatever form this might take.

One month before I departed for Vanuatu I delivered a course required seminar to the Department of Anthropology at ANU, entitled “Youth/Culture: Practice and Performance in Vanuatu” (Taylor, 1999). In this paper I outlined my new research

\textsuperscript{14}At that stage consisting of Margaret Jolly, Lissant Bolton and Nicholas Thomas.
\textsuperscript{15}Amongst the products of the research were a statistical report (Vanuatu Yang Pipol’s Projek, Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta, 1999), and the remarkable film \textit{Kiim Taem} (1999). These were both produced a few months before I was due to leave for Vanuatu.
CHAPTER ONE

aims, which focused on the lives of young people in the archipelago’s second major town, Luganville. I stated that I hoped to provide critical insight into the life dilemmas and experiences of young people – young men, in particular – as they come to terms with the dramatically changing circumstances entailed in moving between home island and town. In doing so, I would question some of the key metaphors employed within the rhetorical construction of “youth”, in both academic and official discourses. In this context I was particularly interested in exploring how notions of the “traditional” and the “modern” were played out, along with their counterparts the “island village” and the “urban centre”. Luganville had also not yet been visited by members of the Yang Pipol’s Projek (YPP), and so I proposed to help coordinate YPP research there as partial fulfilment of my contractual agreement with the government of Vanuatu.

In the interests of gaining an immediate impression of the relationship between village and town life, I also proposed that I spend short periods of time on one of the “outer islands”. It was Lissant Bolton, at the time my primary supervisor, who first suggested that North Pentecost would provide an important and interesting secondary field site. After I had returned from the field she told me that she had in fact had it in the back of her mind all along that I might end up focusing on North Pentecost, and that she rather hoped I would.

Apart from its relative proximity to Luganville, and the fact that according to the national census of 1989 Pentecost islanders made up 14.5% of Luganville’s population of approximately 10,000 (Vanuatu 1989), the reasons for choosing North Pentecost were at least fourfold. First, as far as I was aware at the time, North Pentecost had not yet been made the subject of sustained ethnographic inquiry. Indeed, the scope of Yoshioka Masanori’s research into kinship and ritual would not become apparent to me until after I had reached Vanuatu and had the opportunity to delve into the library archives of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre. Second, the reputation of North Pentecost as a major participant in the recent Pacific “kava boom” was of considerable interest, both because of the central involvement of young men within this industry and in terms of broader issues of changing political economy. Third, during these months of “pre-fieldwork” negotiation, Vanuatu’s former prime minister, Father Walter Lini, also an Anglican priest and Chief from North Pentecost, had passed away. I surmised that the death of this prominent individual would elicit important discursive information concerning church and state – especially young people’s perceptions of history and authority in relation to these. Fourth, and through the collective design of Lissant
Bolton, Darrell Tryon and Ralph Regenvanu, it was suggested that my road to North Pentecost might be channelled through links with Kolombas Todali, a young Vanuatu Cultural Centre fieldworker from the area.\footnote{Central to the operation of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre is the network of indigenous researchers, or “fieldworkers”, representing different language groups throughout Vanuatu. Part of their role as fibokas (Bislama) involves “working alongside their expatriate counterparts”, such as foreign anthropologists, who conduct research within their home communities (Regenvanu 1999: 99, see also Bolton 1999, 2003).} As a fieldworker, an unmarried man and as an entrepreneur within the domestic kava trade, Kolombas was identified as an ideal person to introduce me to North Pentecost. Indeed my introduction to Kolombas a few days after I arrived in Port Vila turned out to be a key moment in the negotiated definition of this research.

PORT VILA

On a bright afternoon in April of 1999 I touched ground in Vanuatu’s capital, Port Vila. Air Vanuatu flight 42 had departed from my home town, Auckland, where I had spent two weeks with friends and family before departing for “the field”. The plane’s one hundred or so other passengers were mainly tourists, and with an irony that was not lost on me at the time, their familiarity made me feel strangely uncomfortable. Having originally set out to research tourism itself, before turning to the more starkly confronting problems facing young people in town, I had become inevitably sceptical of those touristic images with which we now travelled: adventure escapes and barefoot dreams of an island paradise. While recognising anthropology as a form of tourism, I wished to distance myself from those images as quickly as possible. However, in time, just as the central locale of my research would move from urban centre to rural hamlet, so too the resorts of Port Vila would come to represent for me a different kind of escape. Despite overwhelming joys, my time on Pentecost was also inevitably punctuated with the depression and anxieties of extended “culture shock”. During the several rest periods that I spent in Vila throughout the fifteen months that I stayed in Vanuatu, I sometimes thought I could escape the “realities” of anthropological fieldwork by becoming a fully-fledged tourist-for-the-day, on the beachfronts of Hideaway Island and Irririki Resort. During the evenings, in kava bars and night clubs I also sought out the familiarity of aleian taturani (the way of whites). But through a mixture of desperation born of loneliness, a growing sense of both the ambiguity of my
CHAPTER ONE

situation as neither tourist nor expatriate “local”, and a simultaneous awareness of my complicity within the social inequalities that so obviously pervade these contexts (see especially Rawlings 2002), these meetings invariably left me in even deeper states of depression than I suffered in North Pentecost.

Jean Mitchell met me at the airport. Since I had planned to stay a few weeks in the capital, acclimatising and getting comfortable using Bislama, she kindly offered me the spare room in her house. On that first evening I accompanied Jean on a walk to visit a friend of hers living in Anabrou, one of the town’s inner suburbs. The air was hot and moist. The fading sunlight shimmered through dust thrown up from the wheels of the road and rust-worn vehicles that sped through the town’s little streets. An old truck flew past, its trailer alive with a group of men waving and calling out to us, “good night!” For a moment I felt acutely self-conscious, and afraid. I suddenly wished to escape. Houses of corrugated iron mixed with those of more familiar concrete blocks, some emitting the glow of an electric light or more softly-toned hurricane lamps, and occasionally the flicker of a television. People were out walking, on their way home from work or off to drink kava at one of the many nakamal (kava bars) whose proprietors had hung out kerosene lamps, signalling that their kava was ready.

Later in the evening, before turning in for a night in which I hardly slept a wink, I made my first personal diary entry: “So strange to finally be here. Strangely familiar – I feel more comfortable than I anticipated. I wonder how long it will last.... Streets so beautiful at night.” This sense of the uncanny – of strangeness amid familiarity – continued to haunt me throughout my time in the field. It does so even now that I have returned “home”, and am sitting quietly at my desk thinking about it, writing about it. Buried, as it so often is, in ethnographic authority (Clifford and Marcus 1986), the uncanny is perhaps one of anthropology’s most powerfully veiled tropes. In this thesis about history, cosmology and personhood in North Pentecost, I aim to take that sense of the uncanny in fieldwork seriously. I would say that to utter the words “fieldwork” and “everyday life” in the same breath is an oxymoron. Fieldwork, for me, was an extraordinary experience that was always at least one step removed from the mundane.

My first meeting with Kolombas Todali occurred through an introduction from Vanuatu Cultural Centre Director, Ralph Regenvanu, a week after my arrival. Kolombas and I sat alone on a bench outside the beautiful Cultural Centre museum
building, the design of which is based on a northern Vanuatu gamali ("men’s house").17 We engaged in a short and difficult conversation made difficult by his halting English and my inept Bislama. During this conversation I must have asked him a question about the participation of young men in North Pentecost kastom. My notes for this meeting contain a rather confused list of the ritual sacrifices that may be performed by males before entering the system of named grades in that region. The notes emphasise the relationship of these sacrifices with male pedagogy, and the role of the gamali in which such teaching ideally takes place. What is particularly apparent in these notes is the way in which Kolombas’s explanation made use of the Western educational system as a simile. The “sacred fires” of the four formative name grades (see chapter four), that are situated immediately outside the gamali, were described as a “kinda” (preschool) in which young boys learn “respect” and “honour”. Subsequent grades were explained in terms of their correspondence to “classes” involving the teaching of particular kinds of knowledge. Next there is a brief mention of Kolombas’s own recent involvement in which he sacrificed no less than one hundred chickens (tua) and two peregrine falcons (mala) in order to “take back” the name of an important ancestor, Malanvanua.

Exploring the historical revaluation of this ritual (called gonato), as well as its symbolic significance, later became an important part of my fieldwork. It also became a significant marker of the knowledge that I attained throughout. Some fourteen months later, on the day before I left the North Pentecost hamlet of Avatvotu, a group of my mothers’ brothers arrived with chickens for me to sacrifice. Being my father, Jif Ruben also provided a pig by which I would attain the graded name of Tari. As well as providing symbolic bookends to my fieldwork story, this ceremony highlighted the fact that much of the knowledge that was imparted to me throughout the course of my stay in North Pentecost was directed by my interlocutors within a self-consciously indigenous pedagogical framework, one that would be referred to as kastom in Bislama. Indeed, this was also made clear in a speech made by John Leo Tamata on the completion of the ritual proper. He told me how fortunate I was to have been taught

17 Here I use the Raga term gamali to distinguish it from the Bislama word nakamal. The latter may also be used to refer to the northern Vanuatu village “meeting houses” or “men’s houses” from which the word is derived, but more commonly refers to the “kava bars” where people buy prepared kava, especially in the urban contexts of Port Vila or Luganville where Bislama is more commonly spoken.
by Jif Ruben, and reminded me that some twenty years earlier an anthropologist called Yoshioka Masanori had asked to live and study with him, but had been refused.¹⁸

With John Leo Tamata’s parting comments in mind, it is worthwhile looking at some of the processes that had occurred over the decade that preceded my arrival and that might have contributed to Jif Ruben’s changed position. To do so will also go some way towards developing an understanding of his intentions and reasons for allowing me access, however partially, to the knowledge that he embodies. One way of understanding this is through reference to an organisation called Gaiware Bulvanua.

Image 5: Simon Godin of Gaiware Bulvanua leads a demonstration of a boy’s dance during a youth fundraising event at Labwagtongoru (December 2001).

Gaiware Bulvanua is a locally oriented initiative that was originally instigated in 1957 by Ruben Todali and a number of other Sia Raga church and community leaders.¹⁹

This occurred, at least partially, in response to the establishment in the same year of the

¹⁸ Throughout the terms of his initial and subsequent field trips Yoshioka was based in the nearby village of Labalabamata. I should point out that his version of events may differ from that described here, which is based on conversations that I shared with people in Gilau.

¹⁹ One of the organisations’ first and most influential actions has been the rejuvenation and promotion of the male ritual called gaute (see also above) in the early 1960s, before which time it had not been performed for around forty years. Gaute is now considered by many, and not only by those involved with Gaiware Bulvanua, to be crucial to the formation of male persons. The performance of gaute involves the ritual sacrifice of chickens of different coloured plumage, to which correspond specific meanings and values that are thereby impressed upon the initiate. An extension of this ritual often includes sacrificing a rucked boat, and thereby taking on the first name grade, Tan.
area’s first local government council (Bebe and Leo 1995: 269). Both Gaiware Bulvanua and the council were at that time centred in the village of Abwatuntora. The name Gaiware Bulvanua refers to a hook upon which baskets belonging to people from many different places are hung. This describes the organisation’s intention to consolidate and rejuvenate local knowledge and “ways” (aleŋan vanua) through the mutual cooperation of Sia Raga leaders and other knowledgeable people. My own research should be read in part as having been allowed to take place within this semi-institutionalised project involving the revaluation of local knowledge and practice. On my arrival in 1999, for reasons including the fact of Jif Ruben’s advancing age, the time was considered ripe to allow a foreign researcher into the community: to document appropriate aspects of aleŋan vanua, and to disseminate that knowledge abroad. Thus the iban boe (pig name) bestowed upon me at my departure is Tari Liñ Vanua, the Tari who is “released” and “issues forth from the place”.

This however does not address why I was allowed access to Gaiware Bulvanua while a previous anthropologist appears to have been at least partially refused. The answer to this largely involves issues of timing vis a vis local political considerations. The main period during which Yoshioka stayed in North Pentecost, one year from 1981 to 1982, took place in the early years of independence. One can only surmise that as staunch supporters of Father Walter Lini’s Vanua’aku Pati, Vanuatu’s first independent government, the people of North Pentecost may have been somewhat reluctant to share their kastom knowledge with outside researchers, especially in consideration of the degree to which kastom was being refigured throughout this crucial period as a valuable resource to the formation and development of the newly independent nation-state (see Lini 1980, Jolly 1997b, Bolton 2003). Throughout the decade leading up to independence, Vanua’aku Pati leaders had been formulating a vision of a future independent country based on a fusion of Christianity and particular ideas of kastom. In his “Independence Address to the Nation”, given on July 30, 1980, the newly elected prime minister, Father Walter Lini, said:

In this and other tests we shall need guidance not only from God but from our own custom and traditional values. We are moving into a period of rapid change rather like a canoe entering a patch of rough water: God and custom must be the sail and the steering-paddle of our canoe. It will be the responsibility of parliaments and governments as well as the chiefs to preserve our custom but not to preserve it blindly and without reference to change.
CHAPTER ONE

For custom has always changed with people’s ideas and it must continue to do so (Lini 1980: 62).

Given the importance assigned to ideas of kastom by this new government, which according to Lini had been formed from a party based in the struggle against “any form of colonialism, and any tendency towards neo-colonialism” (Lini 1980: 27), a moratorium was established in order to block foreign research. This lasted for a decade, from 1984 to 1994, at which time it was lifted to help fulfil the Vanuatu Cultural Centre’s mandate “to preserve, protect and develop kastom” through the encouragement of collaborative projects between foreign researchers and local communities (Regenvanu 1999: 98).

My own experience contrasts with this moratorium period by showing that it is not just through blocking or banning anthropological projects that local people or governments may assert agency over them, but also through transforming and redefining them in other ways. My arrival in 1999 took place within a considerably different political climate to that of early independence. People in North Pentecost generally express an ambivalent pessimism towards national politics, and have little faith in the moral and kastom values of politicians who are often exposed as self-seeking and corrupt. These sentiments have been given further weight by the recent death of Father Walter Lini. Furthermore, by this stage the Vanuatu Cultural Centre had firmly established an authoritative position as the primary mediator of kastom on the national level. That my project was endorsed by the Cultural Centre and took place through a road defined within its network of fieldworkers, as indeed all outside projects must, generally carried a great deal of weight on North Pentecost. Indeed, I soon learnt the passport value of the phrase “mi wok long sasd blong Kaforal Sent” (“I work with the Cultural Centre”).

The further importance of my first conversation with Kolombas is evidenced by the fact that I would be prompted to write about it some seven months later, this time while lying on a mat in the gamali (“men’s house”) at Avatovou. From my field notes:

Thinking about my first encounter with Kolombas back in April. I remember him asking me quite seriously – testingly, I thought – whether I believe in Adam and Eve. I was rather flummoxed, hoping not to spoil rapport at that early stage. (Now I’ve discovered I can say “I don’t believe in God” with rather interesting, but not negative results – In fact, “I don’t believe in God” has become somewhat of a research tool!). Being aware of the heavy Anglican influence in the area of Raga, I proceeded cautiously with
“I don’t know”, and then went on to describe ideas of the big bang and evolution of plants and animals including humans – in a very basic way.\textsuperscript{20}

Kolombas’s response was to get very excited about this and describe how the Raga world view, too, traces the physical present through an evolutionary past – a story that I have since heard several times repeated. But, he wished to retain the Adam and Eve aspect, too. He suggested – rather like present theories that propose that the human species started in 3 or 4 separate areas – that Raga must have their own Adam and Eve, too, as the island is too far away from Europe – the home of Adam and Eve. This theory finds expression and proof in the story of Mugarimaña and her 12 children.

In hindsight this was a very complex exchange of positioning for both of us. Kolombas was trying to express his beliefs in terms that would fit with mine. I was trying to “open myself up” to anything he might wish to suggest and at the same time give an impression of myself as a thinking individual worthy of his ideas. (Extract from field notes dated November the 9\textsuperscript{th}, 1999).

Of course it was only in hindsight that the importance of this conversation, taken in its entirety, could be fully appreciated. As these notes suggest, I believe that Kolombas was subjecting me to preliminary tests of character and aptitude that would be continued, by both himself and others, throughout the entire course of my fieldwork. That it also touched on nearly all of the central aspects of this thesis – history, the reproduction of knowledge, cosmology, the \textit{gamai}\textsuperscript{t} and the formation of male persons – is of no simple coincidence. Indeed, these concerns have all been, and continue to be, central to the project of Gaiware Bulvanua. Already, then, in that first meeting I had with a North Pentecost islander, my project was being redefined for me. Did I have a choice as to whether or not to follow these roads that were being laid for me? While I might have thought so at the time, I now consider this a more difficult question to answer. Nevertheless, following threads is a central characteristic of contemporary anthropological methodology (Marcus 1995: 106), and in one sense I was just grasping at the most promising threads that presented themselves to me. The point I am trying to make here, however, is that these leads did not simply appear, as if out of nowhere. Rather they were lines thrown out by specifically interested others.

\textsuperscript{20} Due to a limited knowledge of both evolutionary theory and Bislama.
On the third evening after our meeting Ralph Regenvanu offered to drive me out to see Kolombas and drink kava at the “Hahai Gara” nakamal, a kava bar and small store that he and other family members operated in Tagabe. Kolombas’s family rented several kava bars in Port Vila and shipped their North Pentecost meloge (kava) directly to these. From here they sold kava in prepared form across the bar, but also, more importantly, wholesale in the form of unprepared roots to other Port Vila nakamal proprietors.

Tagabe is a suburb of medium density that is mainly populated by people from the islands of Pentecost and Maewo, and from north Pentecost in particular. It is located close to the Bauerfield International Airport, and is focused around a large Anglican Church established on land bequeathed to the North Pentecost community by
a French planter shortly after World War Two. Over the following weeks, and during subsequent visits to Vila, I spent a great many afternoons and evenings in Tagabe, mainly in or around the Haihai Gara nakamal. The clientele of the nakamal reflected the diversity of educational and economic positions within this urban community. They ranged from high-ranking politicians to teachers, tradespeople and entrepreneurs (such as Kolombas), a professional potter, musicians, community elders and unemployed people of all ages.

During our short meeting Ralph acted as interpreter when my still somewhat halting Bislama failed me. He told Kolombas how I was interested in making a study of the lives of young people, and that I wished to spend a few weeks in North Pentecost. Kolombas was immediately enthusiastic, and suggested that since he was returning to the island in three weeks time, I might go along with him and base myself at his hamlet, Avatvotu. Between visits to Tagabe and my efforts to learn Bislama, the three weeks quickly passed. By now I was anxious to press on to Pentecost, but when I breached the subject with Kolombas he told me that a new consignment of kava had just arrived from the island, and that he wouldn’t be able to leave for another two weeks, at least. I decided that I couldn’t wait. I wanted to spend only a few weeks in Pentecost – enough to get a “feel” for the place – before moving on to Luganville where the major research would begin. At Kolombas’s suggestion it was arranged that I would go to Pentecost alone, in one week’s time. From a telephone at the nakamal shop he made a call to his family at Avatvotu. He told them that I would be arriving and that I should stay with them, and that he would follow a week later. After the call, Kolombas assured me that his family were happy for me to stay with them, and that when they had voiced concerns over what I would eat he had told them that I was interested in kastom, and would therefore be happy to eat the local food. In fact, Kolombas didn’t make it to Pentecost for a further six months.

In recent years, ethnographers of Vanuatu have developed as a referent the master tropes of rootedness and mobility, symbolised by the tree and the canoe, as a way to conceptualise ni-Vanuatu utilisation of space and place. Yet despite this dual emphasis on situatedness and movement, the identification of language groups and culture complexes located within geographically defined settings has provided the typical basis of ethnographic inquiry in Vanuatu. This is perhaps not surprising given

---

21 See especially Bonnemaïson (1985, 1994) and Jolly (1992, 1994, 1999), and for further discussion see Patterson 2002: 200-201). Note also the diffusionism of Rivers (1914), and later, Layard (1942) and Deacon (1934).
the way in which “the field” has been conceptualised throughout post-Malinowskian anthropology: bounded spaces that might be stumbled upon by fortunate anthropologists.

This geographical basis for social “setting” might also seem to correspond with local understandings. For most ni-Vanuatu, *lanwais, ke Tâm* and *ples* are pivotal components in the positioning and construction of personal and group identity. Yet as we shall have cause to explore throughout the course of this thesis, local understandings associated with terms such as these also resonate deep metaphysical meanings, and move far beyond the empty and homogeneous boundaries of western cartographic “space”. So, too, recent critiques of the way in which “the field” is typically imag(in)ed in anthropological discourse suggest a necessary move away from the framing of subjects based primarily on location (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Clifford 1997). In this way the people from whom anthropologists learn may be allowed a degree more freedom from the kind of analytic and textual “incarceration” described by Appadurai (1988). During the time that I spent in Vanuatu many people I worked with were in fact more mobile than I was. This was especially true of those politicians, public servants, business people and other “elites” for whom inter-island and in some cases international travel was a regular necessity and/or privilege. Other people – men, and young men in particular – were also often able to enjoy a considerable freedom of movement, especially between their home islands and the towns of Luganville and Port Vila.

Jif Ruben’s four sons (Robinson, Kolombas, Silas and Haggai) and four daughters (Anika, Amy, Eileen and Agnes) provide the most immediate example. While Robinson and Haggai resided for the most part with their young families in the hamlet of Lolbubulusi, throughout the course of my stay in Vanuatu, both made trips to *taon* (the urban centres of Port Vila and Luganville) for periods of a month or more. Kolombas on the other hand spent most of his time working in Port Vila and made two trips to Pentecost of two months each. Silas I met only briefly in Port Vila. For the most part he was engaged in long-term contract work on Taiwanese fishing boats, through which he had visited many international ports. For Silas and Kolombas, as unmarried males, long-term dislocation from the hamlet was both more feasible and socially accepted, even expected, than it was for their two married brothers. However, both had built houses at Avatvotu, and intended to return there permanently in the not-too-distant future. Of Jif Ruben’s four daughters, the eldest, Amy, whom I only met during a return visit in 2001, worked as an Anglican teacher in Big Bay, Santo. Anika,
who resided locally, was also married but had no children. She spent a month in Vila to attend a National Women’s Council annual workshop, as well as several weeks in Luganville with her husband. Eileen had just given birth to a son when I arrived in the hamlet, and she stayed there throughout. Agnes, the youngest daughter, also stayed for the most part at Avatvotu. She did however spend several weeks with relatives living in South Pentecost, and otherwise spent shorter periods of time visiting or working in not so distant locations.

I do not mean to underestimate the considerable constraints on individual mobility, especially those that are familial, financial, and gender based. I rather seek to illustrate the point that the geographical field within which the majority of individual Sia Raga operate extends well beyond those ancestral places that primarily define their identity. For the majority of Pentecost Islanders life may revolve around the vanua of village life, but it is by no means restricted to it. Indeed the many places on other islands where Raga-speakers have established communities have themselves become important reference points of North Pentecost identity. While I, too, focus mainly on a particular, geographically-located place, the image I try to present here is of an area in process that is defined as much by movement as by placement. In this way, while particular attention is payed to Avatvotu in particular and Gilau more generally, I will also be paying attention to those roads that connect the hamlet to the wider world.

AVATVOTU

Even from the perspective of most Pentecost Islanders, Avatvotu is an out-of-the-way sort of place. After being stranded in transit at Luganville for three days due to bad weather, I touched down in one of Vanair’s small fleet of twin-otter light aircraft at Sara airfield in the North Pentecost district of Ahivo. This was one of four scheduled flights a week. Haggai Todali, the youngest of Kolambas’s three brothers, had come to meet me. He introduced himself, then loaded my backpack and other luggage into the back tray of a 4WD vehicle. He then hopped into the tray himself, courteously allowing me to sit in the cab beside the young driver, Stanley, who I would later call nituku (“my child”).

22 Including Tagabe in Port Vila. But also in areas such as Big Bay, Thalankar and in several areas of Luganville, on the island of Santo.
CHAPTER ONE

For what is little more than a three-hour walk, when travelling on one of the ten or so 4WD transport vehicles that operate in North Pentecost the same journey may take anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour, depending on whether or not there has been any recent rain. There had been. For a few minutes the truck wound its way through several heavily populated villages and I caught my first glimpses of the Pentecost environment: rectangular houses with woven bamboo walls and sloping leaf-thatched roofs, set amid beautiful decorative gardens of cordylines and crotons, cycads and other shrubs, and the shade of larger fruit and nut-bearing trees. After a minute the houses abruptly thinned. We then began the steep ascent to the island’s upper plateau, then lurched and skidded a further six kilometres southwards along the rugged truck road to Halbulbulu (where the “roads come together”) near Amatbobo village.

At Halbulbulu the road forks in two directions. travelling southwest it continues a further four or five kilometres before descending dramatically into the beautiful bay and village of Lolotonga. Here, also, the Roman Catholic enclave of Latano is situated, as well as the North Pentecost administrative and police headquarters. The other fork initially points eastward, but soon turns to the south once again and continues a lonely path towards the more populous area of Central Pentecost, and then continues on to the very south of the island. There is no road from Halbulbulu to Avatvotu, however, and until one is cut the truck drivers will only hazard their way through the gardens and stands of coconut to the west in the driest of weather.

After handing over 2,000v to Stanley, Haggai and I continued by foot. With my eyes fixed firmly on the muddy path, and fighting to stay upright, I had little opportunity to take in my surroundings along the way. Occasionally I glanced ahead and saw Haggai, a notorious speedster in talk and travel, my large backpack balanced on one shoulder, easily skipping along ahead. I quickly lost bearing of where I was, and Haggai became my only source of orientation. When we finally climbed the last hill and stepped over the pig-wire fence that marks the vanua boundary of Avatvotu I was covered in mud, dripping with sweat, and exhausted. Stepping into the cool hazy darkness of the large gamali was like entering a dream.

A raised platform runs along the left side of the gamali, upon which Haggai put my luggage. A mattress next to this, over which hung a mosquito net, was to be my bed until the building was officially opened eight months later, thereby becoming a newly restricted and sacralized place. Later I learned that Jif Ruben had officially designated

23 Approximately, AU$1.00 would buy 75 vatu during 1999-2000.
the area around my sleeping platform an *aia goona*, a "taboo place", and that fines would be meted upon those who trespassed there. This never occurred.

Image 7: Watched by Eileen Todali, Wairahu, and Ruben Todali, Haggai Todali rehearses *gunaaro* ritual procedure outside the *gamali* at Avarotu.

The majority of group activities took place either inside the *gamali*, in the open spaces of the *tambona* ("porch") to which it opens out, or under the corrugated iron canopy of the kitchen area situated off to one side. During the course of my field research the *gamali* at Avarotu provided the focal point from which I experienced North Pentecost, and to which I always returned. Other men of Gilau and elsewhere would often spend the night in the *gamali*, numbering one or two or as many as forty, particularly following ritual or other community occasions and the late-night sessions of kava drinking that took place there. However, Jif Ruben Todali was the only other permanent inhabitant of the building. Through the generosity with which he shared his profound knowledge of *Sta Raga* lore with me, of all the voices present, his is in many ways the most significant. Not only did his words and presence prove decisive in the project's eventual physical location (see below), throughout the course of this thesis it will also become apparent the degree to which he shaped the "ways" of the knowledge presented herein.
As I was introduced to the people who would soon become my Pentecost family, I felt conscious of enacting a clichéd allegory. If fieldwork is an example of rites of passage, as has often been suggested, then this moment marked the conclusion of the processes of my separation from cultural familiarity, and the definition of entry into “the field”. Gupta and Ferguson ask the question: “If a heroized journey into Otherness is indeed a rite of passage, what sort of subject might we expect to be formed by such an encounter” (1997: 16). In many ways I struck the image of a “typical” doctoral student on anthropological fieldwork: white, middle-class, male, and about to turn thirty. Acting on the advice of pre-fieldwork informants I had tried to “dress-down” in sneakers, a plain t-shirt and football shorts. I had also made a conscious effort not to bring with me too much “stuff”, just what I considered to be “bare necessities”. Nevertheless I felt inescapably self-conscious of the newness of my clothes, and of the things I carried: a large and very full backpack along with a bright red “esky” containing cameras and film, tape recorder and blank cassettes, and a paranoia-soothing first aid kit. I wonder what was seen and thought when I first stepped through the light that drenched the gamali doorway?

The production of anthropological knowledge, of “data”, is first and foremost grounded in the experience of the participant observer. Given this basis, such knowledge is inevitably partial and circumscribed. In order to evaluate knowledge gained through fieldwork, it is therefore important that it be contextualised within that experience. Whether it takes place abroad or “at home”, and whatever the level of acceptance or depth of “immersion” that the researcher achieves over time, fieldwork produces difference through the very nature of the enterprise, and so anthropologists must always confront the unusual. This was certainly the case here, as I was often reminded. Not only was the social and physical milieu in which the fieldwork took place and that provided the object of my inquiries foreign to me. As an outsider I was also the casual object of unusual treatment and attention by the so-called “subjects” of my research. Nevertheless, the place that researchers are able to take within the field is also defined in terms of existing social structures and specific, historically contingent conditions. The expedient negotiation of these does not only benefit the researcher, but also the community worked with. This is especially the case for societies in which the exchange of goods and knowledge is largely defined through the framework of a classificatory mode of kinship.
After little more than a week I became aware that I was being situated within the Sia Raga system of kinship as a particular member of Jif Ruben’s family. I wondered at the case with which this occurred, and that the terms of my “adoption” were never negotiated, at least in my presence. Very soon, people I was meeting for the first time were not only introduced by their names, but also by Raga kinship terms, such as ‘ina or niu, tana, mua, tana’o or mawana (see chapter four). One significant evening in the gamali stands out. I was being shown how to prepare kava and had successfully poured my first laka (coconut shell cup) when Robinson, Ruben Todali’s firstborn son, instructed me to call over his father. As the highest-ranking ‘ataki (“chief”) present, he was to drink the auspicious first laka of the evening. Robinson told me to call out to his father in the Raga language which was still very new to me, “Tata, mai maven molo” (“Father, come drink kava”). As Jif Ruben crouched beside me to drink, I was vaguely conscious of being at the centre of a subtly enacted ceremony. The ways in which kava may be used in marking the definition or transformation of relationships would later become much clearer to me.

That my relationship with Ruben Todali was central to this fieldwork will become obvious throughout the course of the dissertation. Being at once my father,
CHAPTER ONE

teacher and *ratabigi*, a great deal of the esoteric and historical knowledge that is presented here came directly from him. At the time of my arrival to the island of North Pentecost Jif Ruben was probably 83 years old. He is a rather short, lean and slender man, who sports an impressive grey beard befitting a *ratabigi* of high standing (but worn, as he told me, to hide sunken cheeks caused by missing teeth). Upon meeting Jif Ruben I was immediately struck by his vitality, that seemed to belie his age, and with how he became instantly animated when his interest was aroused. Here was a man with a unique passion for knowledge and understanding of the world, and who had spent a lot of time thinking about and formulating that knowledge. In those first weeks he seemed to delight in describing to me stories from his past. I remember the first evening in which I had the opportunity to talk with him at length, my second on the island. Haggai and I sat with him alone in the *gamali*, talking late into the night in the soft glow of a kerosene lamp. He spoke of his younger experiences of working as a house steward for a Frenchman in Port Vila, and as a coconut plantation worker on the island of Aore, near Luganville, prior to the Second World War. He also recalled the arrival of US troops to Luganville in 1942, and how he was employed to wash clothes for soldiers. His narrative was filled with snapshot images: battleships in the harbour, an enormous dry dock, squadrons of fighter planes performing manoeuvres overhead, and a small cinema at which he saw a film demonstrating the workings of an apple processing factory in New Zealand.

During the first few weeks of my visit Haggai led me on various excursions to the neighbouring districts of Hurilau, Lolcasai and Aute. Through him, as an easygoing friendship quickly developed between us, some first impressions of people from outside of Avatotu filtered back to me. These are important to note in so far as they indicate the range of contexts and purposes for which *tuturani* now visit the area of North Pentecost.

The most immediately defining characteristic that people saw in me was my whiteness. Not surprisingly, during the first few months – and before I became more widely known and recognised – assumptions concerning the purpose of my visit were often formed based on recent experiences with other *tuturani* in the area. One of the main questions that Haggai was asked was whether or not I had arrived to buy kava. While Haggai would make jokes about their wishful thinking, it was perhaps not an

---

24 *Ratabigi* is translated as *jif* ("chief") in Bislama. As my immediate *jif*, I refer to Ruben Todali as Jif Ruben throughout the course of this thesis.
unreasonable assumption to make. Escalating in numbers over the last decade, several tuturani had come to do just that.

The open reactions of children were also sometimes very telling. These seemed to vary from place to place, depending whether they were alone or in groups, and on the relative proximity of their homes to truck roads and major villages, and other such places where tuturani are most likely to be encountered. Invariably, children were instantly excited by the novelty of my presence. For some, or so I was told, I was the first white person they had seen. Walking through a hamlet for the first time was often accompanied by a chorus of “tuturani, tuturani” from a bevy of laughing kids, thus raising the attention of adults who would emerge from their kitchens to greet us as we passed. Other children, especially if encountered alone, would flee and hide in fright. It was explained to me on several occasions that some children saw me as a “ghost” or “devil”.

For many others their only previous encounter with white people was with the nurses who periodically visit the island to inoculate against polio and tetanus. The figure of the syringe-wielding tuturani has become incorporated as a macabre feature of North Pentecost children’s stories.

Passing through the coastal villages of Lolotong and Latano, where Haggai had taken me to watch a football match, was exceptional. Here the children greeted me with cries of “turis, turis” (“tourist, tourist”). While North Pentecost as a whole does not generally receive many international travellers, one exception is the area of Lolotong, whose deep and sheltered bay is an established anchorage for the sailing boats that pass at the rate of one or two a week during the months of April to November. Outside the context of this relatively small enclave I did not so much risk the anthropologists’ horror of being confused as a tourist (Jolly 1994b: 133), as of being imaged as a foreign aid worker. This partial misconception became entirely entangled with my own constant struggle to define my field research, and the fact that this was already being negotiated for me on a local level. 25 Haggai’s own response to questions concerning the purpose of my visit was an interpretation of my own ill-formulated explanations that I had given to him: basically, that I had come to study the lives of young people (in Bislama, “olgeta yongala” or “yul”). What quickly became apparent to me was the extent to which I had underestimated the importance of meanings attached to the idea of yul (youth) in local discourse, as well the contextual specificity to which it pertains. 

---

25 Partial in so far as I did eventually end up helping to plan and secure UNESCO funding for the establishment of the Gaiware Bulvanua Kalfjoral Senta project.
CHAPTER ONE

is used in Bislama does not simply refer to young people in a general sense, but to specific locally organised social groups that coordinate the activities of young people, in most cases young men in particular.26

Such groups are often targeted by religious institutions and foreign aid donors. Since independence Vanuatu has built up an entire youth industry based around programs of economic and social development. Soon I was being framed within this mould: as an aid-worker who had come to *givhan long ved blong yut* (to help with youth issues). This became especially clear to me when, a week after I had arrived in the region, Haggai took me down to the large coastal administrative village of Abwatuntora to meet Ifrain Boe. Ifrain is a member of the National Youth Council, and the leader of the Abwatuntora Youth Centre whose facilities and programs cater for the one hundred or more young people of the Hurilau area. With its large hall built with donor funding, a football field and netball court, and a telephone and Tele-radio service from which to raise funds, Abwatuntora is the most successful youth institution in the region of North Pentecost.

I don’t know the extent to which Haggai had arranged this meeting, but it seemed that Ifrain was expecting me. The meeting took place at Ifrain’s house whose *vanna* (land/place) spans a beautiful outcrop overlooking the Bay of Abwatuntora. From here snatches of magnificent views caught through the surrounding trees stretch up and down the island and across the sea to Ambae. Our conversation, which was punctuated by a lunch of rice and two-minute noodles, lasted for several hours. We talked about my proposed project which, due to my improving Bislama and Ifrain’s good grasp of English, I was able explain in more detail than I had previously. Ifrain expressed a great interest in the project, and suggested that, if I wished, I could move into a small house situated at the end of the point. Weighing up options, I thought of the location’s appropriateness to the aims of my project. I also thought of the comfort benefits of being situated in a large administrative village; with a telephone and stores and many social diversions; with my own house near the sea, as against my

---

26 This gender division relates to the kind of imbalances noted by Jolly (1981), in particular to those relating to the age-based sexual division of labour. As in South Pentecost, boys and unmarried young men (*mwalengelo*) are largely exempt from communal or household garden work, and “unlike girls of their own age are allowed to roam around in gangs, and engage in other activities” (1981: 272). This also relates to different expectations and strategies regarding gendered knowledge formation for male and female persons. Jolly notes that through a fear of the loss of women’s labour, sexuality and fertility, Sa men “consciously inhibit the contact which women have with the outside world” (1981: 289). By contrast, the Raga term *mwalengelo* implies a specific engagement with that world. It is primarily through their “worldliness” that the kinds of activities that *yut* (“youth”) collectives organise are often heavily male-oriented.
position of sharing the gumali at Avatotu some two hours walk into the hills. Hastily, as it turned out, and with Haggai's approval, I accepted. I arranged to relocate to Abwatuntora in a week or two. Had I known better, I might have listened more carefully when my eldest brother Robinson had told me, "kastom i stop, be of man i care misien" ("kastom is present, but people can overlook it").

I spent the following two days enjoying hamlet life, primarily in the company of Jif Ruben at Avatotu. During this time the nature of our relationship was starting to be defined. Once again, my field notebook displays the range of topics covered. Amidst a series of word lists, including one of than bov (pig names based on tusk size), Jif Ruben placed a great deal of emphasis on those same issues of alean runna ("ways of the place") and knowledge that are central to this thesis and that Kolombas had raised in our first meeting a week earlier. The notes for this time are littered with maxims, "a man who thinks too quickly cannot know kastom"; "killing pigs is not kastom, kastom is about knowledge, respect and togetherness"; "you must remain by the graves of your ancestors in order for knowledge to be passed on to you". The significance of such turns of phrase would later become clearer to me, especially as I came to understand the importance of concepts and practices such as gūgova, for which Jif Ruben then used the
Bislama phrase "*rap kumi*", and which I translate as "abiding quietly", or, more properly, "respect".

Image 10: Ifraim Boe, wearing his "Yamatu National Youth Delegation" T-shirt that he wore on a conference trip to Waitangi, New Zealand. He is also holding the whip which he claims his father used to scare away *tumurani* during the later days of labour recruiting.

On one hand these maxims were directed at myself. Not only was Jif Ruben translating for me aspects of *defun ronua*, he was also making reference to my decision to relocate to the village of Abwaturnora. On the other hand his discussion of the meanings of *kasiom* was more directly developed as a critique of a series of ceremonies that were about to be performed in the northern district of Abivo, and which I was to attend with Robinson. As such, I was immediately alerted, in a rhetorical sense, to the contested and political nature of *kasiom*. This would be brought into stark relief over the next few days during which I attended a series of grade-taking performances.
associated with the auspicious one hundredth day of the mourning cycle following the death of Father Walter Lini.

The next week was anything but quiet. On that day, the 29th of June, Robinson and I made the three hour journey by foot down to Ahivo, where at several specific locations the period of heightened ceremonial activity was in preparation. That night I watched with a large group of locals as close members of the Lini family performed a *rau* (funerary dance) around Father Walter Lini's grave at Nazareth. We then moved up to the *gamali* at Lavusi to join in a *rau* ourselves. The following day I attended a major pig-killing ceremony (*bolololi*) performed by a *tuturani*; the prominent and controversial Vietnamese businessman and naturalised ni-Vanuatu Dihn Van Than. The day after that I witnessed a "minor" grade-taking ceremony involving the ritual slaughter of one hundred and forty chickens and fourteen pigs.

I do not recount these ceremonies here, or their political ramifications, as they relate to issues that will be discussed elsewhere (see chapter two). What is important to this discussion is the emotional effect that it produced in me. Nothing could have prepared me for the extraordinary encounter with cultural difference that I experienced over this short period. I was profoundly struck by the visual beauty of these lavish performances of exchange and status, by the casual solemnity with which they were carried out, and by the fact that I understood nothing of what was going on. I was thrilled and elated. This, I thought, was what real fieldwork was about.

I returned to Avatotu tired but excited. Before leaving for Abwatuntora, much of the next two days was spent in conversation once again with Jif Ruben and his two sons, Haggai and Robinson. My own interest had now turned towards the mechanics of grade taking rituals. Looking at my field notes once again, however, I find a significant emphasis on the early, pre-*bolololi* phases of the male ritual cycle. Clearly Jif Ruben was directing my attention along what he considered to be an appropriate passage of learning. On the evening before I left, Jif Ruben casually reiterated some of those principles that he had already told me several days before. This time I felt them to be more pointedly directed at myself: "In order to learn, a person should not travel about too much. It is alright to go away for a few days, but one should always return to one's place and *step kwa'e*." After giving lengths of calico to Jif Ruben's wife Eileen, and his...
daughters Eileen and Agnes, I struck off with my backpack for Abwatuntora. That I left half of my belongings behind indicated the increasing polarisation of my situation. It seems as though Jif Ruben was at the same time making me an offer and perhaps setting me a test. This left me with an important decision to resolve, one that would be crucial to the direction my research would take. Ironically, perhaps, the predicament seemed to rest on the very dichotomy that I was seeking to critique: between the “modernity” that Abwatuntora seemed to represent, and access to Jif Ruben’s “traditional” knowledge.

I spent a week with Ifraim Boe at Abwatuntora before returning to base myself permanently at Avatvotu. Before doing so I told Ifraim of what Jif Ruben had told me. He agreed with my interpretation of Jif Ruben’s parting comments, but left the decision to me. I hope that I did not disappoint Ifraim by eventually turning down his offer. As it turned out I was able to spend a good deal of time at Abwatuntora, staying with Ifraim’s family and participating in the activities surrounding the Youth Centre. In this way it represents an important secondary locale to this research.

MELBOURNE

Anthropological truths are not only revealed in “the field” (Gupta and Furguson 1997: 38). Defining my own field of research in terms of the collective range of significant contexts of knowledge production that have contributed to the construction of this text, I am also forced to acknowledge those sites which lie beyond the boundaries of sand and reef that define North Pentecost as a geographical location. This evaluation entails extending conceptually the spatial and temporal boundaries of fieldwork to include the time I have spent in libraries, on the Internet, and in other archives after the fieldwork took place in situ. My experience of the field of North Pentecost has also been extended through the ongoing relationships that I have maintained with my North Pentecost family and friends since “exiting” that field. These have been mainly experienced in occasional long-distance telephone calls to Vila, or through the “coconut wireless” of everyday talk that somehow manages to filter across the Pacific to my home in Melbourne. While much of my experience of “writing up” has corresponded with the doctoral student caricature – a poor, tortured soul who spends hour after lonely hour in the same small room, hunched in front of a computer.
screen – thankfully, the “post-field” has also involved ongoing experiences of collaboration and negotiation.

The thesis that I write is undoubtedly influenced, and to some extent produced by my conversations with Jif Ruben, Kolombas Todali, John Leo Tamata and the other individuals I came to know in North Pentecost, and from whom I learnt about themselves and their place. My field notes, tape recordings and photographs, and more importantly my memories that uncertainly recall these encounters have been the primary sources for the writing of this text. But it is also the product of other text-mediated “post-field” encounters; with indigenous scholars, anthropologists, government officials, missionaries, and the like, such as have been initiated through archival research. Since leaving North Pentecost in June, 2000, and apart from having enjoyed a later six week visit,28 I have also remained in constant dialogue with many of the names and places that I encountered in North Pentecost by engaging with a variety of archives and documents. In much of my writing I try to set up a dialogue between these sources which have been otherwise separated in space and in time. In this sense, then, I envisage the text that I am producing to be a mediation: within the Raga knowledge field as I have defined it, and between the different contexts in which that knowledge is retained or re-produced. I must, however, concede my political bias from the outset, a bias that relates to my more immediate position as a mediator between the Sia Raga and the Western academy. In trying to come to an understanding of Sia Raga history, cosmology and material culture, I try most to emphasise and privilege those local voices that I encountered in the field, and that display a subaltern “otherness” that has too easily been disempowered in the textual renditions and analyses of missionaries, anthropologists and historians.

Shelley Mallet has questioned the “conflation of field with text, and fieldwork with writing”, that has characterised recent critiques of ethnography, and of the textual construction of ethnographic authority in particular (Mallett 2003: 27-31).29 In reference to this critical focus on the ethnographer as author, rather than participant observer, Mallett suggests that:

…it is not only in the text that the ethnographer must confront what it means to be a faithful “I-witness,” s/he must also confront this in the field, and in later conversations and oral presentations of the lived field. After all, anthropology is not only a written, but also a visual and verbal tradition (Mallett 2003: 29).

28 During November and December, 2001.
29 Her main points of reference are Clifford (1988) and Geertz (1973)
CHAPTER ONE

From the formal contexts of conference and supervisory meeting to casual conversations with friends, engagement within the “post-field” verbal tradition of ethnography has lent further insight into my experiences and understandings of Sia Raga knowledge, culture and society. Coupled with the generous sharing of knowledge and expertise that accompanies the scrutiny of written drafts, “post-field” dialogue has also greatly influenced the textual rendition of these understandings. Thus the ethnography presented here is not simply a testimony to my own experiences in North Pentecost, or to the lives and articulated thoughts of my Sia Raga interlocutors. Gupta and Ferguson have suggested that:

Practicing decolonized anthropology in a deterritorialized world means as a first step doing away with the distancing and exoticization of the conventional anthropological “field,” and foregrounding the ways in which we anthropologists are historically and socially (not just biographically) linked with the areas we study (1997: 38).

This chapter has asserted that the Sia Raga “field” that is North Pentecost is always/already a part of that broader field in which the production of this text has taken place. To suggest otherwise would be to construct that place as discretely other, and to deny those interlocutors the fact of their entanglement and agency within a globally interconnected world. This entanglement is further examined historically in the following chapter.

---

30 In revealing the identity of some of pre- and post-field interlocutors, it is partly for this reason that the “Acknowledgments” sections of ethnographic texts often make such interesting reading.
There is to be a dispute settlement at Lagaranboga, and I have just arrived at the hamlet with Jif Ruben Todali. A number of distinguished older men are sitting about and chatting on an outcrop of stones situated above the gamali. As we join them we are greeted with handshakes, and Jif Ruben sits down amongst them. I want to sit down, too, but the only dry seat I can find is a cluster of rocks situated a few feet behind and above the group. I vaguely sense that I am about to commit a faux pas by placing myself so conspicuously above the group of chiefs, but I do so anyway. I am tired from the walk and frustrated of the field and in the mood for rebellion – for experimentation. After a short while the men begin talking about me, referring to me as “ratahigi”, meaning “mother” or “chief”. I understand more language than they guess. A moment later an old woman approaches up the pathway. Momentarily startled, she stops, then laughs, “Awe! Tuturani mon do amare, kun atmate” – “Wow! The white man is sitting up there, like a spirit!”

The past envelops the lives of Raga speakers, and like the grand tusks that are grown on boars it is shaped into a spiralling future. From everyday gossip to the telling of epic stories, such as those relating the deeds of ancestors or the adventures of culture heroes, the practice of telling historical narratives pervades daily life on North Pentecost. This chapter explores the significance of one such narrative, the arresting account of the adventures of Jimmy, the first tuturani (white man, foreigner) to visit the northern Raga-speaking region of Pentecost Island. During the time I spent in the area I frequently heard versions of “Storian biong Jimmy”, as it was usually called in Bislama. In fact, so often was The Story of Jimmy offered to me, or told in my presence, and by so many different people, that I began to feel haunted by its main character. Jimmy appeared to be stalking me, from village to village, like my own shadow. Yet as I became entangled within the webs of meaning that his story seemed to throw out – as it seemed to me, at least – I began to understand that telling histories on North Pentecost is not simply about recounting immutable pasts, but rather, that arts of memory and narrative performance are essential to the evaluation and re-creation of Sia Raga community and personhood. Engaged within specific social contexts and at particular moments, histories provide frameworks through which people make sense of their own present, and furthermore, they may also be utilized as a part of that work by which
people seek to shape others, and in doing so give shape to their shared futures. Here we see how *The Story of Jimmy* is used as a point of departure for examining aspects of the North Pentecost colonial past, and how, more importantly, it has become a vehicle of social and political assessment and agency within the neo-colonial present.

What follows is a somewhat abridged telling of *The Story of Jimmy*. This translated version is based on that which was told to me by John Leo Tamata of Ataleva, a hamlet in the Hurilau District of North Pentecost. 31

---

**THE STORY OF JIMMY**

The story begins with a group of ni-Vanuatu labourers, from the islands of Epi, Paama, Ambrym and Pentecost, at work on a plantation in Fiji. 32 Dissatisfied with their working conditions and wishing to return to their homes, on a Saturday night the men steal a boat from the dock. However, it is not until they are far out to sea that they detect the presence of two white men who emerge from a cabin below: the ship’s captain and his young son Jimmy. In bad weather, and with no knowledge of how to operate the ship’s navigation equipment, they soon become lost. Food and water runs short and is eventually finished. Close to starvation, one of the men who is a leader amongst them decides that in order to survive they must kill and eat one of the white men. They choose the captain. Seeing what they are about to do Jimmy rushes about the ship and collects all the matches he can find, then throws them overboard. Now the men have no way of cooking the captain and are forced to eat him raw. But even when they have finished eating the captain – in very small pieces – there is still no sight of land, and so they continue wandering aimlessly on the sea.

After more days at sea they are too weak to stand upon the deck or control the boat in any way. They will soon die of starvation. But they decide not to eat young Jimmy, as they had his father. Eventually they find themselves approaching Pentecost Island’s extreme north eastern coast, heading towards a passage (landing place) called Alivoa that belongs to a village in the hills above, Lavusì. Tossed by waves breaking on the reef and

31 Father Robin Siro (at Amatbobo) and Simon Tevi (at Lamalanga) also allowed me to record their versions of the story. Both of these have been incorporated to provide supplementary material within the version recounted here.

32 In other versions of the story told to me the location given was Queensland, Australia.
being too weak to control the ship, many of the men crawl towards the rails, ready to jump into the water to swim ashore. But Jimmy tells them, “No, you must lie down and hold onto the ship. When the ship becomes lodged on the reef, only then should you go into the water. If you jump in now, some of you will surely die”.

Taking Jimmy’s advice, the islanders stay on board until the ship is eventually stranded on the reef. They then fall over the sides into the water and are washed onto the beach. They crawl up the beach, and in their starvation eat the leaves of the wild plants found growing there. They fall asleep. Jimmy, too, crawls up the beach, finding a pile of stones shaped square and flat like a bed. He takes a piece of dry wood to use as a pillow, and some coconut leaves, and goes to sleep on top of the stone pile. Unbeknown to Jimmy, these stones represent the vatun tamata ("stones of peace") of Vira Mata, a powerful chief from Lavusi.33

Meanwhile, at the village of Lavusi above, some men had witnessed the ship’s approach and gone to warn their chief, Vira Mata, of its arrival. Upon hearing the news Vira Mata tells his men to go and investigate, and to kill any men found alive. But the first person they find is Jimmy, asleep on top of Vira Mata’s vatun tamata. The men send a messenger back up to Lavusi to tell Vira Mata of the white man lying asleep upon his “stones of peace”, and to receive further orders. This time Vira Mata instructs them to bring the survivors up to the village alive. While awaiting these orders the rest of the men continue to search the beach. In doing so they stumble upon a box full of gold coins. Not knowing what they are, they simply throw them into the sea, playfully skipping them over the waves.

There are plenty of survivors from the wreck (who, as mentioned, come from several different islands, including Paama, Epi, Ambrym and Pentecost). They stay at Lavusi many months, and when they become strong again Vira Mata puts them to work. Again they plan to escape. One night they steal all of the canoes from Abwatuntora and paddle down the coastline, each finally reaching his home island and village. With nowhere else to go, Jimmy stays behind, along with a man from Ambrym and a man from Epi, both of whom die shortly after.

33 Vatu tamata are erected for the purpose of restoring peace after a man has shed blood by killing pigs at a grade-taking ceremony, or bobo/bolo. Consequently, vatun tamata are places of sanctuary. It is taboo for blood to be shed near them.
As time passes Jimmy’s trousers become torn and useless, so he is given a *malo* to wear. He begins to participate in the life of the island and to follow its ways. Vira Mata has by now adopted him as a son, and gives him leave to explore the area and participate in various *kastom* activities such as those followed during marriages, pig-killings, or other celebrations. In doing so he learns the local language, and to sing and dance *kastom*.

It is said that Jimmy stayed on the island for several years, during which time he had many adventures. Two of these are also remembered in song. In the first, Jimmy goes to a *bolololi* (pig-killing ceremony) at Aute. On his way through the bush he happens upon a group of women preparing for the performance of a *havwa* (a dance performed by women at *bolololi*). As he observes the women from a hiding place he notices them apply bright red and blue paint to their faces. He thinks, “this paint must come from the place of white men. Where could they have got it from?” And so he begins to sing:

\[
\text{Nam do go\text{\textg}onai, inau gitu} \\
\text{Inau tuturani, nu bai vu\text{\textg}uri} \\
\text{Liangin tuturani, nu bai vu\text{\textg}uri} \\
\text{Varine aten bebe, uliuli kuniau, uliuli kuniau.}
\]

I abide quietly, I look  
I, the white man, it has gone up [become plentiful] already  
Blue face paint of the white man, it has gone up already  
Where are the women underneath? They paint themselves like me, they paint themselves like me.  

In the other story Jimmy goes to stay at Lamalanga with his friend called Gigiala, who he would often visit for short periods before returning to Vira Mata at Lavusi. During one such visit Jimmy goes alone to swim at a beach called Avenia. While swimming he encounters a group of *mwei*. The *mwei* (and *sarivava*) are playful, sometimes troublesome, and usually invisible human-like creatures that typically dwell near the seashores. When speaking Bislama they are referred to as “spirits” or “devils” (see chapter three). Unfortunately, while the song associated with this encounter is remembered, people were unable to provide an adequate translation for it.

---

34 *Malo*, the male *kastom* ("traditional") dress of North Pentecost, are lengths of finely woven and tasselled pandanus that are usually dyed red. They are worn between the legs and fastened around the waist by way of a rope or belt.

35 The reference here probably relates to the early appropriation of Western paints and their incorporation in place of indigenous pigments.

36 *Mwei* (and *sarivava*) are playful, sometimes troublesome, and usually invisible human-like creatures that typically dwell near the seashores. When speaking Bislama they are referred to as “spirits” or “devils” (see chapter three). Unfortunately, while the song associated with this encounter is remembered, people were unable to provide an adequate translation for it.
the look of him because, since he is white-skinned also, they think he is one of them. But then they notice his long beard, and therefore see that he’s a little different from them.

One day while Jimmy is staying at Lamalanga a ship arrives. White men come ashore in a small boat and take Jimmy back to the ship. Looking at Jimmy, the men on the ship are confused as to what kind of man he is. His skin is white like theirs, but his hair and beard are long and he is wearing a malo instead of trousers. They try talking to him in English, but at first he doesn’t answer. But when they ask him to tell them his story, he does so. When he has finished telling of his adventures the captain of the ship asks him, “would you like to stay here, or will you come back with me?” Jimmy says, “No, I will go with you.”

Before departure the men on the ship cut Jimmy’s hair and shave his long beard, and they also give him clothes to wear. When he goes back to shore to say goodbye the people are confused, they no longer recognise him. But Jimmy says to them, “No, it’s me, it’s me back again. I’ve cut my hair and shaved my beard. Don’t be afraid.” Jimmy then asks to see his friend Gigiala, but Gigiala has gone to work in his garden in the hills above. Jimmy says, “Alright. But now I’m going to leave on this ship. When Gigiala comes, tell him that I’ve gone.” With that, Jimmy goes back to the ship, which then departs southward up the western coast of the island.

After sailing as far as Bwatnapne [on the central east of Pentecost Island], Jimmy begins to feel sad at not having seen his friend Gigiala before departing, and so he asks the captain to turn the ship around. The captain agrees, and Jimmy goes back to shore at Lamalanga. By this time Gigiala has returned to the village, and upon seeing each other they begin to cry and embrace each other. After they’ve finished crying, Gigiala goes to fetch a white pig, or boe tamata, which represents peace. He kills the pig and places it on the ground with some taro and yam, saying, “this is your food and a pig to go with it. It is yours to eat on your journey.” The food is then taken aboard the ship.

Seeing this, Jimmy feels ashamed at leaving, after having been so well looked after throughout his stay in North Pentecost. He says to Gigiala, “My leaving makes me sad. But after I’ve reached my home you will see Jimmy. You will see me forever, everywhere.” He says this because of all the goods of the white man that will come – many, many small things. Finally, before

---

37 Boe tamata translates, quite literally, as “pig peace”.

51
departing on the ship Jimmy bestows a new name on the island. He calls it Uretabe, meaning “the place of gifts and love”. This is how the story ends.

BRANCHES ON THE EVERGREEN TREE: JIMMY “HISTORICISED”

In Raga, Jimmy’s arrival signifies the beginning of a new tauva, a word meaning either to “begin” or “put”, as well as “generation”. Within the context of Sia Raga historiography the concept may be translated as describing a cosmological transformation or rupture that heralds the start of a new historical “epoch”. Each tauva relates to the arrival of spirit beings or people within different cosmological zones, and at the same time, the formation or shaping of those zones. The tauva represented in this story is marked by the arrival of whites to the Sia Raga world (see chapter three).

Jimmy’s story is primarily concerned with issues of cultural contact and alterity at what is recognised as a major point of transition within the North Pentecost past. Within the story, many of the changes that will take place as a result of that rupture are foreshadowed and considered. Indeed, at the end of the story Jimmy himself makes the prefigurative nature of his visit clear when, upon departing North Pentecost, he tells his friend Gigiala that, despite leaving, he will remain forever in the physical memory of Western goods. But Jimmy also seems to depart with a promise: that despite the arrival of whites, and all the things that they represent, the values of Raga aleñan vanua (ways of the place) will continue with integrity.

Jimmy is generally believed to be the first white man to reside for any extended period on Pentecost Island. In fact, most people suggested to me that he was the first to set foot on Pentecost at all, preceding both Captain Cook (in 1887, or 1774), and Bishop Patteson of the Melanesian Mission (in 1855). However, after an extended discussion with some older men, including John Leo Tamata (whose version of the story I have presented here), the story was identified as belonging to somewhere between the 1860s and the 1880s. Amongst other things, this estimation was based on the tracing of genealogies from the characters Vira Mata and Gigiala, and on local knowledge of labour traffic in the area. Not only does this period coincide with the

---

38 According to the accounts made by those on board the Resolution (Cook 1777 Vol II), Cook never set foot on the island of Pentecost during his pass through the islands in 1774. Nevertheless, the existence of a now sand-covered dated inscription on the beach at Aroa, on North Pentecost’s west coast, led many people to suggest to me that he in fact set foot on the island in 1887 (see footnote 55, below).
development of the labour trade, but also the arrival and early growth of the Anglican Church (Price and Baker 1976: 115; Fox 1958: 101). By this time the people of Pentecost would have been far from naive about aleñan tuturani, or the “way of whites”. There had been varied and steady contact for several decades.

Vanuatu encompasses a vast territory of 83 inhabited islands spread north to south over more than one thousand kilometres of ocean. To use Epeli Hau’ofa’s suggestive and poetic phrase, Vanuatu is a “a sea of islands” (1994: 152), with homelands that represent not only places of dwelling, but also of connection and relationship. Whether in the ocean-voyaging and long-distance trading canoes of the past, or on board the commercial ships or planes of today, ni-Vanuatu are a people accustomed to living on the move and to spanning relationships across the sea.39 Yet grounded in cosmologies that emphasise community and the life-giving qualities of places of origin, travelling ni-Vanuatu remain tied to place through the inexorable tug of their homelands.

In the following sections I employ the artifice of a rough chronology to provide historical context to The Story of Jimmy, and comparatively, to the contemporary situation in which the story was told to me.40 I do so by focusing on the changing webs of connectedness that have linked the Sia Raga to other places, and through which they have negotiated their understandings of the world. Evocation of the concept wasi (tension, entanglement) is appropriate here, for in the course of telling these stories it will become apparent that external relationships are characterised locally in terms of an ambivalent entanglement. In the present, many north Pentecost leaders are re-evaluating their position with regard to the relationship of their communities to outside influences. Major fears are that a continual reliance on foreign aid projects is increasingly undermining local creativity and independence; that a mounting number of

39 Themes that were taken up in a conference held at the Australian National University’s Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, 2000, entitled “Walking About: Travel and Migration in Vanuatu”.
40 I am conscious of the massive historical elision that emerges within this thesis as a result of this temporal leap. A number of crucial topics receive only cursory attention herein. By June, 2003, I had completed a lengthy (23,000 word) history of North Pentecost, Branches on the Evergreen Tree: North Pentecost “Historised” (Taylor n.d.). This was to appear as the second chapter of this thesis. In the interests of spatial constraints, and equally important theoretical concerns (see especially the introduction to chapter three), I finally chose to omit the bulk of this material. Whether whole or in fragments, I am hopeful that this writing will appear elsewhere in published form. Some of the topics covered in this manuscript include: the relationship between the ethnology of Vanuatu and the Anglican Church; the growth of the indigenous plantation industry; the emergence of the politico-religious movement, Sion Dan; the significance of World War Two to changing Sia Raga world views; the profound demographic and sociological changes that were instigated following the 1950s return to Pentecost of the Sia Raga doctor, Phillip Ilo; events surrounding Vanuatu’s national independence and local interpretations of the importance and life history of Father Walter Lini.
development and community projects – mainly focused on education, church, health, women and youth – are impinging too greatly on the time needed by people, and especially young people, to live their lives; and that increased economic dependence on the foreign products sold in stores is unequally measured against a credible and stable means of creating income from local production. In short, there is a general perception that the ability of Sia Raga to make decisions shaping the direction that their economic, political and spiritual lives may take is increasingly being undermined by outside forces.

By way of both introducing and providing a framework for this section I find myself compelled to again evoke two major tropes of Vanuatu anthropology, the tree and the canoe (Patterson 2001a, 2002). In his 1937 book, *Savage Civilisation*, Tom Harrisson envisaged pre-colonial Vanuatu as characterised by:

> ...an incessant interchange of things and ideas, the firm roots of tradition always sending out new branches on the evergreen tree. New influences going from island to island, drifting in from faraway groups, drifting out again (1937: 69).

In the above passage Harrisson recognises that the tree as an image not merely represents the stasis implied by roots, but that it is also characterised by routes of growth and the itineraries of branching. This image moves beyond the kind of reckoning that would reduce ni-Vanuatu societies to the dichotomous terms interrogated by Hau’ofa (1994), and expressed in statements such as the following from Bonnemaison: “Traditional societies seem built around two apparently contradictory concepts: the ideal of fixity and the desire for mobility” (1978: 57). Instead, fixity and mobility are built into the same image, solid and fluid at once.

Even trees not fashioned into canoes may travel, and be made to set down fresh roots and send forth new shoots of growth at locations distant from their places of origin. This is most powerfully illustrated when we consider that the first and successive Pacific voyagers who began to arrive in Vanuatu, some 3600 years before the present, cultivated deep attachments to the lands in which they settled with the vast array of crops that they brought with them (Kirch 1988; Jolly 2001: 421). The Sia Raga are descendants of those pioneers who spread Lapita pottery, a range of subsistence technology, and a diverse arboriculture from the Admiralties to the Solomon Islands in voyages of discovery which probably took place within the short space of about 300 years (Bellwood 1996: 27). As we shall see, the kind of transplantation involved in this dramatic diaspora has continued as a feature of North Pentecost history through the colonial period and into the present day, albeit haltingly, and with varying degrees of
local control. Consider for example the appearance in recent years of Sia Raga settlements on Espiritu Santo, like the place called Thalankar by the local man pies (people of the place), but now more commonly known by its Raga place-name, Alolgalato. Here a permanent population of more than sixty people from North Pentecost have over the last ten years cleared bush, built houses, gamali and a church house, born children and cultivated their premium kava strain, boroñoru, as well as peanuts, pumpkin and a range of other local and more recently introduced species as cash crops for sale in Luganville and Port Vila.

![Image 11: The Gilau “land-canoe”, drawn by Kolombas Todali, c.1998.](image)

In being critical of the way in which Western scholarship has tended to emphasise emplacement over travel and thereby served to reify the negative image of ni-Vanuatu as somehow autochthonously rooted to places of origin, we must at the same time be careful not to undermine those very important ties that people do feel with place. As Jolly has pointed out, “Pacific peoples live in both spatialities and contextually

---

41 Thalankar is located inland, near the Sarakata River, approximately 12km north of Fanafo. Man Raga have also made substantial settlements at Big Bay Santo, and in south east Malakula. In recent years there has also been a considerable spreading of “North Pentecost” boundaries, north into Maewo, and south into Central Pentecost.

42 Such images might not seem entirely inappropriate when we consider the degree to which autochthony does feature in many local histories from around Vanuatu. However, whereas within these so-called “mythical” pasts autochthony appears as a starting point to growth and departure, in colonial scholarship their function tends towards stasis and incarceration.
deploy metaphors of both groundedness and mobility, settlement and detachment to articulate their being in the world. But where they live, the specific places of their being also matters” (2001: 427, emphasis in original). For the Sia Raga the canoe itself is sometimes deployed as a complex metaphor to communicate this dialectic. In this image produced by Kolombas Todali (Image 11), the canoe is rendered as a kind of cartography, and the land of Gilau is imaged as capable of journeying from place to place.43

AMUA

In this section I briefly describe some of the routes by which the Sia Raga negotiated social and economic connections during the period leading up to early contact with European explorers, traders and missionaries. I am conscious that here, in my brevity, I commit the modernist crime of de-historicizing the “pre-European” past (for varied discussions of this problem, see Barofsky 2000). The arrival of whites does not signal the beginning of historical consciousness for the Sia Raga. Indeed, the many richly detailed oral historical accounts of the “prehistory” of the island speak of communities in a state of constant movement and change, and of people encountering similar problems and struggles as those faced today.

As we shall see with regards to the arboreal and architectonic metaphors discussed in later chapters, Sia Raga histories like The Story of Jimmy are often guided by the linked space-temporalities of sequence and of branching. In line with these tropes, there has emerged in the post-contact period a binary historiographical idiom contrasting amua (literally “at first”, or in Bislama, bija), meaning before the arrival of whites, with garigj (“today”), meaning life as it has emerged since contact with whites. The pervasive use of this trope highlights the gravity and catastrophic nature of those events which took place during the course of the nineteenth century.

For older men in particular, the time of amua is valorised and imbued with emotions of nostalgia, and is seamlessly associated with locally authentic “ways of the

43 The particular type of canoe pictured is not a double-hulled ocean-going waga ve, ot vemve, known to us through its sand drawing, neither is it the small coastal waga that are widely used today. In his drawing Kolombas has depicted a lal vora, or sailing canoe. I was told that such canoes could carry up to eight people and were used in inter-island trading voyages. The names of various hamlets (Atabulu, Amoru, Abuaña, etc.) are listed along side the names of various parts of the canoe (hull, outrigger, mast, etc.)
place" (aleñan vanua). At the same time, however, the considerable flexibility of Sia Raga temporal reckoning always allows that the persistence and even re-emergence of the past may be given space in the midst of present change. Events may result in the past being misplaced, but it is never fully forgotten. Contained as it is in the memory and meaning (dovinana) of landscape and environment, and by the ancestors who inhabit that landscape, what has preceded the present may always be recovered. In the next section I describe some of the portentous events and fleeting encounters by which the historiographic split between amua and garig was eventually jolted into the Sia Raga ideoscope.

It is difficult to estimate the population of Pentecost prior to European arrival. Nevertheless, both the descriptions made by early explorers and the testimony of oral records suggest a population at least as high as it is today, if not considerably more. People I spoke to on Pentecost articulated a great faith in the land’s ability to provide for vast numbers of people.\(^4^4\) For this reason most people show little concern over the present rate of population growth.\(^4^5\) Thus local analyses directly contradict the “nightmare visions” of national and NGO political discourse in which the spectre of overpopulation looms large in projected images of the Pacific future (Jolly 2001a: 275; Spriggs 1997: 263).

Evidence of a larger pre-contact population is substantiated for locals by the proliferation of old settlement sites dotted across the island. More important are the many large burial mounds (hrum) associated with old dancing grounds (sara). In Western prehistorical interpretations these sites would probably be grouped into epochs stretching over a longer period of time, rather than be treated as simultaneous. For my

---

\(^{4^4}\) Father Mark Gaviga once told me that he had seen written evidence attesting that the pre-contact population of Pentecost as a whole totalled one million people. In so far as the pre-contact era is considered to have been a time of social prosperity, and that children are seen to represent a socio-economic investment, the production of large families is more usually encouraged as a contribution to community development. John Leo Tamata, for instance, once told me that the pre-European population of Gilau, today under 200, was probably somewhere around 6,000. This is roughly equivalent with today’s total for the whole region of North Pentecost. It was his personal wish, and goal, to have these former numbers restored.

\(^{4^5}\) This was calculated at 2% in the 2000 census. The desire for population growth that is apparent in Gilau is not equally shared throughout Vanuatu, especially in those islands where population pressure is having a noticeable impact on subsistence economy, such as on particular islands of the Shepherds group, and in Port Vila settlement populations. Likewise, on Pentecost itself, and especially in the densely populated Afovo district, opinions are more divided where populations are large in comparison to available space. Nevertheless, there is overall an equally held opinion that the land is capable of maintaining the kind of numbers described by John Leo Tamata and Father Mark Gaviga, although many Sia Raga would argue that due to the degradation of local skills and knowledge in areas of gardening and health this would be impossible at the present time.
Sia Raga interlocutors, such as John Leo Tamata, they instead served to corroborate theories concerning the sudden demise of large prior populations. These were often remembered as the result of epidemic outbreaks caused by sorcery, and in relation to the new and powerfully ambivalent spiritual technologies that accompanied the arrival of Christianity (as discussed in later sections).

The evidence of oral historical accounts and missionary texts suggests that prior to European arrival the Sia Raga preferred to live in scattered hamlets close to their gardens in the island’s interior, rather than on the more malarial west coast. Hamlets typically consisted of no more than four or five families, and in some cases a single family or even a lone bachelor. Spatial arrangement within the hamlet also embodied the gender segregation that permeated most aspects of Sia Raga life. Domestic houses were subdivided into separate male and female dwelling spaces. The men’s *gamali*, at the centre of the hamlet, was juxtaposed with the *inwa* or *walewawewe*, peripherally located women’s houses (see chapters five and six).

Fuelled by images of “tribal war” and the paranoia of “wife stealing”, there is a scholarly tendency to image ni-Vanuatu social life as being incarcerated within places of ancestry, and to describe life as primarily located within a self-contained world of hamlet and surrounding gardens. Yet while regional fighting was undoubtedly an occasional inhibiting factor, people on Raga have and do enjoy considerable freedom of movement throughout the Raga-speaking district and across the island as a whole. In fact there is necessity for freedom of mobility that goes hand in hand with the scattered nature of landholding patterns on North Pentecost, as will be discussed in later chapters, as well as for maintaining political-economic and kin-based relationships.

Oral historical evidence, supported by linguistic and archaeological reconstruction suggests that inter-island voyaging was pivotal to the social economy of pre- and early-contact Vanuatu (Tryon 1996: 178, Huffman 1996). Oral histories provide evidence that the people of North Pentecost maintained direct, albeit infrequent links stretching as far north as the south and south-east Solomon Islands, and south as far as Efate. Their main contacts were obviously with closer neighbours within the

---

46 Armstrong wrote that in 1882 the Anglican missionary Reverend Brittain “had a list of a hundred villages, nearly all of which he visited, though in many cases they only consisted of the *gamali* [‘men’s house’] and two or three houses; and he always took with him some boys as companions. He could only manage one village a day, for each chief expected to have the day to himself” (1900: 228).

47 While the information I gathered on pre-European warfare is vague, it seems that the most common causes of violent conflict were disputes over land, women and pigs (compare Jolly 1994: 232). These tended to relate to ongoing feuds between particular hamlets. In this way warfare may have been patterned over time according to more or less predictable cycles.
northern islands of Vanuatu itself. North Pentecost was located on the eastern fringe of a vast and complex pre-colonial trade network that criss-crossed the calm inland-sea area of central and northern Vanuatu. Large sailing canoes plied the area for trade until complications resulting from the arrival of white traders, missionaries, and the growth of the labour trade contributed to its demise in the mid-nineteenth century.

In a society that valued knowledge specialists, sailors and navigators helped ensure that inter-island voyaging was performed in relative safety. The Sia Raga men who conducted such journeys maintained continual trade and exchange links that extended from North Ambrym in the south and across to the Small Islands of Malakula to the west, north again to Malo and the south-east coast of Espiritu Santo, and as far north as the Banks islands. The main items of export for North Pentecost were pigs, *buana* and *bati* (exchange textiles), baskets, vegetable dyes, mineral ochres and kava. Produces imported from more distant islands especially included shell valuables from the Banks and Torres Islands and prestige pigs from the Small Islands and also from Malo which was famous for its *rarue* (intersex tuskers). In order to appreciate the full range of goods in circulation however, these lists would need to be vastly extended, to include, for instance: a great range of foodstuffs, medicinal herbs and decorative plant varieties; woven items made of pandanus, coconut leaf and other fibrous materials, including numerous basket and mat styles, specialty exchange textiles and clothing items such as skirts, *maimal* and *nambas*; wood-crafted products such as “walking sticks”, knives and clubs; body adornment such as jewellery, woven arm and leg straps, and belts. This is not to mention a vast corpus of intellectual property, much of which travelled along prescribed routes: gardening and other technical skills, ritual procedures, magical knowledge, histories and songs, sand drawings, carving and tattoo designs, to name just the obvious.

The most frequently visited areas were the immediate neighbours at South Maewo, Northeast Ambae and Central Pentecost. To the Apma-speaking area of Central Pentecost the Sia Raga would and do give pigs in exchange for mat-weaving and dying services, as well as for specifically designed *gasigo* (“walking sticks”) and *maimal*.

---

48 For a hypothetical cartographic reconstruction of this network, see Huffman (1996: 184).
49 *Maimal* and *nambas* are Bislama terms referring to two clothing styles that appear throughout Vanuatu and which Deacon argued that, along with the “mat-skirt” and “fringe-skirt” styles for women, represented distinct culture areas (Deacon 1934). *Nambas*, as worn in South and Central Pentecost, consist of a penis wrapper and belt. *Maimal*, as they appear in North Pentecost, are properly called *malo* in Raga. *Malo* are textiles woven from pandanus, usually dyed red, and are very similar in appearance to the *bati* that are worn by women (wrapped around the waist). They are looped between the legs and fastened around the waist by a rope belt.
(fighting clubs). Inter-island marriage flows and associated land rights were also strengthened through a shared social organisation incorporating two exogamous moieties; for instance, *Bule* and *Tabi* in North Pentecost and areas of South Maewo, *Asu* and *Liu* on North and Central Maewo (Hume 1985: 272), and *Tagaro* and *Meraoute* on Ambae.

A great proportion of inter-island journeys were made for the purpose of fulfilling the ritual and economic demands of male and female rank-taking and the associated system of cultural knowledge by which the area was, and still is characterised.  

As is the case today, the male and female systems are in many regards different from one another, particularly in the elaboration that takes place surrounding men’s *bololo*. Yet they are also crucially linked. Not only do they incorporate what are essentially the same ritual and economic processes to similar ends, but also, both men and women who attain the highest levels in their respective systems are in some cases, albeit rarely, able to participate in the other.

In its modified form, the male rank-taking system of North Pentecost today is most commonly called *bololo*. The women’s system is referred to as *lihilibi* (to “purchase”) by Yoshioka (n. d.: 4). Both systems involve the acquisition of “pig names” (*iban boe*) through the ritual sacrifice of pigs, and emblems through the strategic exchange of pigs. However *bololo* more properly denotes the elaborate ritual performances during which men sacrifice pigs of varying degrees of tusk curvature, and corresponding value, in order to achieve upward mobility through the later stages of a series of name grades. The institution as a whole is also sometimes referred to as *suwbe*, a phonetic reflex of the same name which appears with linguistic variation throughout the northern islands, east to Santo and as far north as the Torres group. This term, I would suggest, was used prior to European arrival to denote the broader, loosely

---

50 For a map showing the distribution of the male ritual complex in northern Vanuatu, see Layard (1942: 688). Note further the obscuring of women’s rank-taking in this (see Deacon 1934, Jolly 1994, Bolton 2003).

51 In his unpublished and untitled report on North Pentecost “life-cycle rituals” (copy held in the archives of the Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta), Yoshioka refers to the women’s grade-taking system as *lihilibi*. I never heard the system as a whole referred to in this way. In my experience *lihilibi*, or *liha*, refers to the act of purchasing the right to wear emblems or perform certain practices from those who have already attained that right, such as may be achieved by both men and women at pig-killing ceremonies.

52 Emblems include textile “skirts”, feather headdresses, hair combs, pig’s tusk bracelets, ankle straps, necklaces and tattoos. More abstractly, men are also purchase rights to appear on the *sava* in association with particular *suanui* drum beats, to have particular architectural structures present at their *bololo*, to drink kava, and the like.

53 For a map of the distribution of these different names, see Layard (1942: 688). When speaking Bislama, Raga speakers might also use the term *numanka*, this word is derived from the languages of the more central islands, such as Malakula, Ambrym and Epi to the south and south-east.
integrated social and religious complex in which *bolololi* operated as the status-transforming mechanism. This graded system not only supplied a basis for social hierarchy and authority, but also served to regulate flows of knowledge, skills and spiritual power.

Image 12: Clement Leo leads Willy Dogo, Kolombas Todali and Robinson Todali in circling to receive pigs during a *bolololi* at Ararvatu (January 2000).

I will have cause to describe aspects of *bolololi* more thoroughly throughout the course of this dissertation, including the significance of sacrifice (*tatareb*), grade names (*ibem bon*), and the salience of *matan gani* (fires of the *ganai*), but for the time being turn to an early characterisation by John Layard of the male name grade system of the Small Islands of Malakula, here called *maik*. Layard succinctly describes the progenitive efficacy of these rites, a theme that I analyse more deeply in relation to both men and women in chapter five.

It is on the one hand a "mystery", ...based, like all mysteries, on ritual re-birth of which the outward and visible signs are here the taking of a new name and lighting of a new fire on which, or from brands taken from it, the food of the re-born individual's sustenance must be cooked. As a rule, also, during the period immediately following the culminating act of re-birth the celebrant ritually becomes a child... During this period of spiritual as well as physical
retirement, though his food may be cooked, with due precautions, by his wife, he abstains from sexual intercourse and observes many taboos. By these means he becomes at one also with the ancestral dead in whose footsteps through the observance of the rite he treads (Layard 1942: 12).

In "Territorial control and mobility within ni-Vanuatu societies", Bonnemaison puts forward a theory equating increasing rank within the graded society with expanding territorial mobility. He writes, "traditional social organisation based upon the grade system is reflected by concentric circles of unequal size: the higher the man's rank, the greater will be his circle of mobility and the wider his perception of space" (1978: 62-63). However, in the case of North Pentecost at least, my own evidence suggests that while a great deal of long-distance mobility was indeed crucially linked with the economic pursuits of rank, men of high rank rarely made such journeys themselves.

As it is in the present day, it is more likely to be the case that mobility was curtailed by the increasing localised social obligation that high rank entails. As a ratahig's ("chief") own mobility diminished, his control over a wide sphere of mobility became greater. But it was more often the younger men (mwalegelo) who were sent out in order to broker deals or call in debts from the long-time exchange partners of their rank superiors, or to conduct business along pre-established routes of exchange. Such journeys would have exposed younger male aspirants to the opportunity of instigating new exchange relationships themselves, thereby ensuring the long-term continuation of inter-island allegiance between specifically localised groups. The name by which the Sia Raga remember such voyages, ligo bila (to "fasten reciprocal work"), points to their repetitious, mutual nature. Just as the paths (bala) that link neighbouring hamlets across the land are maintained through their continual use, relationships struck between individuals and groups across longer distances were also made secure through repetitious journeying.

ISLES DE LA PENTECÔTE

Given the widespread interconnectedness of pre-contact northern Vanuatu it seems unlikely that people living on North Pentecost would not have received news of bizarre events taking place in the islands to the northeast. The year was 1606 when a Spanish expedition consisting of three galleons piloted by the Portuguese explorer
Pedro Fernandez de Quiros and carrying 130 sailors and soldiers, as well as 10 monks, sailed through the Banks Islands, briefly stopping off at Gaua before moving on to anchor at what is now known as Big Bay, on Espiritu Santo. De Quiros’ attempt to colonise what he thought to be the great southern continent – and that he subsequently named *Terra Australis del Espiritu Santo* – lasted little over a month before skirmishes with the local inhabitants, along with sickness and mutiny, resulted in the fleet’s separation and swift departure (de Quiros 1904).

After this initial encounter over one hundred and fifty years elapsed before further European arrivals occurred. On May 22, 1768, travelling from north to south through the archipelago, Bougainville sighted the west coast of the island of Pentecost. Being Whitsunday, he decided to call it by “the name of the day, *Isle de la Pentecote*” (Bougainville 1967: 286). Making landfall in Northeast Ambae, Bougainville distributed “pieces of red cloth” (Bougainville 1967: 289). Their colour being significant to the dyed pandanus textiles used as exchange items and as clothing throughout the northern islands, these European goods were probably subsequently introduced by their new owners to circulate within the indigenous trade nexus.\(^{54}\) Despite the apparent confidence that was gained through the distribution of these gifts, the visit eventually ended in a violent skirmish following the burial by members of Bougainville’s crew of an engraved plank under a tree: “the act of taking possession of these isles” (Bougainville 1967: 290). Six years later, arriving from the east, Cook navigated the *Resolution* around the northern tip of Maewo then tacked southwards between Maewo and Ambae before catching sight of Pentecost. He chose to Anglicise the name given by Bougainville, calling the island Whitsuntide.

Several people on board the *Resolution* committed their observations of Pentecost to writing. As brief as these appraisals were, the much debated “colonial gaze” (Manderson and Jolly 1997: 9-10) is perhaps the most striking feature of these collective writings. Though certainly not alone in this regard, Wales’ observations are particularly extraordinary for their juxtaposition of elements of the natural sublime (c.f. Bazarov 1981: 51) and of romantic nostalgia:

> The shores of Whitsuntide Island are bold, without Inlets... the Land high and Mountainous; but exhibits the most beautiful Prospect I ever saw, being cultivated up to the very summit, and divided into rectangular Fields by

---

\(^{54}\) Red cloth was also distributed throughout the islands during Cook’s voyages, to widespread appeal. Since that time the use of calico has become fully integrated into the local exchange economy.
THE STORY OF JIMMY

Fences which appear like Hedges from ye Ship, so that one could scarce help imagining oneself in sight of England, with an extensive View of enclosed Fields before one (Cook 1777 (Vol. II): 27).

The scene is striking for the manner in which that which is first imaged as a seemingly impenetrable island is suddenly transformed into a strictly regulated space—the ordered productivity of England. As with the nostalgic naming of the archipelago as the New Hebrides, it seems that the island was being co-opted into a broader Pacific vision in which the exotic was not simply constructed in terms of difference, but was also made to merge with the familiar. As I have argued elsewhere, images such as these represent in aesthetic terms an ideological version of nature which is constituted as materially and socially valuable to an incoming culture (Taylor 1998: 30).

The comparatively realist observations of Forster seem to support the claim made by many Sia Raga today, that before the onset of colonialism the population of Pentecost was much greater than it is at present:

In the Isle of Whitsuntide we saw in the Evening fires to the very top of the hills, & as we saw so many cultivated Lands & but few & bad Canoes, I think I may conclude from thence, that the Natives chiefly live upon Vegetables, & depend not so much on fishing... (Forster 1777: 202).

Cook’s own report of the island, made in his journal entry for July 20, began with the observation that, “Off the North end of the latter Island lies a rock not far from Shore” (Cook 1777 Vol II: 27). That the rock he describes is probably Vathubwe is most uncanny. Cook could not have known that his northerly approach, like that of Bougainville before him, enacted the retracing of more primordial itineraries. In Sia Raga cosmography Vathubwe acts as the island’s stepping stone, being the ancestral starting point of all human arrival to the island, and likewise at death the final place of exit (see chapter three).

Looking through my field notes and considering these dates I encounter two similarly uncanny facts. Firstly, the day of my own arrival to Pentecost – which was delayed for three days due to bad weather – corresponds to that of Bougainville’s “discovery” of the island, May 22. Second, on July 21, the same day that Cook’s Resolution sailed south along the western coast of the island, I held my first conversation with anyone on the island on the subject of early European explorers. The notes that I took on that day recall that de Quiros and Bougainville do not feature in Sia Raga oral historical narrative accounts. However, local evidence of Cook’s arrival is evidenced in the form of words carved into stones on the beach at Aroa. While sand has now swept
over these stones, and the exact wording is no longer clear, people who are aware of their existence insist that Cook inscribed them himself. 55 While this evidence would seem to contradict History as it comes to us through the various writings of the explorers I have discussed above, as well as later historical accounts, for the Sia Raga the inscription exists as *donoana* (memorial, proof) of Cook’s voyage. Thus Sia Raga accounts of Cook’s journey resonate with interpretations made elsewhere throughout the Pacific and in Australia, that draw parallels between his movements and the itineraries of indigenous Gods and ancestors (Sahlins 1985; Rose 1984, 2000). Just as the founding ancestor Bwatmahaña and his nemesis Tagaro in their primordial journeys across the island created features in the landscape as signs of their power and passing, so too did Captain Cook leave his mark, appropriately, on one of those Pacific beaches so crucially situated as a boundary “dividing the world between here and there, us and them, good and bad, familiar and strange” (Dening 1980: 31).

**THE CANOES OF STEALING**

After Cook, it is a further one hundred years before tuturani (whites, foreigners) reappear on the shores of Pentecost and in Sia Raga oral histories, this time in devastating proliferation. This is the epochal setting for *The Story of Jimmy*, even if many local historians suggest he preceded Cook. Planes have become a prominent feature of inter-island travel, and one imagines maritime traffic in Vanuatu during the middle of the nineteenth century to have been somewhat heavier than it is today. 56 Contemporary shipping would be dwarfed by the many schooners, frigates and steamers that plied the

---

55 On that first occasion I was told that the words inscribed were, “New Hebrides discovered by James Cook - Moon”. Later, by a different person, “Captain Cook - 1887”. Another informant spoke of the existence of footprints left by Cook, accompanied by the words “Sun - Moon”. One interpretation might be that these arc boundary markers placed by plantation prospectors. *Vamnati: a Lonely Planet travel survival kit* tells me that such markings - here “CNH TOAD STOOL 1888” - are to be found etched into a slab of cement at a beach near “Captain Cook’s Rock” at Etau Point, South Pentecost (Harcombe and O’Byrne 1995: 255).

56 It remains largely the case, as Bonnemaison found in the 1960s, that commercial inter-island travel by sea and air “only affects a few large islands, indeed a few “capital” towns with island networks. In most cases, Pacific islands are not as well connected now as they were in the past; they have increasingly become scattered fragments of space searching for linkages across the open sea” (Bonnemaison, 1978: 106). During my stay in the area two small ships visited the ports at Lohong, Abwatuntora and Lamalanga once a fortnight. These were the tiny *El/Vodak* and larger *Saraska*. When the latter sank off the coast of Ambrum, with a precious cargo of 4WD trucks bound for Pentecost, it was replaced by the even smaller *Hula*. Rather than closer island locations, the majority of Sia Raga travel is to Port Vila or Luganville.

65
inter-island routes, mainly from Australia, during the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Before this time the sandalwood trade, by the 1860s in decline due to over-exploitation, had been in operation since the late 1820s (Shineberg 1967). There was also an abundance of *trepang* to be found in the waters of Vanuatu which could be sold into the Chinese market where they were, and are, valued as an aphrodisiac and used in cuisine.  

Sandalwood was never found on Pentecost, although occasional visits to the island were probably made by sandalwood traders out looking for it. Many sandalwood traders employed ni-Vanuatu workers in wage labour during this period. In some cases they made up an entire ship’s crew, working as sailors, sandalwood cutters, curers, negotiators, etc. This established the important concept of working for money and in many ways laid the foundations for later work on plantations within the archipelago and abroad (see Rawlings 2002: 146). While traders and whalers seem to have had little direct impact on Pentecost island, no doubt stories of their itinerant activities would have circulated throughout the islands, travelling across networks of regional exchange accompanied by some of the European goods that had begun to gain currency in the area, such as axes, guns, knives, hoop-iron, cloth, pipes and tobacco (Jolly 1994: 23).  

It was not until the 1860s with the expansion of sugar and cotton plantations in Australia, Fiji and the Solomon Islands, as well as the establishment of both mining and plantation enterprises in New Caledonia, that more regular and direct relations were established between Sia Raga and *tuturani*. The period also coincided with the arrival of Anglican and Roman Catholic missionaries, who had been preceded in the southern islands by the Presbyterians. Young Melanesians were the particular focus of attention for both missionaries and labour recruiters throughout the decades spanning the turn of the century, representing both a valuable resource and a potential for conflicting interests.

The labour trade developed just as sandalwood was becoming scarce through rapid over-exploitation. This caused a considerable impact on the North Pentecost population. Beginning around 1847, and extending dramatically from 1863, over 100,000 Pacific Islanders were recruited to work on plantations in Queensland, Fiji, Samoa and New Caledonia until its demise in the early twentieth century (Firth 1976:  

---

57 The word *Béche de mer*, by which *trepang* are known in French, provides a likely source for the name of the national vernacular language, Bislama.

58 This remains an assumption in that no such expeditions are noted in the major text on the subject (Shineberg, 1967).
CHAPTER TWO

51. About 50,000 ni-Vanuatu were recruited during the forty years following 1880, many of these to plantations established in Vanuatu by European settlers (Price and Baker 1976: 115; Haberkorn 1989: 5). Jolly suggests that “from the 1860s, and despite early difficulties, at least a couple of thousand men, and some women, were recruited over a fifty year period, from all regions of Pentecost” (1994: 24).

What occurred throughout this period was a transformation in the major routes of Sia Raga travel. Along with greater distances, the duration of the journeys was also lengthened. The usual period of contract was three years, and many labourers undertook successive contracts before returning home, if they returned at all. While new links were being made to the more distant locations of Queensland, Nouméa and Fiji, the ability to move within previously established and more localised inter-island networks was significantly curtailed. Due mainly to the unscrupulous behaviour of the labour traders, open-water canoe travel became increasingly dangerous.

With the aim of curtailing illegal recruitment, at first missionaries backed by the British and French naval military, and then condominium government officials sought to discourage the non-“official” movement of people between islands. Indeed, rivalry between the missionaries who sought native souls for conversion in the hamlets, and recruiters, who required bodies for profit, were intense and often violent. In the late 1880s, a joint French and British naval commission was established in an effort to protect the interests of white settlers and missionaries, to maintain some control over law and order amongst “natives”, and to police the activities of labour recruiters (Rodman 1987: 43, ).

The Sia Raga recognise two distinct eras of involvement in the plantation industry, each of which are further divided to form a four-part historical sequence stretching from the mid to late 1800s to independence and the recent growth of the kava industry. The sequence relates to increasing geographic proximity, local agency and control, moving from the plantations outside of the archipelago to those established in North Pentecost itself by local entrepreneurs, mainly after World War Two. The variety of novel working encounters that were enjoined in the towns of war-time

59 It should be noted that this figure is probably somewhat misleading in that many individual workers may have been recruited several times throughout this period, but also because few of the undoubtedly great number of deaths that occurred on both recruiting and repatriating vessels were ever recorded (Shineberg 1999: 184).

60 Of one destination, Shineberg says 9% of all recruits to New Caledonia were women (Shineberg 1999). For Queensland, Corris reports that the percentage of Melanesian women fluctuated from 6.2% to 8.5% over the period 1881 to 1891 (Corris 1970: 51).
Vanuatu introduced many Sia Raga (especially men) to new understandings of labour and production, as was the case throughout the archipelago (Lindstrom 1989: 414). The first era, involving the movement of people to work at locations outside of Vanuatu (the subject of this section), is defined initially by the unscrupulous practice of *surai sinombu* (“stealing people”) by the *tuturani* that came in *wağan surasura* (literally, “canoes of stealing”). This is followed by a second period of contract labour. The unusually terse stories that emerge from the early period are violent in every case, telling of people brutally “lost” to the coercive tactics of recruiters. Women are abducted while gathering crabs and shellfish at night by torchlight. Men are forced into a gigantic ship with a hold carrying seven thousand people and taken away to Queensland. The many incidents of “kidnap” from this period involving the capture of people engaged in inter-island canoe travel have fuelled contemporary stories. During my fieldwork, rumour circulated following the disappearance in 1999 of the small trading ship *MV Latua*, that its 27 passengers had been abducted at sea by a Russian ship and were to be sold as slaves to work in Siberian mines.

In the second period, in which ni-Vanuatu are accorded more agency, such acts of violence are woven into more complex stories of adventure and intrigue. While *The Story of Jimmy* is the labour story *par excellence* of this period, there are innumerable other narratives told. This is not surprising given the demographic impact of the trade. Shineberg, on the basis of her thorough archival research culminating in *The People Trade*, suggests that, on average, 14 percent of any given community in Vanuatu were absent working abroad during the early 1880s (1999: 5). There is also the issue of historical proximity in that despite various official prohibitions and suspensions, recruitment to locations outside of Vanuatu continued well into the twentieth century before diminishing during the “great depression” of 1929-1931 and its final cessation at the onset of the Second World War (1999: 9). However, as I found out, these links have in fact persisted into the present. One of the first Sia Raga men that I met was John Brown. John had just returned to Port Vila from Brisbane where he works once a year, for a period of three months as an agricultural labourer (the length of visa restriction). It must have been shortly after the turn of the century when Vira Livlivu, Jif Ruben’s father, signed up for recruitment, boarding a ship bound for Nouméa. The story recounted by Jif Ruben tells how Vira Livlivu stayed with the ship only as far as the

---

61 This analysis is also shared by Haberkorn (1989, quoted at footnote 66).
62 As it transpired, the ship had in fact sunk, with no survivors.
coast of South Ambae where, having decided he'd rather not go to Nouméa after all, he escaped overboard. While some people believe he then turned himself into a shark in order to return to Pentecost, Jif Ruben insists that he did so by more conventional means, in a canoe acquired on Ambae.

Stories told on Raga are invariably of return as well as departure, yet few recruitment experiences would have been as brief as that of Vira Livlivu. One contemporary repatriation story of a more extended sort is documented in the 1995 film *Sugar Slaves: The secret history of Australia’s slave trade* (Graham 1995). Here Joe and Monica Leo, two South Sea Islanders who both descend from Queensland plantation workers taken from North Pentecost, embark on a journey “to recover a portion of their stolen past”. Joe and Monica’s situation clearly resonates with the Raga concept of wasi (tension, entanglement), with the film showing both the cultural and emotional difficulty they have experienced in coming to terms with their alienation from Sia Raga life.

Written sources suggest that disputes and skirmishes between recruiters and Sia Raga were fairly common, especially at the anchorages of Bwatnapni Bay, Lolotong Bay and Lamalanganga. These incidents sometimes resulted in the death of recruiting vessel crew members, but more often locals. Due to the prevalence of such incidents, since the inception of the Melanesian labour trade there has been polarised debate concerning the degree to which islanders chose to enlist, as against levels of coercion and kidnap by recruiters. Researchers such as Moore have shown that the degree to which Melanesians chose to enlist does not undermine the reality of European exploitation (Moore 1981, 1985; Jolly 1987: 123). I agree with Shineberg who suggests that while incidents of blatant kidnap may have been more common in the early period, one should not underestimate the extent to which levels of coercion remained possible for the duration of the labour trade, through, for example, what she calls “indirect kidnapping through chiefs and bigmen”. After all, with a one in four chance of death at

63 Descendants of Melanesian labourers living in Australia are now officially recognised in Australian law as a distinct ethnic group.
64 For some examples from Pentecost, see Harrisson (1937: 205, 206), Holthouse (1970: 49-50), Jolly (1994:27-28) and Shineberg (1999: 41, 64). See also the diary of Bishop Cecil Wilson (n. d.) in which several such incidents are recorded.
65 Nineteenth century opposition to “kanaka traffic” was mainly promulgated by Presbyterian and Anglican missionaries, and organisations such as the Anti-Slavery Society and the Aborigines’ Protection Society in England. Their focus on coercion and kidnap continued within the twentieth century in images of “blackbirding”, such as have appeared within journalistic and popular historical accounts like those of Harrisson (1937) and Holthouse (1970) (see Jolly 1994: 55; Shineberg 1999: 4). This “disguised slavery” (Shineberg 1999) view was more recently taken up within the film *Sugar Slaves* (Graham 1995).
an average age of seventeen to twenty-four, "it was a worse prospect than enlisting for the First World War" (Shineberg 1999: 230-1).

There is also debate over the degree to which people recruited through personal choice, through the brokerage of local community leaders, or as a result of community pressure (Moore 1985). What motivated people to enlist voluntarily remains one of the least understood aspects of the labour trade (Munro 1993). One aspect of the "individual choice" model that demands scrutiny is the degree to which people were lured by the "great desirability of European goods" (Corris 1970: 37), not the least for the way in which these arguments tend to elide the involvement and agency of indigenous women in the trade (Jolly 1987). The "cargo cult" view exemplified by Corris, and particularly his assertion that firearms were the most sought-after item of trade (Corris 1970: 37), is also taken up by Shineberg: "The most powerful incentive to recruiting was the offer of a good breech-loading rifle" (Shineberg 1999: 231).66 The importance of the rifle as an incentive to recruit, whether on the part of community leaders, or of recruits themselves, does seem to be an important factor for the early period leading up to the turn of the century. By the end of the 1800s firearms were indeed ubiquitous in North Pentecost, where it seems almost every adult male possessed a rifle.67 Yet the historical record also shows that after that date rifles were not only in abundance, but were in many places being destroyed by their owners in a population quickly converting to Christianity and the promise of "peace" (tamata) that it brought.68

---

66 This view is also echoed by Haberkorn who, referencing Scarr (1967) writes: "Although kidnapping was the initial form of introducing ni-Vanuatu to wage-labour migration and plantation work, the safe return of most early recruits after three years abroad and the bringing back of European goods, particularly muskets, prompted many others to enlist subsequently" (Haberkorn 1989: 6).

67 Rifles are, for instance, ever-present in Edgell's account: "About half an hour after the service was over, and when they were dividing up the cooked food, a shot was heard, on a small rise near a house, just outside the vanua. Everyone seized his gun..."; "There was a report that the disturbers of peace were going to waylay Tom and shoot him on the road, so we all kept close together, and about 20 men with rifles, formed an escort..." (Edgell, 1889: 17).

68 Writing his Melanesian Mission Report of the island voyage of the Melanesian Diocese in 1894, Bishop Wilson stated of North Pentecost, "We were told that lately a man had returned from Queensland with a Winchester rifle, and had tried to get up a war on the heathen side of the island in order to test his powers. However the Heathen said, "No; the school people do not fight, and we do not mean to."") (Mel. Miss. 1895: xxii). Likewise, in his diary of 1899 Wilson describes visiting the village of Qatumuq where "customary peace stones" (vatu tamata) had been erected by a pathway leading to the village: "at the corner nearest the path was an old musket half buried with muzzle pointing skywards, & facing it on the other side was a hatchet buried in the same way but its head showing above the ground.... Where once signs of a desire for peace have been [made] in this way, woe be to him who does anything to cause strife. If he be one of the people, or if he be one of another district trying to raid the peace-desiring territory - "he is sought-out", said Tom [Ulgau], "be where he may, & killed & eaten. (Wilson n. d.) Elsewhere, Shineberg reports that "At Pentecost in 1885, a man said to be a "chief from the bush," refused guns in favor of general articles, including a large amount of tobacco, for the two young men he offered" (Shineberg 1999: 80).
For North Pentecost, at least, it seems that other motivations must have also prevailed, intangible as well as material.

Undoubtedly a demand for goods was an important factor in the successful brokering of recruitment deals. The most popular items included firearms, cloth, steel axes, hatchets and knives, tobacco, as well as local pig wealth which was also traded across the islands by recruiters (Shineberg 1999: 77). I would also suggest that in travelling to the destinations offered by labour recruiters people from North Pentecost and elsewhere also often sought intellectual and spiritual cargo, cultural capital, and a more intimate knowledge of the encroaching Western culture (see also Lindstrom 1990: 91-92; Gundert-Hock 1991: 101). Perhaps mainly because of the intangibility of these motivations, and their tendency to escape the written historic record, these kinds of incentives have been largely overlooked by researchers. Yet, in 1906, while on North Pentecost, Wilson made the following observation: “‘Labour’-boats are about. The inducement held out amongst these people is the school now provided in Q’land [Queensland]” (Wilson n. d.). Indeed, despite their growing proliferation Wilson often laments the lack of schools in the area of North Pentecost, such as on August of the same year: “There are nineteen villages in Raga asking for schools; and fifty have them” (Wilson n. d.).

Image 13: Sketch-map of Raga showing “Christian villages”. From the diary of Reverend Colin Wilson, 1899 (Wilson n.d.).
These considerations lead me to speculate that the kind of dichotomy which is often perceived to distinguish missionaries and labour recruiters, or for that matter traders, was not always so radically perceived by indigenous people. Rather, their relationship from this perspective was probably seen as more ambivalently fraught, displaying a mixture of both division and complicity. Indeed many missions ran plantations themselves as a way of generating income, such as the Catholic enclave at Latano on North Pentecost. This had further ramifications in being important to the development of direct indigenous participation within the copra industry (Interview with Richard Leona, Lolotong, December 2001). The Melanesian Mission headquarters on Norfolk Island was itself supported by a farm and plantation, the running of which demanded the labour of the indigenous scholars who lived there (Montgomery 1908: 11-23; Melanesian Mission 1901: 8).

From the outset the recruiting strategies of missionaries were in large part the same as those employed by the labour recruiters (the less overtly violent, at least). In order to gain “scholars” Bishops Selwyn and Patteson, as well as later church leaders, were compelled to follow the precedent set by traders and give presents to those men of high rank who allowed, or sometimes forced or brokered the departure of young men and women to Norfolk Island (Hilliard 1978: 21). In this way, with the exception of rifles (it seems), the items of material wealth distributed by missionaries and labour recruiters were essentially the same: cloth, knives, axes, fish hooks, hoop iron, and especially tobacco. This is recalled in local oral history, as well as in the texts of Western archives. At a visit to Lamalanga I was told that when Bishop Selwyn first swam ashore (at Lamalanga) from his anchored ship, he did so with a packet of fish-hooks hidden under his top hat. These he immediately began distributing amongst the gathered crowd of men, much to their delight (interview with Steven Tevi and Simon Tugu, March 2000). Likewise, in a widely popular account it is recalled that the first of the Anglican’s Sia Raga recruits, Louis Tariwali, was in fact sent to Norfolk Island by his uncle Borotarere, for the purpose of acquiring an axe.

While the opportunities offered by the Anglican missionaries who regularly visited the northern beaches of Pentecost might have been considered superior to those

---

69 There was direct Roman Catholic complicity within the copra industry. As Wilson wrote in his 1901 diary, “the R. C. priests are regular traders, a copra factory in Noumea being run by Jesuits, who buy the priests’ nuts” (Wilson, n. d.).

70 As Wilson wrote in this diary of 1897 after visiting Lolotong to see a chief: “He has two boys for us”.

72
CHAPTER TWO

offered by labour recruiters in some respects, they were nevertheless essentially the same: a chance to travel abroad and to accumulate European-style capital – cultural and spiritual as well as material and economic. In this way it was not uncommon for returning Anglican scholars to depart for plantation work, or vice versa.\textsuperscript{71} Indeed, throughout the northern islands generally, where wealth was itself seen as a sign of divine efficacy, it seems difficult to separate these two inducements. Conditions, too, seem to have been little better in the destinations offered by the Anglican missionaries. Despite having recently moved the Melanesian Mission school and headquarters from New Zealand, due in part to the apparent unsuitability of the climate, the first “scholar” from North Pentecost to travel to Norfolk Island died there during an epidemic outbreak of influenza in 1863 (Fox 1958: 102, Armstrong 1900: 71).

Image 14: Photograph titled, “Rowboat from the “Southern Cross” at Lamalana, N. Pentecost.”
J. W. Beattie, 1906 (Collection of the National Library of Australia, Canberra).

In terms of broader socio-cultural considerations, the acquisition of knowledge of the world through travel was and is the expected occupation of those passing through the life-stage of mwalegelo – young unmarried men who made up the vast majority of both labour recruits and missionary scholars. To a lesser degree, due to the

\textsuperscript{71} Upon his first arrival to the island in 1882 the Anglican missionary Arthur Brittain, “found the central [Anglican] village, Qatvenua, considerably disorganised by the desertion of the teacher who, with two others, had gone off in a labour vessel” (Armstrong 1900: 227).
kinds of cultural restraints discussed by Jolly (1987), this would have in many cases been as true for female recruits as it was for men. That from the Sia Raga perspective recruitment had a socio-cultural basis, and was probably motivated as much by community strategies as the individuals who undertook these journeys is also given evidence by the fact that a great many labourers established Anglican schools upon their return to the island. It is largely for this reason that the Anglican missionaries of the period generally displayed a reluctant tolerance of the activities of those considered to fall within “the better class of recruiters” (Edgell 1889: 22).

MAMA MATTHIAS AND THE CURSE OF ASAOLA


72 Reflecting what is for Vanuatu a fairly typical scenario, according to Richard Leona’s hand-written history of religion in North Pentecost, Uholina manu dan Bwativttna Raga (n. d.), Christianity first arrived in North Pentecost through returning labourers.
By tragic irony, the traders and planters who sought bodies for labour and the missionaries who arrived to save souls were the couriers of their own worst enemy. In many parts of Vanuatu whole island populations were dying out before their very eyes. The major contributor to this rapid population decline that undoubtedly took place in the decades leading up to and into the twentieth century was neither labour recruiting nor the introduction of firearms, but rather a devastating broth of diseases carried by missionaries, traders and returning ni-Vanuatu labourers and scholars. Based on the estimates of missionaries, the population of Pentecost Island as a whole plunged to somewhere between 4,000 and 6,000 by the turn of the century.\(^\text{73}\) Using current percentages this would have meant a Sia Raga population of approximately 2,000 people, about one third of the current figure.\(^\text{74}\)

Epidemic outbreaks of influenza, dysentery, whooping cough, and other diseases are a constant presence throughout the historical record. However, as Jolly found for South Pentecost, there is no evidence that the people of North Pentecost blamed the *tuturani* directly for the introduction of these diseases (1994: 34). Instead, as with the majority of deaths today, disease was more often seen as the work of local sorcerers or of maligned ancestors. At the same time, however, insofar as illness and death is invariably seen to emanate from spiritual power, sickness was also often associated with Christianity in a more general way (compare Jolly, 1996). This was apparent when Brittain visited Raga in 1889, as reported by Armstrong: “Sickness was prevalent everywhere, and had much disheartened the small party of Christians, besides keeping others from joining them, as illness always excited their superstitious fears” (Armstrong 1900:280). The connection between sickness and “superstitious fears” surrounding the new religion features strongly in a story told today about how the Roman Catholic church came to be located at Latano. The following event, related to me by Father Mark Gaviga, took place shortly after Matthias Tarileo had returned to Pentecost as the region’s first ordained Anglican Priest, sometime around 1915:

One day Mama Matthias visited the village of Asaola, a large Catholic enclave, while returning to Ahivo following a tour throughout the heathen villages of South and Central Pentecost. As he passed through the village

\(^{73}\) The total population figure for Pentecost was estimated at 4,000 in the Melanesian Mission report of 1895, 6,000 in the same of 1901, as well as in Edgell (1889: 66). Pentecost was by no means amongst the worst effected areas. The southern islands of *Aneityum*, Erromango and Tanna were particularly hard hit.

\(^{74}\) The current North Pentecost population of 5,255 is approximately 37.5% of the island total, 14,010 according to figures derived from the 2000 census (Collingwood-Bakeo to Taylor: personal communication).
people began to poke fun at him, "Oh! Look at Mama Matthias Tarileo. And we thought he was a big man. But look, he's just a small man after all. What is there to be afraid of?"

As a result of these insults Mama Matthias felt very ashamed, and as he left the village and passed into the bush he didn't speak to the two catechists that accompanied him. However, upon climbing the hill to a place near Lolotu he turned to the catechists and asked them, "Where is Asaola?". After they had pointed out the village on the beach below Mama Matthias praised the village, saying, "My word! Asaola looks so beautiful, such a pretty place." As they returned northward the catechists were silent once again. They recognised the curse in Mama Matthias's words.

The next morning at Asaola people awoke as usual to the sound of cocks crowing. But leaving their houses one man noticed that while the sun was beginning to climb above the island, not one fowl had come down from the trees. Instead, they all just sat up in the branches, singing out.

Now, one man poked a stick at one of his fowl and it fell down from the tree. Upon hitting the ground it was dead. All the other fowl began to stop singing, and one by one, to fall down dead from the trees above. The villagers became afraid. Not one fowl remained alive, and then their pigs too began to fall down dead. After the pigs had all died, then the people themselves began to get sick, with great sores covering and eating their bodies. One by one they began to die. It was a large village, and they buried many people in that one day.

Soon they began to realise the cause, saying, "Oh, What is Father Matthias doing? He is the cause of this. We insulted him, and he has done this harm to us in return." Some people of the village then rushed to see Mama Matthias and apologised to him. They told him what had happened, and how their village was nearly at an end. Mama Matthias then told them, "OK, this is true, but enough now. We must love each other. One Master has come to the world, and he teaches us that we are born into love, and that we must love one another. We may belong to churches of different names, but we worship the same God. The same Master died for us."

When the villagers returned home the sickness had stopped, and no more people died. Nevertheless they decided to move away and settle at Latano. So Latano is a new place that was built after these deaths, after they had buried all of their people. (Recorded in May, 2000, in Father Mark Gaviga's office at Angoro, Ahivo).
This story makes clear the important point, made by Bronwen Douglas (1994, 1999: 122) and Margaret Jolly (1996: 246), that throughout Vanuatu missionaries were viewed as a major source of illness and death, as well as a potent road to healing and life. Here we see that this was as much the case for the emerging indigenous clergy as it was for their white teachers. This belief in the ambivalence of spiritual power corresponded with indigenous aetiologies which, like the ancestral *atatun vanua* of today, entailed both creative and destructive potential.

The most important difference separating the missionaries from other whites lay in their great willingness to impart to indigenous Melanesians aspects of their both life-giving and life-taking esoteric knowledge. That individual access to and control over this knowledge formed the basis of power and status differentiation within the Anglican clergy was basically congruent with indigenous values and understandings (Tonkinson 1982: 77). By 1930 North Pentecost was considered a “stronghold” by the Anglican missionaries. Forty five villages (probably around 50%) ran schools led by 80 indigenous teachers and four indigenous clergy (Hilliard 1978: 285).

In order to understand the speed with which the Anglican church spread throughout North Pentecost one must also understand how authority is achieved and maintained locally, and the relationship of authority to the social dissemination of knowledge. While the attainment of rank through traversing prescribed ritual procedure is a key element in the acquisition of social status and authority, throughout the northern islands of Vanuatu the relationship between rank and leadership is not seamless (Allen 1969: 108-109; Jolly 1994: 211). Instead, local leadership systems throughout the archipelago are characterised by a considerable flexibility and creative potential. So much so that, as Lindstrom notes, “almost any ambitious and capable man, in some contexts, with a straight face, is able to call himself *jif* [“chief”]” (Lindstrom 1997: 211).

On North Pentecost, the Bislama term *jif* operates as a direct translation of the Raga term *ratabigi*. This reflects somewhat the mediatory role played by *ratabigi* in negotiating and defining community links with those *tuturani* who had come to trade, missionise, and govern. As Linstrom discusses (1997: 213), in Vanuatu there is a clear link between the development of the concept of *jif* and the interaction of condominium

---

75 Note that Hardacre’s (n. d.) c. 1920 translation of *ratabigi*, “govern, rule. One who rules”, does not contain the term chief. Neither does it make reference to the system of name grades. For a brief history of the term *jif* within the Pacific, see Lindstrom and White (1997: 5-10).
officials who sought out existing local leaders to assume positions of authority at the
level of local government. The acceptance and cultivation of such positions allowed
local leaders to further amplify whatever authority they possessed in their home villages
(Lindstrom 1997: 213, see also Bolton 1998).

Throughout the northern Islands of Vanuatu, and like the archetypal Melanesian
“big man” (Sahlins 1963), leadership status is primarily achieved through relatively
unstructured contexts of competitive action. But this is also usually augmented through
the exercise of entrepreneurial and other abilities within a highly specified framework of
exchanges, payments and ritual performances by which both men and women achieve
ascendancy within a formal hierarchy of named ranks or grades (Allen 2000: 6).

Accordingly, on North Pentecost an important distinction is made between status which
is achieved through the attainment of rank and the socially achieved status of ratahigi.
The name grade Vira is fundamentally the highest, and is associated with certain rights
and privileges. Yet it is those people who are called ratahigi that are identified as the real
leaders in Sia Raga society. The fact that most ratahigi are also Vira is not coincidental,
rank does play a role in stabilising authority (Jolly, 1994: 212), and the judicial exchange
and sacrifice of pigs will significantly contribute to a person’s leadership status.

Nevertheless, rank does not act alone in conferring chiefly status, and in this way it is
also possible to become an accepted ratahigi without killing pigs. Edward Rau, despite
being a Seventh Day Adventist, a faith which prohibits participation within bolololi, is
nevertheless considered an important ratahigi of the large west coast village of
Abwatuntora. Ifraim Boe, as a respected youth leader of the same area, is also
considered a jif, despite having only entered the lower name grades.

With the arrival of the Anglican church in the late nineteenth century a new set
of ranked categories was introduced to the area, those of the catechist, pastor and priest.
While functioning in slightly different ways to the locally derived system, particularly in
the kind of knowledge that they controlled, the role assumed by people in these
positions essentially mirrored that of the ratahigi. A ratahigi must constantly practise and
work to uphold certain cultural ideals, including generosity, eloquence and a balance
between pride, self-assertion and decisiveness, and humility, deference and vacillation
(Jolly 1994: 212; W. Rodman 1973: 240). Also, as Tonkinson points out, one important
aspect of “traditional” leadership in ni-Vanuatu society is the achievement of nodal
positioning within local and regional information networks, and, following Lindstrom,
the ability to effectively manage the flow of esoteric knowledge (Lindstrom 1990;
Tonkinson 1982: 77). Most importantly, *ratahigi* are responsible for the maintenance of *tamata* (peace); it is they who are called upon to negotiate the settlement of disputes and who receive the payment of fines by rule-breakers. This resume of the archetypal *ratahigi* is for all intensive purposes identical to that of the Sia Raga Anglican priest today. Indeed, the idea that the hierarchy of Anglican leadership strategically superimposed itself upon pre-existing indigenous patterns was suggested to me locally, by Kolombas Todali. Little wonder, then, that Sia Raga clergymen have come to be referred to as *mama* (from the English, “mother”).

The Sia Raga distinguish between those *ratahigi* (community leaders) who are also called *jif* in Bislama, and those referred to as *mama*. The origin story for the Raga term *ratahigi* (as it is used for male community leaders) tells of a young boy who grows up to be referred to as a *ratahigi* because he emulates the nurturance skills and hard work of his mother, unlike that of his lazy father. The concept of “motherhood” is in this way considered to define the virtues of both *ratahigi* and Anglican *mama* whose task it is to oversee the social wellbeing of their local communities, and particularly to ensure the maintenance of *tamata* (peace) therein. Nowadays, in the same way that village leaders are referred to as *ratahigi*, meaning “mother” (see chapter four), members of the North Pentecost Anglican clergy are affectionately referred to or addressed with the English-derived Bislama term for mother, *mama*. This term usually, but not always, takes the place of the Anglican term Father, thus “Mama Mark Gaviga”, or “Mama Father Walter Lini”. At the level of local government, community issues are presently managed by the District Council of North Pentecost, called Vatunmalanvanua. This council is made up of a number of sub-district *jif*, as well as several *mama*.

**CONVERTING THE TUTURANI: JIMMY’S EXPERIMENT IN COMPARATIVE RELIGION**

Jimmy’s North Pentecost adventures, if not the story of his journey there, are emphatically framed within an optimistic ethos of *tamata*, or peace, such as would belie the violently fraught social realities of the *tauva* (epoch) from which the story emerges. During the mid-to-late nineteenth century the Sia Raga population came under

76 Pentecost as a whole is divided into three district councils: Malbangbang (South), Biltaken (Central) and Vatunmalanvanua (North), collectively these are referred to as Bilmalvanua.
escalating stress through a combined process of severe depletion by blackbirding, introduced diseases, and an escalation of local fighting fuelled by introduced military technology. At the same time there was increasing pressure to convert to the Anglican Church, which not only seemed to offer new intellectual, spiritual and material wealth, but was also sometimes backed by the terror of British Military gun boats (see, for instance, Edgell 1889). I would like to suggest, however, that it is precisely through the absence and selective presence of these realities in Jimmy’s story that we are in fact encouraged to consider some of the important social and economic issues represented at this point of historical rupture, as well as characteristic aspects of the ensuing epoch.

One of the more apparent themes that the story takes up considers the relative value of an insurgent monetary economy as against the local political economy of gift exchange. Of more profound importance, perhaps, are those muted meditations on issues of religion and conversion that are articulated within a range of allusions suggesting the arrival and growth of the Anglican Church. It is to this later point that I now turn.

The vast majority of other histories that deal with the period from which Jimmy’s story emerges engage directly with themes and incidences relating to the spread of the Anglican Church in the area. References to Christianity are, however, conspicuously absent from the story of Jimmy. Nevertheless, geographical allusions in Jimmy’s itinerary suggest that the church is probably one of its central considerations.

Jimmy’s geographical movement – from east to west across the northern tip of Pentecost – is also a socio-religious movement from heathenism to church. His physical trajectory thereby enacts a reversal of his social journey into Sia Raga life.

Two of the story’s main locations are also the two most historically significant Anglican Mission strongholds in the region of North Pentecost. The village of Lamalanga, home to Jimmy’s friend Gigiala and his own final departure point, was the centre for the Anglican mission station throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, and beyond. Sometimes referred to as ute tuturani – or “place of the white man” – its long white beach also provided an inviting landing point for traders in both human and material cargo. The landing place was visited regularly by Bishop Patteson from as early as 1855, and continually by his successors, such as Brittain and Edgell, who would often visit for months at a time (Fox 1958: 101). Shortly after the turn of the century and until the late 1950s a succession of missionaries lived and worked at Lamalanga full time. In more recent years Lamalanga has produced a number of important indigenous churchmen and politicians, including the late Father Walter Lini, the first Prime Minister
of independent Vanuatu. Today it is a place whose memory is inextricably associated with the growth of North Pentecost Anglicanism.

While Lamalanga is strongly associated with whites, Abwelhubwe (located in Hurilau, between Arasa and Aroa) is more specifically denotative of indigenous Anglicanism. Upon returning from Norfolk Island in 1875, the first native teacher to the area, Louis Tariwali (see above), originally based his church at a village close to Lamalanga, at Abwatvenue, but he soon moved slightly further south, “up” the western coast to Abwelhubwe (see image 62). This was the first church to be successfully established by a Sia Raga Anglican teacher outside of the Lamalanga area. It is at Abwelhubwe that Jimmy encounters a group of mwei, or “spirits”.

The other two locales mentioned in the story, Lavusi and Aute, are equally notable as sites of resistance, or at least ambivalence, to early Christian activity. Aute, where Jimmy witnesses a group of women applying face-paint in preparation for a harwa (dance) performance at a bolololi (pig killing ceremony) is often described as North Pentecost’s “middle bush”. This area was relatively inaccessible to the early missionaries, and many of its inhabitants did not choose conversion to Anglicanism until as late as the 1940s or 1950s. Lavusi on the other hand, which is less than an
hour's walk from the mission centre at Lamalanga, was governed during the nineteenth century by a series of powerful chiefs. These included Jimmy's Pentecost father, Vira Mata. Vira Mata was for a long time at war with the famous raiahiqi Vira Doro of Anviu – part of the present large village now called Abwatunora – who himself took a strong interest in the teachings of the new religion.

Image 17: Eileen Todaii dancing harwa at Avatutu.

Stories from the early missionary period tell of a series of skirmishes and struggles concerning issues relating to the church, particularly between the “heathens” of the Lavusi area and the Christian hamlets of the north western coast, including Lamalanga. These “wars”, as the Rev. W. H. Edgell described them in his diary of 1889 (15), continued until at least the turn of the century, and lives were often lost in the fighting. In fact the residual effects of this ideological struggle continue even today in the form of land disputes. Witness the visiting Bishop Wilson's diary entry for July 31, 1897, in which Vira Doro, during a pig killing ceremony, offers his war club to be chopped up and distributed to the chiefs of the wider area in an effort to bring about peace:
No sign of S. X. [Southern Cross]. A big dance close by; a man killing 100 pigs. Went and watched for a time. About 60 women did a pretty dance, and the effect was striking. But they decorate their faces with terribly bad taste, blue and vermilion stripes, the nose always vermilion. But they danced prettily and modestly of course. After I had left Vira Doro, the white-haired and white-bearded old chief, made a long speech, and ended by handing to the man who made the feast a war club to be chopped to pieces and distributed among the chiefs of the district as a declaration of peace and goodwill to all. The fighting and ill will between his son Vira Tira and the village on the opposite side of the island is at an end, and very soon pigs will be exchanged. Perhaps this will have been the last “war” in the Christian part of Raga (Wilson n. d.).

With regard to this geographically defined split between church and kastom (discussed further in chapter three), it is important to consider the degree to which islanders are figured as agents of the social and economic issues that are raised within the story. From the very beginning, Jimmy does not choose to make his journey to Vanuatu, but is instead unwittingly captured. Albeit to the surprise of both himself and the ship’s hijackers, from the perspective of Jimmy and his father the hapless circumstances of their capture are not unlike those that might have instigated the returning labourers’ original journey to Fiji. According to local accounts, one favourite recruiters’ trick was to lure islanders into the holds of their vessels with promises of gifts or alcohol. After becoming drunk or otherwise incapacitated, the islanders would awake in the morning to find themselves still aboard the ship, and already out at sea.

When Jimmy finally arrives at the island he is first laid bare of his former identity and deposited in a state of tamata, or “peace”. It is from this position that, through Vira Mata and ultimately North Pentecost kastom, he is allowed to successfully enter the Sia Raga social world. Vira Mata first appropriates Jimmy before assimilating him, however partially, into the North Pentecost community as a kastom man. Jimmy learns to sing and dance kastom, and comes to understand the ways of marriage and of the subwe (or “graded society”). (In several other versions of the story Vira Mata, as his father, has Jimmy kill pigs so as to enter the graded society as a fully-fledged participant). Most

---

77 My use here of the Bislama term kastom, as opposed to ailenan vamta, in this way relates to the particular context of discussion in which the concept of kastom operates as an oppositional category to Christianity. For further discussion, see the prologue to this thesis.

78 This particular trick provided one further explanation of the Sia Raga word for whites, tutumani, meaning to “wait until morning”.
importantly, he learns the Raga language. However, his transformation is never complete, and the mwei or “spirits” that find him swimming recognise this, as do the sailors who eventually pick him up.

Given this issue of agency and the pointed absence of Christian references, to tell Jimmy’s story is to evoke a veiled commentary on aspects relating to the early struggles of church and kastom. Through the central structural trope – a reverse narrative through which Jimmy is converted to kastom rather than islanders converting to the new religion – the story invites us to consider the efficacy of kastom in accommodating difference. Perhaps more importantly, it suggests some of the ways by which kastom can circumvent the mediating role of Christianity in defining relations with the white world. Jimmy gains the skills but not the being of a local, as attested by the emphatic acknowledgement of his status as a tuturani in the song that he sings. Yet, when he leaves, his commitments are evinced by his actions of reciprocating European gifts to the islanders. The mobilisation of kastom in articulating between local and national, and even more global political-economic and religious spheres is of particular importance today. I will now focus on this issue more closely.

**LOST GOLD AND PIGS OF PEACE, IN THE LAND OF LOVE: CROSS-CULTURAL TRANSACTIONS**

Many different forms of transaction take place throughout the course of the story. Here I will look at some of those that take place on Pentecost. This central chapter begins with a distracted rejection of money by the men from Lavusi who throw the ship’s gold coins into the sea. Usually recounted with sardonic humour, this episode also carries with it a wistful tone, “If only they’d known of the value of gold, perhaps we’d be rich today”. By way of dramatising the idea of the naiveté of ancestors when confronted with the insurgent economy and abstract value of money, the theme of cross-cultural exchange is immediately suggested. North Pentecost is pictured as an economic world in which gold coins have no value. This episode may be usefully juxtaposed to the specifically localised transaction that takes place upon Jimmy’s departure: Gigiala’s gift of a pig and root crops. In North Pentecost, such a gift does not demand material reciprocity, but rather consecrates an ongoing social relationship involving binibi marabi – in Bislama, ting beri (“think heavy”), or rispek (“respect”).
a generalised exchange of sentiment rather than of quantifiable values. Indeed, we recall that the porcine aspect of the gift is specifically referred to as a *boe tamata*, quite literally a “pig of peace”.

When viewed within the current economic climate, these episodes sit within a wider Sia Raga discourse by which the cash economy represents a contaminant of group sociality. As a lyric of a popular local string band song laments in Bislama: “*Moni, moni i spoelem yum?*” (“Money, money spoils us”). Here, the first person inclusive plural pronoun “*yumi*”, or in Raga, *gida*, refers to a social ethos in which the desires of individuals are downplayed in favour of group solidarity. It is worthwhile comparing this to Jimmy’s emphatic use in song of the first person singular pronoun, *Inau tuturani* (I, the whiteman). In one conversation I held with two men at Abwatuntora it was suggested that the word *inau* (“I”), did not exist in Raga vocabulary prior its arrival of whites, but instead the Sia Raga social world hinged on the collective concept of *gida* (“we”). Today, while seen as a somewhat necessary evil, money is often considered to be dangerous because of its tendency to create disputes between individuals, to undermine Sia Raga principles of togetherness (*bulbuluana*) and to promote *aleñan tuturani* (the way of whites).

Jimmy also has cause to reflect upon the relationship between local and Western products when he observes women applying face paint before their *havwa* performance. Western paints appeared alongside locally produced pigments relatively early on in the colonial period, certainly with the arrival of copra trading. Jimmy’s recognition of this appropriation carries with it a kind of nostalgia for a passing world. In his song he describes how the use of these paints has become pervasive “already”, and so the arrival of Western goods is nuanced with a sense of inevitability. However, upon his departure he offers us an alternative view of this process, as being one of exchange rather than simple one-way traffic. In return for the kindness he has received on Pentecost, Jimmy offers a future of Western goods as a reciprocal gift, objects in which he will be forever inalienably present.

People living on Pentecost today cannot choose to throw money into the sea. While cash continues to play a secondary role to subsistence for most family groups, it is of vital importance in other areas, such as school fees, transport, and for acquiring clothes and essential household items. With cash cropping as the central source of income, livelihoods are subject to the fluctuations of local and global markets. This is
of considerable contemporary concern as there has been a recent and dramatic switch from copra to kava as the main cash crop in the area.

The kava market may be broadly analysed as consisting of two separate spheres, one domestic and the other international. The domestic sphere is centred on the archipelago's two major towns, Port Vila and Luganville. Here periodic market flooding causes kava prices to swing rather habitually from month to month, sometimes from as little as 150vt to up to 400vt a kilogram. Nevertheless, these fluctuations follow fairly predictable cycles through which the majority of Pentecost Islanders are able to profess an understanding of the instability of the market. Indeed, operations within this market are usually maintained by small family-based *bission* (business) groups that retain full control of their product, from agricultural production right through to consumption.

![Image 18: Bales of Gilau kava for export to Port Vila, Lohong Harbour.](image)

For example, residents of the five hamlets of Gilau have formed a kava co-operative that operates three *nakamal* (commercial kava bars) in Port Vila. The kava that is processed and sold for consumption in these *nakamal* is exported solely from Pentecost where it is grown and harvested by co-operative members. A few specific men take charge of *bission* at either end, while the majority of younger men take up periodic residence in Port Vila in order to assist in the day to day running of the *nakamal*. Often as not in travelling to town they accompany their kava aboard ship. In this way the vast majority of men are able to claim an intimate knowledge of the full
Images 19 and 20: Photographs from the opening of the Mologu Company headquarters, in North Pentecost, (January 2000, the day after “Manuel's” bololo). During this event kastom played a critical role in communicating skepticism of the companies future and impact. This was seen for instance when dance groups focused on themes of export using dancing sticks depicting ships, planes and helicopters (above). (Below) “Manuel” and another tattum (name unknown, at right) are videoed in front of a South Pentecost dance troop.
process of local kava *bisnis*. Women on the other hand are often heavily involved in the
garden work that takes place on the island, and have less of a role to play in town.
Nevertheless, in so far as kava *bisnis* has become a part of everyday Sia Raga discourse,
and to the varying degrees that they take part in this *bisnis*, everyone in the area is
assured of a reasonably confident grasp of its workings.

By contrast, less clearly understood by many Sia Raga are important aspects of
those diffuse economic links that reach further afield, such as the more explicitly global
*bisnis* of international kava export. Around 1996 an Australian businessman,
Emmanuelle Foundas (known locally by most people as “Manuel”), met with key
Pentecost leaders with a proposal to facilitate the export of North Pentecost kava to an
international market. This resulted in the establishment of The Mologu Company with
funds contributed by both Foundas and his associates, and local shareholders. 79 In
short, the company was run by a board consisting of Sia Raga leaders and politicians,
and chaired by Foundas. It also employed a number of men to organise and coordinate
local production, processing and payments, as well as the initial transportation of the
product. Export was from Pentecost to Port Vila by plane, and then on to Australia. 80

In ways not dissimilar to copra before it, and despite the company’s claim to
being indigenously operated, by contrast to the domestic market kava export at this level
involved the pointed alienation of the products of Sia Raga labour into a sphere that was
only vaguely understood by the producers. Indeed, it was made clear to me on several
occasions that most people had little or no idea of the destination market that their kava
would reach, or of the uses to which it was to be put therein. Furthermore, no one I
spoke to could claim to have any real idea of the final market value that their kava
would attain. I’m sure these people would be shocked to discover, as I did upon leaving
Vanuatu, that some internet suppliers were at that time able to charge as much as
US$5.50 per ounce for the unprocessed kava that the Sia Raga market gardeners sell for
approximately US$3 per kilo.

Being knowingly ignorant, then, of the processes by which situations such as
this become possible, most people felt that Foundas was a necessary component to the
project’s success: here was a *tuturani* who could properly negotiate the vagaries of

79 *Mologur* is Raga for kava.
80 Since this time the Mologu Company has gone into receivership. A good deal of basic information
regarding this company remains unclear to me, as it also does to most people on Pentecost. However,
and partially for this reason, I would like to provide a caveat by pointing out that in raising the issues that
I do here I do not mean to question ethically the motives or actions of either Emmanuelle Foundas, or
anyone else involved in the Mologu Company.
international business. Nevertheless, and especially as the company failed to boom as had hoped, from 1998 into 1999 Foundas became a focus of considerable anxiety within the Sia Raga community. This is not surprising considering his ambiguous position, being at once an outsider to the institutions that guide Sia Raga social relations and the sole negotiator of their kava product to the Western economic world. As a response to this anxiety, and in order to impress upon him the importance of his position, early in the year 2000 Foundas was put through an elaborate kastom pig-killing ceremony, or bolololi. In doing so Foundas became the third tuturani to attain the graded rank of Vira (very loosely, “chief”, see above). The previous two white men to do so, Denis Hour and Dihn Van Than, were also prominent businessmen with links to North Pentecost. Emmanuelle Foundas’ ceremony, after several hiccups, was successfully achieved at considerable expense to the pig and mat wealth of several local leaders. Sceptics chided that these chiefs were simply “throwing their pigs into the sea”, somewhat like the young men of Lavusi from The Story of Jimmy before them. For these people it seemed unlikely that Foundas would act upon his newly achieved status as Vira by carrying out the roles and expectations that their high-level of achievement within the bolololi entails (see above).

What is apparent in each of these cases, but especially Manuel’s, is the mediating role that kastom has to play in forging links between what is often perceived as the radically separated worlds of Sia Raga and Western social economy. As well as the considerable responsibilities bestowed upon him as a chief, through having him perform bolololi (appropriately known as bisnis pig in Bislama) Foundas’ sponsors were effectively drawing him into a specifically local economic system. To engage in bolololi means to enter into relations of kinship and exchange with a number of transactors to whom one is from that point on tied through a system of continuing indebtedness. It is for this reason that bolololi is sometimes referred to as wasi, a word which is perhaps best translated in this context as “social entanglement”. I believe that Dihn Van Than knew that he was in this way missing the point when he said in potlatch fashion on the night before his own ceremony: “I could easily buy one hundred pigs, and kill them at any time I choose.” Here kastom becomes a source of social agency by which economic relations are redefined in a milieu that is locally controlled, and equally importantly, understood. In the case of Dihn Van Than and Emmanuelle Foundas, at least, this

---

81 I have little information on events surrounding the Denis Hour bolololi, especially as it occurred several decades before my field research took place. One older informant did however comment that if Dennis
also entailed the positively mediated reciprocation of economically based anxieties. Indeed, neither seemed entirely happy to take part in their exchange ceremonies, and only did so under local pressure.

Image 2: Echoing violent images from elsewhere in Melanesia (above), a “devil” (attmate) guards a dance troop from South Pentecost.

REFLEXIONS OF JIMMY

Changing tack a little, I sometimes ask myself, if Jimmy did return “home” from his adventures, then surely his story could not have escaped the net of Western history making. Perhaps then it will turn up in some old newspaper, dated c. 1868, or as episodic instalments in a turn-of-the-century periodical and bearing the stereotypical title “Five Years Shipwrecked on a Cannibal Isle”. We know that the Pacific of the

1 hour should happen to come back he should be considered more powerful than any of the chiefs alive today, such was the magnitude of his grade taking.
nineteenth century teemed with illiterate beachcombers and scallywags of dubious background, and so can easily imagine how such a story might have remained untold. But if not the story itself, then perhaps some hint of the hijack could be found – “Native Plantation Workers Steal Trading Vessel” – or a mention of Jimmy in the log of the ship that carried him away. Despite the lure of such possibilities I must nevertheless confess that for the first few months after returning from the field I was thoroughly reluctant to begin the search for such “documentary evidence”. It was not simply that I was afraid to discover that Jimmy’s story did not “match up”, or perhaps worse still, that it was all entirely “true”. Neither was it that I would be any more or less sceptical of the validation of these still fictitious texts, if such were ever uncovered. Indeed, I take the position that all forms of history-making must be viewed as ideologically located projects in the construction of worlds, not only of truth and falsity, but also of possibility. This partiality of historiography is as much in evidence for Western history making – which habitually values the assumed “factuality” of textual modes above all others – as it is for the Sia Raga. Klaus Neuman points out that for the ethnographer who seeks to elevate the authority of indigenous or alternative modes of historiography:

There is a somewhat comforting “but” to this: histories that select events by virtue of their verifiable factuality are not only biased, they can be extremely boring. Some seek a truth that comes to nothing, Neitzsche said. “There are very many trivial truths” (Neitzsche) (Neuman 1992: 120).

Of course there is more at stake here than boredom. The Western historicist drive towards corroborating orally transferred histories with Western textual sources, for the purpose of historical re-construction, tends to eclipse important local interpretations. To engage with colonial texts as validation would create a narrative that, as Kaplan puts it, “replaces indigenous avoidance, encompassment of, or triumph over the novel, with the story of the brutal or subtle workings of external incursion” (1995: 13). The “epistemic violence” (Spivak in Young 1990: 158) that such historicism perpetrates likewise serves to undermine the ideological content of local oral histories, as well as their socially productive power in the present. If I have been slow in attempting to find an “other”, Western side of Jimmy’s story, it is mainly through fear that such a history might eclipse my own experience of that story, disrupt its narrative finesse, dislodge its critical potency and its ongoing social efficacy. As it happens, so far the archives have still not yet yielded any conclusive results. The authenticity of “my” Jimmy therefore remains intact.
For the people that tell it, *The Story of Jimmy* does more than provide a framework upon which to explore the politics of the past. At the same time, its powerful evocation of insider-outsider relations is made to confront issues regarding neo-colonial social relations in the present. I have given you the story of Emmanuelle Foundas to illustrate this. In my view, if we are to take Jimmy's story seriously as a history, we must also take into account local awareness of the same repeated effects of imperial processes, which continue today. That for better or worse I, as a white, first-world anthropologist, am a part of that imperial process was I believe abundantly clear to the people who volunteered Jimmy's story to me. As Walter Benjamin puts it, "to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognise it "the way it really was". It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (Benjamin 1968: 255). The memory flashes up as an image of the past, an image in which for a moment the "now" fuses with the "what has been" (Benjamin, 1968: 255). With this precept in mind, any analysis that I make of this story must take into account my own position within the context of its re-production. Indeed, it was my very presence that provided the reason that was needed for telling the story. If, in North Pentecost, the past is somehow part of the "always-becoming" of the present, as I would argue that it is, then undertaking fieldwork there may also provoke the re-enactment of narrative histories. As Benjamin reminds us, such histories are always infused with a politics.

The frequency with which the story of Jimmy was told to me suggests that it provided a frame upon which to comprehend my own position within the North Pentecost community. Indeed, parallels between Jimmy's position and my own were often commented upon; such as my dependency on the local community, the fact that I sang and danced *kastom*, was at pains to learn the local language and was put through an early stage of the grade-taking system by my Sia Raga father. Analogies sometimes suggest themselves, as we say.

The equation of myself to Jimmy not only suggested ways in which the past is used to make sense of the present, but also how it may be used as a vehicle for both understanding and prescribing actions and relations in the future. Benjamin also tells us that "in every case the storyteller is a man who has council", and that "council is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding" (1968: 86). It was not simply that aspects of my position as a particular "kind" of *tuturani* – one with an interest in *kastom* rather than the church, for instance – seemed in ways to mirror or recapitulate the account of Jimmy's stay in the area.
In being told the story I was also being encouraged to view Sia Raga *a de \`a na (ways of the place), as he did, and to follow the moral and social example set by him. Indeed, I first heard the story of Jimmy after I had been in North Pentecost a little over two months, during a late night leave session that followed the official announcement of a marriage. David, the man who told me the story, informed me that he had first heard the story himself during a speech delivered by the late Father Walter Lini to welcome the New Zealand High Commissioner on a visit to the island. According to David, the story was in this case told to demonstrate the kindness and hospitality of the Sia Raga people, and to encourage the High Commissioner to also discover Ure I, the “land of love and gifts”, in the Island of Pentecost. But it seems clear to me that Father Walter Lini’s speech aimed to inspire more than this. Like myself, the High Commissioner was also being asked to examine the imperial past, as well as to consider his own position within the so-called post colonial politics of the present. In this way Jimmy’s story also has a message for anthropologists. For I, like both Jimmy and Emmanuelle Fournas,
am also a mediator between worlds, and this is a responsibility that must be taken seriously.\textsuperscript{82}

Let me briefly conclude. In the terms of a more traditional anthropology, the arrival of Jimmy and the story of his travels and adventures in North Pentecost accords to the juncture at which “history” begins to flow out of “myth”. In doing so, it represents the conjoining of two radically different and apparently irreconcilable temporalities. Peter Crowe, in his evaluation of the “Birth and Efflorescence of Song on Maewo” (Crowe 1984), describes these as follows:

the one scientific and objective, based on observations and logical deductions and sometimes (recently, as a rule) supported by documents or their equivalent; the other, the body of myth and folklore and its relation to monuments or natural evidences like stones and rivers and, importantly to social life and the way it is ordered (Crowe 1984: 11-12).

The people who tell Jimmy’s story are in no doubt of its historical “truth”. Objective evidence and “proof” is found in the accuracy of the names of people and places, and the authenticity of the accompanying songs. However, in Sia Raga epistemology, “truth”, or mwasi\texttimes, has little value without meaning, or binihiva (literally, “thought beneath”). The meaning of things is located behind or beneath the worldly surfaces of event and appearance in a parallel, “timeless” space – abanai, on “the other side of the leaf” – one that is of necessary and continuing value in the present. As is the case with the physical world, historical truth is not simply made valuable through its contextualisation within a linear historical realism, or as Benjamin so eloquently puts it, through the filling of “homogeneous, empty time”. Instead, “mythical” time is always “filled by the presence of the now” (Benjamin 1968: 261).

Throughout the course of the next chapter, as well as those that follow, it is my aim to come to an understanding of the patterned nature of Sia Raga historical consciousness. In this chapter I have sought to provide some historical context to those understandings. More importantly, anticipating the discussion and analysis of Sia Raga historiography that follows, I have shown that it is not simply enough to evaluate the ways in which local histories diverge from or talk to the histories of colonists, how they “charter” the cultures in which they operate (cf. Malinowski), or reveal in their

\textsuperscript{82} The importance of moral messages within histories told to anthropologists in northern Vanuatu has also been taken up by William Rodman (1991). Of related importance to this discussion, debate sparked by this article concerning the “factuality” of the events described by Rodman (Lane 1992) prompted him to comment on “the illusionary nature of some anthropologists’ views that they can be interpreters uninterpreted” (Rodman 1992: 695).
indigenous narrators an underlying structure of unconscious thought (cf. Lévi-Strauss). For *tuturani* researchers, at least, it is important that we are attentive to the ways in which these histories both inform and are put to work within specific contexts of politics and performance.
SECTION TWO: INTIMATIONS OF STRUCTURE
CHAPTER THREE

THE WAYS OF THE LAND-TREE: SIA RAGA COSMOGRAPHY

Within the hegemonic time of what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls “modern historical consciousness”, that which is defined by the “rational” and totalising histories of academic discourse, we are constantly reminded of a world that is already disenchanted (Chakrabarty 2000: 73). The time of such histories appears continuous, empty and homogeneous (Benjamin 1968: 261). It acts like a bottomless sack, one that is capable of holding any number of events. While such histories may also contend with worlds of thought in which humans are not the only agents, Gods, spirits and the “supernatural” may claim no agency in the narratives produced therein. For here, while events happen in time, time is not effected by events. Instead, the process of modern secular historiography involves translating those enchanted other-worlds and histories into its own narrative cosmology (Chakrabarty 2000: 72-73).

My situation of Jimmy “Historically”, in the previous chapter, likewise depended upon the kind of secular and “modern” narrative construction that is interrogated by Chakrabarty (2000). Here, the North Pentecost past was presented from within the linear terms of academic historiography, and paid continual respect to its touchstones of historical dates, periods, and key historical figures. In the present chapter I aim to reframe this past through focusing on the somewhat different ontological and historiographic codes by which Sia Raga people explore and interpret their emergent being in the world.

While people on North Pentecost constantly utilise the months and days of the Western calendar, particularly in the process of organising future events, calendrical dates are rarely used in the context of telling histories. Nevertheless, Sia Raga historical narratives do entail the distinction of epochs into “natural” linear sequences, and rely on key historical figures as if they somehow represent whole groups of people. But within this perspective the past is also understood as a resource that is located and crucially present. It is then and now, here and there; it exists in time and in space. The Sia Raga past also appears as a kind of bottomless bag, or more appropriately, a bottomless hole in the ground (a banot). Yet the past-and-present of Sia Raga historical consciousness is crucially enchanted, and reveals the tracks and traces that link people to their atatun vanna, their “people of the place”. These ancestors and spirits cover the North Pentecost landscape, dwelling as they do in abanai – an other-world “below”, a mirror-
world that is threaded through that of secular human experience. Here, in exploring the time of *atam vanua*, I hope to convey something of the intimately emplaced relationship that is shared by the living and the dead on North Pentecost. This will also entail the elucidation of narrative themes that recurred throughout the previous chapter by showing that such closeness also comprises an ambivalent character, one that is shot through with a sense of separation and distance.

**The Clean Ones, the Drinkers, and the Voice of Daniel.**

![Image 23: Land-tree figure one, drawn by Ruben Todali at Avatotu, and copied into field notes by the author (June 1999).](image)

Image 23 is a diagram that was drawn by Jif Ruben Todali on a blackboard in the *ganali* at Avatotu, and which I copied into my field notes in June, 1999, a month after my arrival on the island.

---

65 "Other-world" is the term used by Call in an article on Polynesian cosmology and ritual (1995).
after my arrival there. It is headed with the words, “Vanua toto deti – bwatun towa” (“Here is a tree of place – foundation of generations”).

Blending cosmography with social topography, the image depicts the physical emergence of the island of Pentecost. At the same time it traces the past and present distribution of atatun vanua, the “people of the place”, across that landscape. The island is imaged as a tree, its branches ramifying on either side of a stout trunk. The tree grows from the soil of a unitary plenum, of land (vanua) and surrounding cosmos (ureure). This land is described as having formed during a cosmogonical episode in which fire and water met, reacted, and affected the emergence of solid rock from the sea: Aten Vanua beobeo atero gabii mai xi, “kastom” land pushed from beneath by fire and water”. The land is enveloped by the stuff of ureure (the “material” cosmos of lived experience). This includes “mahava, alo, visui, dodo mai taiangi” (“air, sun, stars, rain clouds and white clouds”), of which the land (vanua) is also a part.

Historical provenance for this remarkable “land-tree” image is the divisive turbulence of the early twentieth century. It is therefore framed by the competing cosmologies and hegemonies of church and kastom that I began to describe in the preceding chapter. To continue that narrative, as Sia Raga church leaders began to assume more authority at the village and district level new disputes arose. These not only occurred between the Christians and the so-called unconverted “heathens”, but also within the ranks of indigenous church leadership and their congregations. Questions concerning the form that an emergent Sia Raga Anglicanism should take were particularly troubling, especially when confronting issues concerning the ongoing social, political and economic value of aleiian vanua (“ways of the place”). As well as an increasing involvement within insurgent tuturani (or “Western”) political-economic spheres, the 1930s and 40s were characterised by a heightening of tension between competing local politico-religious ideologies. This sometimes resulted in violent conflicts that are of continuing consequence today.

84 Note that spelling employed by Jif Ruben is often inconsistent (and that there is no firmly established orthography for Raga). In the orthography used here, Jif Ruben’s towa should appear as tawa (“generation”), and toto as dodo (tree). Tawa was translated into Bislama as jeneresen (“generation”) by Jif Ruben himself. It is no doubt related to the word taw (“to put, to make”) (Yoshioka and Leona 1992: 33). This word appears in Hardacres dictionary as dau, with meanings including “place”, “put”, “appoint”, “create”, and “bury”. Hardacre also lists the construction dau bwatuna, meaning “begin” (Hardacre n. d.: 32). Note here the important connection between origin and location, or place, the central topic of discussion in this chapter.

85 See the Prologue for a discussion of this translation of aleiian vanua as kastom.
In the early 1930s an Anglican synod was held in Siota, Solomon Islands, which resulted in the Episcopal prohibition of pig-killing ceremonies and kava drinking amongst Anglican populations at Ambae, Maewo and Pentecost (Hillard 1978: 202, Matas-Kalkot 1985: 150). The Bishops G. A. Selwyn and John Patteson had at least initially held comparatively moderate attitudes regarding those “native customs” that were not seen to be “directly contrary to the declared will of God” (Occ. Papers Mel. Miss., 1843-1897: 22). But later in his career Patteson developed a determination to see an end to the practices and beliefs of the *subwe*, a course that was also followed by early twentieth-century missionary leaders such as the Bishops John Selwyn and Colin Wilson. The reasoning behind this change of stance was ostensibly due to economic concerns: on the one hand the *subwe* seemed to produce “law abiding citizens” through the hierarchies it engendered, but it was also seen to pull people into a debilitating system of debt (Wilson 1932: 80-81).

More importantly, missionaries were becoming increasingly aware of the relationship between *subwe* and broader indigenous cosmologies. These included what were described in the ethnological terms of W. H. R. Rivers, and Reverend Codrington, as “ghost worship” and “animism”. Thus the *subwe* was seen to encode fragments of the “old religion” that the missionaries sought to displace (Wilson 1932: 76). In North Pentecost, Sia Raga clergymen attempted to enforce their prohibitions of pig-killing and kava drinking through the threat of excommunication, and with delinquents giving up the right of a Christian burial. What resulted was the classificatory division of the entire Sia Raga population into the “clean”, church affiliated *melmele* and the kava “drinking”, pig-killing and for some, once again, polygamous *mwinminu*.

Not all church leaders sided with the *melmele*, and their Anglican leaders Matthias Tarileo and Judah Butu. Oral histories concerning the struggle to maintain aspects of North Pentecost *kastom* in the face of Anglican opposition recount the actions of three Anglican men; Basil Leodoro, Basil Tovili and Louis Lolo. Basil Leodoro had been sent by the church to Fiji in order to train as a doctor when he heard of his mother’s death. He also heard that since she was aligned with the *mwinminu*, she had not received a Christian burial. Leodoro went to Sioto in order to launch an appeal to Walter Baddeley, the current Bishop of Melanesia, that he accept aspects of Sia Raga *kastom*. At the same time Basil Tovili, an influential chief and government assessor, and also an

---

86 The Raga words *melmele* and *mwinminu* literally mean “to clean” and “to drink”, respectively.
outspoken mwinminu, had been arrested and taken to court in Port Vila.\(^{87}\) Independently of each other, Basil Leodoro and Basil Tovili used the same argument in defending the practices of kava drinking, bolololi and polygamy. These, they said, were just the same as the European practices and institutions of alcohol consumption, money, and the employment of houngels (female domestic servants). According to these oral histories, both the Bishop and the British Government at Port Vila accepted their arguments on the first two issues, and this was enough for the two Basils to return to Pentecost victorious.

The third defender of kastom, Louis Lolo, was a catechist at what is now called Atangarua in the strongly Anglican Ahivo district. His story was recounted to me as follows by John Leo Tamata:

When Louis Lolo became a catechist he shaved off his beard so that he could enter into cleanliness. But when the split between mēmelo and mwinminu occurred he let his beard grow again. As a catechist he continued to ring the church bell, but he also continued to drink kava. One day Father Matthias Tarileo visited from the Aute district. He asked of Louis, “Are you still going to church?”

Louis answered, “Yes”.

“Are you still drinking kava?”

“Yes”.

Matthias Tarileo allowed him to continue in this way for some time, but the Anglicans found it difficult to convert the remaining kastom adherents in the area. They then held a meeting at Atabulu [in the Aute district of North Pentecost], deciding that all kava drinking and pig-killing must completely cease. At the conclusion of the meeting Father Matthias asked Louis Lolo why he had not spoken, and if he had anything to add. He replied with a short but powerful speech:

“I have one point only to make. I want to tell you that in this life man has a partner, woman. Day too has a partner, night. Rain has a partner, sun. War has a partner, peace”. Then he added, “every young shoot that comes out from its roots has two sides, left and right. There is never only one. And I believe that church has a partner. It is kastom”.

Hearing these revolutionary words, Father Matthias said, “what you say may be true. Let us watch this ānai tree [a kind of nut tree, canarium indicum], and see if your words can eat it.”

\(^{87}\) In the accounts I was given the precise reason for Basil Tovili’s arrest was not made clear.
Following the meeting another Priest, Father Henry Tavoa, went through all the villages of the area with a group of men. They pulled all the kava plants out of the ground, destroyed their bulin molo (kava grinding dishes) and basisi (kava grinding stones), thus making sure that kava would no longer be consumed in any North Pentecost gamali. After a few days the aiñai tree that was pointed out by Father Matthias dried up and died from the power of Louis Lolo’s words.

The church came to Pentecost by a good road, but after this there was fighting, and both church and kastom faced hardships. But to look at this story men can see that it is right that both church and kastom can live together. (Recorded in January, 2000, inside the gamali at Labwatgogoru).

Louis Lolo’s use of arboreal metaphor in describing the split between the melmelo and mwiminimu bears a direct relation to the subject of this chapter, Jif Ruben’s land-tree images. As such it also corresponds more broadly to the paradigm of Sia Raga historical and sociological consciousness. Here the idea of “sides” is seen to resonate with the ambivalent push and tug implied by the term wasi (tension, entanglement). In Sia Raga analyses, this condition is seen to have characterised the relationship between aleñan vanna (ways of the place) and the aleñan tuturani (ways of whites/foreigners) of institutionalised Anglicanism since the arrival of missionaries to North Pentecost.

The fighting and hardships referred to by John Leo Tamata at the end of the passage allude to a parallel episode of Sia Raga history that is seldom openly discussed. By the 1930s the church was also confronting division from another quarter, in the form of what Hilliard describes as a “prophetic movement ... begun in the Christian revival tradition, in a campaign for religious purity” (Hilliard 1978: 287). This was the emergence of a group of followers of the local prophet Daniel Tambe. Tambe had been a catechist in the Central Pentecost village of Tambok, and it is from him that the movement derived one of its names, the Danielites. Daniel Tambe’s teachings and prophecies, known locally as Silon Dan (“The Voice of Daniel”), came to him in a series of visions that he experienced from 1927 until his death in 1934. His announcement, made after Lenten prayer at Easter, 1931, that a voice from heaven had told him that there were two groups on Raga, “the one group belongs to Jesus and the other group belongs to Satan” (Matas-Kalkot 1985: 151), exacerbated the divide between the “clean” melmelo and “drinking” mwiminimu. Silon Dan maintained a popular following until its demise in the early 1970s. Throughout this time, and despite the pacifism of the
movement, its members were subject to much physical and epistemic violence from both local Anglican and Condominium Government quarters.  

Image 24: Receiving the Holy Sacrament at Amatbobo Anglican Church (October 3, 1999).

While very few people today would profess to being non-Christian, many Sia Raga continue to harbour ambivalent attitudes towards the structures, teachings and practices of the Anglican church. Coming from a predominantly “post-Christian” culture, during the time I spent on North Pentecost I was often confronted by questions concerning my own Christian-ness. Once I had plucked up enough courage to answer such questions truthfully – “I don’t really believe in God”; “back home, I don’t go to church” – I was surprised by the lack of moral rectitude with which people responded. My admissions were invariably met with surprise. They were also often followed by the

---

88 An extended discussion of Sihan Dun is beyond the scope of this chapter (but see Taylor 2003). See also Hilliard (1978: 285), Matta Kalkot (1985).
89 less than 2% of people from North Pentecost according to the 2000 national census (Collingwood Bakeo to Taylor: personal communication).
kind of reflective part-bemusement, part-resentment that was expressed in an observation shared with me by Tony, a young man from Aute: “We pray, and pray, and pray, but still we haven’t got anything. You tuturani never go to church, and yet you’ve got money, cars, trucks, skyscrapers...”

Many people see organised Christianity as a road, especially to education and to travel, and routinely attempt to exploit the resources offered by the range of churches in the region. However this does not mean that their claims to belief should be seen as a veneer, and they rarely are locally. Such a view marks a reflex of the Western tendency to raise the spectre of inauthenticity in belief through the splitting of economic from spiritual motivations. Rather than representing a compromise of religious faith, the expectation that one’s Church should provide (in Bislama, givhan) for its local community represents a continuation of views fostered from the early days of Christian arrival and the variety of opportunities offered by visiting missionaries (see chapter two). That many denominations today proselytise by way of development programs – in particular with offers of schooling and water tanks – enhances this view. At the same time there is the more pervasive correlation of spiritual power with ideas of passage and trajectory, such as are manifest in broader indigenous aetiologies.

Jif Ruben describes the “inventor” of the land-tree images, his father by birth, Vira Livlivu, as a man of questions, a man who needed to understand (iloi) everything. For this reason, while his attitude towards the growth of Anglicanism was essentially ambivalent, he was at the same time drawn to its novel spiritual ideas and to the new forms of knowledge that it was importing. As a result of his thirst for knowledge and his desire to explore the teachings of the Anglicans, Vira Livlivu became a catechist and thereby learned to read and write. In the evocative and ambivalent image with which Jif Ruben enjoys to describe him, Vira Livlivu stands at the door of the church house, with one hand he rings the bell for Sunday service, in the other he holds a rifle.

As this image suggests, Vira Livlivu had come to the conclusion that the knowledge and practices contained within both church and kastom should be mutually maintained in Sia Raga society. According to his vision, these two apparently competing ideologies might be incorporated into a productive duality as new figures within the social and ontological framework of tatalui (“sides”). However fraught, this is a commonly held ideal today. In the context of the early twentieth century, though, his position would no doubt have appeared as radically novel, especially when we consider the levels of conflict and violence that characterised the division.
As a consequence of his interests, and in the hope that a fusing of church and *kastam* would lead, ultimately, to *tamata* (peace), Vira Livlivu encouraged each of his two sons to pursue one of these divergent paths of knowledge. Today Jif Ruben is the recognised *kastam* leader of Gilau, while his brother Peter was for many years catechist to the area. On Sunday mornings, Peter would read the gospels to a smattering of local parishioners at the Lagaronboga church house. Ten minutes walk up the hill, this was the time during which Jif Ruben would habitually work with his exercise books, recording his knowledge of *aleñan vanua*. Utopian visions of *tamata* (peace) also provided the underlying reason why Vira Livlivu devised his “land-trees” and passed them onto his son, Jif Ruben Todali. Considering the continued importance of the knowledge that they systematise Jif Ruben has passed them to his own son, Kolombas.

Shortly after I arrived at Avatvotu, and before I encountered the land-tree on the blackboard, Jif Ruben spent one long afternoon picturing for me the shape and trajectory of Sia Raga cosmography. He began by describing to me the island’s first creation as rock and its emergence from the sea. He went on to explain to me the processes of death and decay by which soil was formed from the moss (*lumute*) that settled on the rocks of the newly formed island, and of how that soil provided substance in which a process of rebirth could occur, thus enabling that moss to diversify, eventually becoming the many plant and animal life forms that exist today. “*Lumute*”, he told me, “is the basis of all life”.

Jif Ruben always provided caveats to these renditions, interspersing his narrations with statements such as this: “I don’t know if what I’m telling you is true or not. This is just what the old men from before believed. It might be true. I don’t know.” Yet he would also contradict his modesties by pointing out that this *verburina* (history, or, more literally, “talk because of it”) could nevertheless be authenticated beyond all others through the examination of elements within the natural environment. Proof that humans are ultimately derived from *lumute*, through a process of incremental growth and transformation, is retained in the physical anatomy of the first animal to appear on Raga, the *bebeure*. As he told me, if you tie one of these moths to a piece of string and ask it a question, such as “where is the rough sea?” or “which way is north?”, it will attempt to fly off in that direction. “It knows”, said Jif Ruben, “That small piece of knowledge, that people emerged from it [the moth], is still here [retained in the moth]. This is apparent in that the knowledge that we have, this small knowledge, is

---

90 Peter Ngau sadly died in 2001.
shared by the small *bebeure* (recorded at Avatotu village, May 2000). Just as the existence of graves, cycads and rocks authenticate people’s relation to place, so too the *bebeure* contains the *dowoana* (memorial, proof) of Jif Ruben’s account of Sia Raga history, and, by extension, the authority of the land-tree.

On a more pragmatic level the land-tree operates as a central technological device whereby Jif Ruben is able to maintain his position as a key judicial negotiator at land dispute meetings which, given the considerable flexibility of the Sia Raga land tenure system, are commonplace. In so far as social identities in the present are seen to be crucially linked to the landscape through the foundational actions of ancestors, the land-tree is therefore made to function in a very practical and disciplinary way: to help settle land disputes by demonstrating the historical relationship between the land and its embodiment by the ancestors of disputants, and therefore by the disputants themselves.

During the time in which I lived with him, Jif Ruben was often called away to different areas of North Pentecost to help settle land disputes. It should be noted however that he does not in fact display or refer to these images in such meetings. This does not mean that they constitute some sort of “secret knowledge”. Rather, Jif Ruben is conscious that reference to written texts in such contexts is often viewed by others as undermining the authority of a speaker’s arts of memory and of oration. Instead, in actual practice the land-tree provides one of many mnemonic strategies by which named plots of land (*vanua*) are known and ordered. It is usually referred to or rehearsed in private, on paper or the blackboard in the *gama*. To my knowledge only a handful of adult males draw them, and all of these are residents of Gilau.

**HALANA: THE WAYS OF THE LAND-TREE**

The tree is already the image of the world, or the root the image of the world tree.
(Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 5)

The primary function of the land-tree is to provide a map of relationships between landholdings based on the history and colonisation of that land by ancestors. This is made obvious in image 25, where the “tree” is clearly the prime object of attention. As Jif Ruben explained it to me, the words that appear alongside the various branches of the land-tree are the names of *bwatun vanua* (foundation places). The list of
names is representative rather than exhaustive, and this explains the significant differences between the examples provided here. There are in fact hundreds of buatan vanua scattered throughout North Pentecost. Some of these denote the vanua upon which contemporary hamlets are located, such as Arevo, Amoru, Asaramanu and Asaola (Image 27). The rest are the sites of hamlets long since abandoned, such as Lauau, in Gilau. Each foundation place is defined by the existence of buaru (ancestral graves). These roughly circular stone piles contain the resting places of primordial and subsequent ancestors, the atatu vanua ("people of the land") from whom the people of Raga today descend. They may also contain more recent graves, which while also constructed of stone piles, are now more usually rectangular like Christian graves (image 26). As will be discussed further below, living people share an intimate yet ambivalent relationship with their atatu vanua who, from the other-world of abaini, continually inhabit the vanua in which they are buried.

![Image 26: A newly re-built individual grave (right), an older grave (left), and an ancient collective buaru left to overgrowth (behind), at Avatotu (February 2000).](image)

In addition to buatu vanua (foundation places), North Pentecost is divided into many hundreds of other individually named vanua. As with buatu vanua, these areas of land are usually little more than an acre in size. Indeed large contemporary villages often span several vanua. Many vanua are distinguished by stones or cycad palms, like
the graves of *bwatun vana*, these markers provide *dovoŋana* (memorial, proof) of the acts by which ancestors (*sibida*) have merged with the earth of that place through the performance of sacrificial “rebirthening” rituals. The ability to identify ancestral grave sites and these other markers and to trace one’s descent through the chronological recollection of those ancestors that they contain or represent is important in claiming rights to utilise the land of individual *bwatun vana*, or *vana*. Individuals are able to claim links to several *bwatun vana*, and still many more *vana*, and do so strategically.

The land-tree very clearly demonstrates the centrality of itinerant principles, and especially of series and divergence, in Sia Raga interpretations of this social topography. The analysis of these can readily be linked to recent appraisals in Pacific anthropology of Deleuze and Guattari’s distinction between rhizomic and arborescent models.\(^9\) In apparent contradiction to Deleuze and Guattari’s suggestion that Oceania, “in particular”, offers “something like a rhizomatic model opposed in every respect to the Western model of the tree” (1987: 18), the shape of the images presented here is clearly tree-like. Thus, in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, and like the figure Bwatmahaŋga (discussed below), they may be seen to incorporate a certain “tree logic” of “tracing and reproduction”: an endless development of “the law of the One that becomes two, then the two that becomes four...” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 5).

Alan Rumsey has tested the application of Deleuze and Guattari’s models of rhizome and tree to a variety of indigenous forms of “topographic inscription”, such as they are described in anthropological accounts from Australia and Melanesia (Rumsey 2001). His discussion juxtaposes what he sees as the essentially “rhizomic” nature of Aboriginal dreaming cartographies to several more ambiguously “arborescent” examples from Melanesia. (The Moorhead River and Iatmul regions of Papua New Guinea, and the island of Tanna in Southern Vanuatu provide his main examples from Melanesia). Rumsey observes that throughout Melanesia there are:

…striking similarities in the way the earth is interpreted as a surface of inscription, in the dense interconnectedness of named places along tracks established by the movements of protean creator figures, in the localization of knowledge about these movements and the role that that knowledge plays in the reproduction and contestation of present-day people’s rights to land (2001: 32).

---

Rumsey's description of arboreal metaphor in the Moorhead River region of Papua New Guinea, which mainly draws on the ethnographic work of Ayres (1983), is in many ways cogent to the form and movement of the images discussed here. For both the Moorhead people and the Sia Raga the tree seems to be the main figure by which people understand the spatiality of social relationships and the mapping of these onto the landscape. Furthermore, in both cases the image of the tree as a fully formed object is not so important as an attendance to the nature and trajectories of its growth (Rumsey 2001: 28). This section is concerned with discussing the tree as just such an image, as a network of *hala* (ways, roads) by which the Sia Raga form an understanding of their relationships to place, and also to each other, across both space and time.

As in Rumsey’s discussion of Moorhead interpretations (Rumsey 2001), the Sia Raga identify two places of original separation and dispersal for the formation of the cosmos, the island itself, and the peopling of that island. The first of these is the home of Mugarimañia (“Mother clam shell gapes open”) (see below). The second location is the home and place of death of Bwatmahañia (“foundation diverges”). Bwatmahañia is the “first man” of Pentecost, and his place is called Anserehubwe, the place of “merging”. As the starting point of human dispersal, but also of return, it is with this location that Jif Ruben’s land tree image is primarily concerned.

Anserehubwe is located at the extreme northern tip of Pentecost island. Following Sia Raga directional orientation, where to travel southwards is to go “up” (*hae*), this point represents the very base of the island. It is thus located in the district called Ahivo (“at down”). The Sia Raga identify Anserehubwe as the pre-eminent *bwatun vanua* (foundation place); the unique place of origin and departure for the human settlement of Pentecost. As we shall see, it is also a place of merging (*hubwe*), for it is through this place that people “return” to *abauai* (the other-world) and themselves become fully merged as *atatun vanua* (people of the place).

From Anserehubwe the dispersal of the Sia Raga population across the land is reckoned to have followed specific patterned trajectories. As Jif Ruben’s representations elegantly show, the image of the tree provides a binding metaphor by

---

92 Mugarimañia’s origins were never made clear to me. A literal translation of her name is “mother clam shell gapes open”. Thus her name relates to origin histories told throughout the northern islands of Vanuatu in which people are said to have emerged from marine bivalve molluscs, such as clams. From the Gilau perspective, however, such renditions are believed to be nonsense. Here I was repeatedly told, despite Mugarimañia’s name and provenance, that “people are born from people”. She is often equated with the Christian Eve.
which this dispersal is traced, and eventually becomes a kind of cartography. Thus space and time are condensed within the same image. Attention to the manner in which the dispersal of people across the landscape is considered to have “taken place”, the growth of the tree, is made clear by the presence of circles and arrows in two of the figures presented (images 25 and 29): circles represent *bwatuna* (foundations, roots, places of settlement), and arrows represent *bula* (ways, roads, trajectories).

As Jif Ruben explained it, the land-tree demonstrates that dispersal took place in a series of departures divided into two successive phases. Each phase is characterised by a distinct pattern of movement, the first being a progression of “lineal segmentation from a unity” (Image 27, from Rumsey 2001: 29), the second a mode of bifurcation from the points already established along that lineal segmentation (Image 28). While obviously recognisable as a kind of “branching”, the latter kind of movement is clearly not identical to the second mode described by Rumsey. Rather than appearing as a somewhat rhizomic “scattering or fragmentation from a starting point or centre” (Rumsey 2001: 29), what occurs here is serial bifurcation at specific nodal points (*bwatuna*) that are evenly distributed along a central “trunk”. This pattern may be further imaged as recurring upon subsequent branchings, and may be ultimately realised as an infinitely reticulating fractal. The image of the tree is the image of the island, and is also the image of the leaf.

![Image 27 and 28: Lineal segmentation from a unity (from Rumsey 2001, left). Serial bifurcation at specific nodal points (right).](image-url)
Image 29: Land-tree figure three, drawn by Jif Ruben Todali and copied by the author, January 2000.
In explanation of these different itinerant modes, Jif Ruben told me that when the original departure from Anserehubwe occurred, the rules of marriage had not yet been devised. These rules hinged around the division of society into two exogamous moieties. Being devoid of the lateral dimension of these two “sides” (tavalui), lineal movement was the only available option. While some people stayed at Anserehubwe a group of people moved upwards, or in Western geographical idiom, southwards, to settle upon a new point on the land. At a later stage a division from this second group departed once again, continuing along the same trajectory, up the “trunk” (bwatun gai) of the island. As this pattern of lineal segmentation continued, children left behind formed their own new bwatun vanua (foundation places) at the places upon which they settled.

As Jif Ruben further explained, the main impetus for the succession of departures was fighting over land. Social tension was fuelled by the restrictive, linear nature of their pattern of movement and settlement. Nevertheless, throughout the course of their journeying the people had been developing their knowledge. By the time they began to reach the “end of the line” they were able to strategise new roads (hala) for the maintenance of peace (tamata). These roads, being the related rules of marriage and land tenure, were based on the designation of two moieties. These are today known as Bule and Tabi. Now, with the division of the population into two tavalui (sides, halves, partners), successive generations began to move outwards rather than upwards, thus forming branches on either side of those previously established nodal settlements. With women moving across from one tavalui to the other in marriage, yet with land being retained within the matriline, the fair and equal distribution of land was ensured.

**Abanoi: The Other Side of the Leaf**

Sia Raga cosmography is in fact made up of three inter-related “spaces”: ureure, ute amare, and abanoi. Ureure refers to the lived world of human experience, and is comprised of those things that can be seen and touched during the course of everyday life. Ute amare, literally meaning “place above”, is often used in Christian discourse to refer to “Heaven”, a meaning it has held in this context at least since the first decades of the twentieth century when Hardacre compiled her Raga dictionary (Hardacre n. d.: 2). In North Pentecost, Christian concepts never stray far from locally emergent
cosmology, upon which they are often easily superimposed. Like heaven, *nte amare* is also the home of angels, or *vinaqga*. These winged, human-like creatures, both men and women, occasionally descend to *ureure* in order to set moral examples. 93

While the heavens are separated from the world of human habitation, properly speaking, they are in fact part of the same space. 94 This is not the case with *abanoi*. Rather than being physically separated from *ureure*, *abanoi* envelopes, punctuates and is threaded through the lived human world, to which it articulates different temporal characteristics. A receptacle of time and of death, it is here that ancestral knowledge, truth, and history are accumulated. While the world experienced by dependent on ongoing time, and on the uncertainties of cause and effect, *abanoi* is somehow both “timeless” and “every time”.

*Abanoi* as it is used here carries the meaning that was in use at my immediate research site, Gilau. It describes an unseen mirror-world that is inhabited by spirits and ancestors. While people from elsewhere in North Pentecost may not use the word *abanoi* to describe this “paradise”, during my time there I did not meet a single person who did not believe that such a place existed, or that it was inhabited by “devils” or “spirits” of some kind. This is clearly the same “Panoi” that was described of Maewo by Codrington’s unidentified “native informant” in the late nineteenth century. 95

Codrington quoted his informant as follows:

> the reason for *Suqe* [“graded system”] is this, that hereafter when a man comes to die, his soul may remain in happiness in that place Panoi; but if any one should die who has not killed a pig, his soul will just stay on a tree, hanging for ever on it like a flying fox... (Codrington 1891: 112).

For the people of Gilau, *abanoi* is not a separate “place” but is present within the same space that is inhabited by people. Despite this presence, it nevertheless refers to a different set of qualities and temporal conditions, like an invisible parallel dimension layered across or threaded within the lived world of human experience. The nature of the relationship between *abanoi* and *ureure* – that which is apprehended by living people

---

93 Many people in the northern islands of Vanuatu enjoy telling stories involving the adventures of creatures such as these. See for instance Jolly (1999: 285-289), whose informants describe an event which is strikingly similar to that which occurred at Avarotu.

94 The defining story of Avarotu tells of a man who fell in love with a *vinaqga*, who married him on *ureure*, and there bore them a child. However, after he mistreated her she flew back to *nte amare* with their child. Desperate to find them, he shot an arrow with a rope tied to it up into the air. The arrow flew through the sky and clouds and struck a tree. He then climbed up the rope to search for the *vinaqga* and their child in *nte amare*.

95 Compare also *naurhop* of Toman Island discussed by Curtis (1999: 59-60).
— is perhaps best described by the generic name of some of the beings that inhabit it, tavalurau.

Tavalurau, translated literally, means “the other side of the leaf”. This describes an object whose two “sides” (tavalua) cannot be observed at once. Turning a leaf (rau) over merely renders the other side invisible. While both sides are always “present” to consciousness, only one is accessible to the eye. As Jif Ruben Todali explained abanoi to me, “you can’t see it, but it is here with us anyway.” Atmate, the “spirits” or “souls” of the dead, are also sometimes described by the related term tavalena, or “spirits of the other side”. Through these terms the relationship between the two cosmological “sides” of ureure and abanoi is pictured as simultaneously joined and separated.

While living people are only able to see into or communicate directly with abanoi through the medium of dreams, inhabitants of abanoi have a less inhibited access to and agency within the human world, and they sometimes choose to make themselves visible to people therein. As discussed below, abanoi is also understood to contain the true and authentic knowledge of ancestors. One idiomatic Raga phrase advises that a person seeking wisdom should sit quietly (gogonat). In doing so, sooner or later that which is sought will be made apparent to them, “as a small insect revealed by turning over a single leaf” (Interview with Mark Gaviga, Angoro, May 2000). Further contemplation will make clear a profundity of binihiva (meaning) belying the apparent insignificance of the object found.

There are at present on North Pentecost divergent interpretations of abanoi. In particular, use of the term abanoi may be used to correspond to ideas relating to both the “heaven” or the “hell” of Christian discourse. This is consistent with the dual and ambivalent character that is accorded to sacred power in Sia Raga conceptions. It also relates to the fact that abanoi is metaphorically said to be located “down”, while at the same time it is a perfect, “paradise” place. As will become clearer throughout the course of this chapter, and in through the discussion of Jif Ruben’s land-trees in particular, the downward location of abanoi bears strongly upon the merging of temporal and spatial trajectories that takes place in Sia Raga interpretations of cosmology and aetiology. As with the concept of bwatu (foundation, base), to be “down” is to be at the beginning, and as such to be located as authentic and truthful.

96 However, Robinson Todali once told me that the people of South Pentecost know of a leaf that, if rubbed on one’s eyelids, renders abanoi and its inhabitants visible for a short period of time.

97 The word abanoi is also in some contexts used to refer to a bottomless hole in the ground, of which it is said that there is several in North Pentecost. The entry in Hardacre’s c1920 dictionary for the word “bano” reads, “deep natural hole, Hell” (n. d.: 8).
TAUVA: THE GENERATIONS OF ATATUN VANUA

As stated in the previous chapter, within the context of Sia Raga historiography the concept of tauva may be translated as describing a cosmological transformation or rupture that heralds the start of a new historical “epoch” (compare Jolly 1993: 191). Each tauva relates to the arrival of spirit beings or people within different cosmological zones, and at the same time of the formation or shaping of those zones. The Sia Raga distinguish between three different forms of abanoi (other-world) inhabitant: atatun vanua, tavalurau, and atmate or tamtena. In actual discourse there is often considerable slippage between these categories. However, following details that were provided by Chief Ruben Todali and John Leo Tamata from Gilau, as well as by Ifraim Boe and others at Abwatuntora, it is apparent that they are clearly differentiated.

The most temporally distant tauva begins with the flooding of the land that separates Pentecost Island from Maewo and the dispersal of primordial manifestations and essences, called atatun vanua. The source of these “first beings” is neither autochthonous nor celestial, as is usually the case elsewhere in the archipelago (compare Bonnemaison 1994: 123; Jolly 1999: 284-5; Layard 1945: 82, but also Patterson 2002), but rather they are the children of Mugarimaña, the apical female ancestor. Mugarimaña and her children resided between the two islands of Maewo and Pentecost, which at that time were joined as one. While searching for their father the children accidentally opened an underground spring, and thereby created the sea that now separates the two islands. As Mugarimaña’s children fled this “flood” they dispersed and embodied various aspects of the natural environment, such as the rain, wind, tides and stones. These primordial atatun vanua continue to inhabit such natural phenomena today. Their work is to act as guardians of the land, and to punish those who offend the vui tanonda, or “spirit of the land”. Since such offences are often meted with illnesses that sometimes result in death, atatun vanua are both feared and highly respected.

98 For example, atatun vanua and tamtena are often spoken of as being the same kinds of being. This is partly due to the fact that the term atatun vanua is on one level used to refer to all of these categories, but in more detailed discussion refers specifically to the first generation of direct ancestors, such as Bwamahana.

99 Again, this event is sometimes said to represent a local occurrence of the biblical flood. Compare also Margaret Jolly, who notes how “the spectre of flight, floating and flood constantly recurs in Sia narratives, and usually emanates from women. There is a gendering of these tropes, and in the articulation of these narratives with colonial history, there is also an ethnic marking. Europeans are associated with the sea, with restless wandering and with transience” (Jolly 1999: 285).
The second tauva is characterised by the arrival of tavalurau ("the other side of the leaf"). This category includes various kinds of spectral creatures that, along with atatun vanua, dwell in the other-world of abanoi. Unlike atatun vanua, tavalurau are not accorded with ancestral significance and are thereby viewed in much more ambivalent terms. In Bislama they are therefore more often described as devil ("devils") rather than gost ("ghosts"). Two particularly important tavalurau are sarivanna and mwei. These creatures are associated with the bush and the sea, respectively. Unlike most tavalurau, they are essentially good "devils" who often visit people in dreams in order to teach them important things such as songs, dances, ritual procedures and medicinal cures. Like all atatun vanua, however, mwei and sarivanna can also be harmful, particularly for those of transformed "spiritual power" (roroño), such as those who have recently performed sacrificial rituals, women during and immediately after childbirth, children and the sick. For these people, to come into close contact with tavalurau is likely to bring about illness. The pre-human arrival of tavalurau is also concurrent with the split between the two cosmological zones described in the previous section: the world of physical experience (ureure), and the other-world (abanoi).

Following the separation of the cosmos into ureure and abanoi, the third major tauva is characterised by the appearance in the lived world of more specifically human and individually named ancestors. These are the children of the primordial atatun vanua. Some of these ancestors are responsible for the arrival or creation of things within the North Pentecost cultural environment – such as yams, coconuts, kava and pigs. As depicted within Jif Ruben's land-tree images, these ancestral atatun vanua are particularly remembered for having successfully negotiated the orderly distribution of people across the land. They are also credited with instigating the range of practices, institutions and laws known collectively as aleñan vanua (the "ways of the place") and silan vanua (the "laws" or "voice of the place"). Such "ways" and "laws" are aimed at establishing and maintaining a state of tamata (peace), or social and cosmological balance.

Many of the stories from this epoch recount the adventures of the earliest of these ancestors, such as Bwatmahaña and his foreign nemesis Tagaro (recounted below).

---

100 Mwei is also a term of endearment for one's daughter, and is used to signal romantic attraction when used by young men of young women.

101 Other tavalurau include halaningo who, like sirens, take the form of desirable women and lead men to death. Donelaoma follow people into villages at night where they upset people's slumber, especially children. Moganioro steal food. Others, such as atmatule and atmate vatu, inhabit plants, stones or other features of the natural environment.
Having been tricked into death by Tagaro, Bwatmahaña is revered for having forged the road that the dead now travel in order that they may enter the other-world, *abanoi*. This road leads “down” (*hivo*) the full length of the island; from a rock called Vatun ĕle, which is located at the southern tip, to another called Vathubwe, which is located on the coast of Anserehubwe in the north. It thus reverses the trajectory of ancestral settlement that is depicted in the land-tree. When a person dies their *atmate* (spirit, soul) becomes separated from their physical body, or *rebehi*. After the mourners that survive them commit the body of the deceased to the ground, their *atmate* is set upon the road to *abanoi*. This is accompanied by a pig or bullock that is sacrificed immediately after burial by a *tua* (same-sex sibling) of the deceased. Upon reaching the doorway at Vathubwe the deceased is expected to complete several tests before being allowed to pass through to *abanoi*, including the completion of two *uli* (so-called “sand drawings”). In doing so they join those *atatun vanua*, *tavalurau*, ancestors and other *atmate* who reside together in the perfection of *abanoi*, “on the other side of the leaf”.

As Codrington noted of North Pentecost:

> Ghosts haunt especially their burial-places, and revenge themselves if offended; if a man has trespassed on the grave-place of a dead chief the ghost will smite him, and he will be sick (1891: 288).

Unlike the other more ambivalent spirits that haunt the landscape, and even though they are similarly feared, the intentions of ancestral *atatun vanua* are ultimately considered just. During my stay in Gilau a young man became sick and eventually died after clearing bush and planting kava at one such place. His death was immediately identified as the retribution of the resident *atatun vanua*. Many considered that the young man’s death might have been averted had his sickness been treated at home, by local methods involving leaf remedies and communication with these *atatun vanua*, rather than by being removed to the hospital in Port Vila. Yet people ultimately blamed the actions of the young man himself for having trespassed at the site, despite his being warned of probable danger. So, rather than being angry at the “ghosts”, his death was taken with a remorseful resignation.

As described in the previous chapter (and below), the arrival of and continued contact with *ira tuturani* (whites, foreigners) defines the fourth and current *tauva*. Of

---

To hazard a translation of the former name, from *rata* (“stone”) and *ĕle* (“return”, although more usually of repayment or retribution) Vatun ĕle might be interpreted as “the rock of return”. Vathubwe is quite clearly a compound of *rata* (“stone”) and *hubwe* (“merge”, “join”, or “meet”).
cosmological concern at this point is the dwindling number of *tavalura*, whose departure from the island is supposed to be a result of broader changes that have taken place within the new *tauva*, including the establishment and spread of Christianity in particular. Accompanying this decline is a reduction of the power that people may draw from *tavalura* and ancestors, as well as "the spirit of the land" (*vui tanonda*) itself. In today’s situation the potency of spiritual power gained through pig killing, the effectiveness of sorcery and divination, as well as many central aspects of the important body of knowledge and practice known as *silon vanua* (laws of the place) are all perceived to be considerably diminished. Nevertheless, through following the kinds of trajectories imaged within Jif Ruben Todali’s land-trees, people are able to establish and maintain fruitful relationships with their *atatun vanua*.

**WELENA: A PATHWAY TO THE ANCESTORS**

What has the shape of the earth to do with the shape of the story...? All our stories about travel across the earth, exploration and research into its forms, are already frozen into place, and if we want to get back to the beginnings on this we must start map-first and then replot the journeys on which the map was made. Myth in reverse (Wagner 2001: 71).

The following piece of writing is the introduction of an unpublished text called “*Harahara ia ailenan vanua*”, or “A collection of the ways of the place”. This text was compiled during the late 1980s by John Leo Tamata of Gilau for consideration by the North Pentecost Island Council, whom it addresses. In line with post-independence political ideology, the council was at that time attempting to standardise *kastom loa* (*kastom* law) throughout the Raga language area. This passage is important in so far as it highlights the way in which knowledge is conceptualised as mediated between people and ancestors along particular trajectories. The author’s use of arboreal metaphor in describing these trajectories, relationships and processes also corresponds to my analysis of Jif Ruben’s land-tree images.

Since a literal translation into English would not make much sense, mine is somewhat interpretive, and attempts to convey a sense of the tropology employed in the original. Orthography is as it appears in the original manuscript. Key terms discussed
within this chapter are left untranslated (followed by a bracketed gloss). The passage is quoted in full so as to illustrate some of the ways in which these concepts interact:

Harahara ia alenan vanua

Aleinan vanua ginau marahi, ginau gogona, ginau sabuga, ginau roro i ginau nava. Atatu nu gita borue mwa lol voroga aluna kam tani vanavuni ratolu huba. Kunia bigea mwa du maragai be gida tar houa vi homai.

Tam doron be tar harahara la mwasing alenan vanua be ram eno kahanga hivo mwa buma. Tam bar doron tehe didi ngtagita roi la silo dodolu, sa silo gora be ram haroro, berevai tam dari haihain silo be bwatuna nusiagi i gita lol bidoi sinobun vanua.

Tam doron be tar tari roron binihiva, sa silo rinai berevai tam bar gita te memela dum bwatuna sa nolivana, i gita mai giginan bantai sa tenteneana vainoiba.

Silon vanua mwa avo maragai buri silo gogonai, binibi marahi mai mai vingiago. Bwatuna yea harahara lol silon vanua sivar burin te balan binibi lavoa, ta vi roro la mwasing welea.

Aleinan vanua kea gaideden vanua, kunia bigea gaidededa sinobu dului, kun atat lavoa mwa botui naturi.

Bwatuna kea lol vahalana dului be tarsala sa ata anvanna mwa bori alohona, gida tam ilbe be silon vanua mwa eno buri gida nito. Kunia harahara vi vartuta burin mwasing welema...

Bwatuna kea harahara vi burin mwasing binihiva ata alohona silon vanua. Ta sibar burin tehe balan binihiva sage, sage wani men ratagus atatu (Tamata n. d.: 1).

A collection of the ways of the place

Aleinan vanua (ways of the place) is a heavy thing, a gogona (“human” restriction) thing, a sabuga (“sacred” restriction) thing, a deep thing and a long thing. People have seen it born and proceed working upward for three thousand years already. It will indeed continue like this if we come together as a family.

We want to collect true alenan vanua, even if they lie far away down from us. We do not merely want to consider the variety of silo (laws) that we have heard about, or bitter silo (laws) that these contain, lest it come to pass
that through you we erase the roots of silo (laws) and confuse the people of the place.

We do not want to include superficial meanings, or what we hope to become silo (laws), lest we see this happen in its roots or in its new shoots of growth, and you become a bad thing or eventually a falsehood.

*Silon vanna* (laws of the place) involves excessive talk because it is *silo gogonai* (laws of “human” restriction), heavy thinking which is to be awed. The roots of this collection of silon vanna (laws of the place) do not lie in the road to fame, but that it will run to the true *welena* (path to the ancestors).

This *ahi nan vanna* is an instrument for directing the land, in this way it is also an instrument for directing all people, such as big men that come from children.

This foundation creates all the roads so if a visitor or a person of the place falls down (transgresses) inside them, we know that *silon vanna* (laws of the place) is set out because we possess them all. In this way the collection will be as it should be because it is the true *welena* (path to the ancestors).

The basis of this collection will be the true meanings that reside inside *silon vanna* (laws of the place). But it is not because of the road of pride, proud people ought to be made to come behind.

The split between two cosmological “sides” (*ureure*, as experienced in everyday life by the living, and the timeless perfection of *ahana*) accords to a corresponding distinction between those rules, restrictions and social norms that are imposed by people (called *gogona*) and those that are understood to represent the sacred and original ways of ancestors (*sabuga*).103 Jif Ruben Todali distinguished these two terms by suggesting to me that *gogona* pertains to “the honour of men”, while by contrast, “*sabuga* does not belong to men, but belongs to *ata tun vanna*”. This distinction was also understood by Codrington, as noted by Yoshioka:

...while Codrington did not clarify how the taboos of *gogona* and *sabuga* were applied, he was aware of the different characters of these taboos: a naturally sacred character is given to *sabuga*, while *gogona* is related to human punishment and prohibition (Yoshioka 1994: 86).

---

103 The Raga word *gogona* seems to be cognate to the Nduindui (North East Ambae) word *kokona*. However, according to Allen’s analysis of this term, *kokona* seems to be more directly associated with ideas of sacred power. This is operates in distinction to the term *muoda*, “*Muoda* objects are those without *tabu* and do not contain any dangerous power” (Allen 2000: 19). In Bislama, both *gogona* and *sabuga* are described by the term *tambu* (“taboo”).

121
Go"ona broadly describes a quality or state that is embodied by people or particular locations when they become associated with actions or events that contribute to or reflect tamata (peace) within the lived world of ureure. In the context of everyday behaviour one exhibits the quality of go"ona when performing such actions as halatena, the “road beneath”, by respectfully stooping when passing between or in front of people who are talking. It also includes the display of socially moral aesthetics of a more abstract kind, such as go"onai (“quietness”, modesty, respectfulness), or binihi marabi (“think heavy”, thoughtfulness of others).

On one particular day Haggai set off from Avatotu on a path leading to a nearby hamlet in which a house had recently and mysteriously burned down. As he walked he began singing loudly. This caused family members to call out after him, “gov ban go"onal” (“you go respectfully”). Their caution was by a concern that through not displaying behaviour that was deemed to be appropriately go"ona, Haggai might draw attention to himself as a possible suspect in starting the fire. People should be go"ona in particular ways when somebody dies, during periods of social tension, or when in the presence of certain kin (see chapter four). In this casual sense go"ona describes behaviour that shows respect, as it is often called in Bislama. Indeed, Yoshioka Masanori suggests that “the basic meaning of go"ona is respectful” (1994: 86).

Actions that are seen to exhibit the character of go"ona are also said to reflect the sentiment of ale"nan vanua (the “ways of the place”). As I have discussed elsewhere, the term ale"nan vanua broadly encompasses any action or sentiment that is considered to be culturally “authentic” to the Raga-speaking area of Pentecost. Some particular aspects of ale"nan vanua are given institutional expression under the category silon vanua, or the “laws of the place”.104

Silon vanua comprises of a set of social laws and corresponding system of penalties that usually take the form of fines of pigs, or bwana and bari (exchange textiles).105 These laws are uniformly established throughout North Pentecost. Their content ranges from prohibitions against assault, theft, and the false reckoning of one’s debts, to such things as adultery, and other rules governing behavioural relations.

104 Such laws are also sometimes called silon go"ona, or the “laws of go"ona”. They are also more simply called sile, meaning both “laws”, and also, “voice” (such as in the quote from Tamata (n. d.: 1), above).
105 Pigs, bwana and bari, have a relatively fixed exchange rate against vatu. During the time of my fieldwork, one bwana was worth 2,000vt, one bari 200vt, and one iru"a (circle tusker) 10,000vt. These items are fully integrated into the cash economy, and are used to pay for services, such as 4WD transport, and in some stores they are accepted for purchasing goods.
between different kin categories. Penalties increase according to status: a *ratahigi* ("chief") is expected to pay considerably more than a *mwalegelo* (unmarried man) found guilty of the same crime. Fines are not only paid to the offended party, but also to the *ratahigi* of the hamlet to which the infringement relates. This latter payment is referred to specifically as a *tamata* (peace). Such payments are made so as to strengthen the role of *ratahigi* in maintaining and supervising *silon vanna* (the laws of the place).

*Ratahigi* are also able to place restrictions on objects and places. These are often signalled by the presence of a *mwele* leaf (cycad palm). Only males of the rank *Vira* are allowed to pick cycad leaves, and those who break this rule are made to pay fines to them. Cycad leaves are used by these men of authority to signify that a particular object or area is out of bounds, or "taboo" (*gogona*). Thus the presence of a cycad leaf upon the bonnet of a broken down 4WD left on the side of the road shows passers by that they are not to touch the vehicle, and cycad leaves draped over a wooden frame on a pathway skirting a garden tells them that crops may not be picked or planted therein. Having been designated as restricted things (*ginau gogona*) or places (*uto gogona*), these become subject to the jurisdiction of *silon vanna* (laws of the place). Once again, transgression of these restrictions is punishable by fines paid to offended parties, and the delivery of a *tamata* (peace fine) to the presiding *ratahigi*.

While many of these restrictions are of a mundane kind, others are specifically designed to regulate the interaction of people in relation to places and things that are considered to be spiritually powerful, or *sabuga*, through their association with *atatun vanna* (ancestors, people of the place). By contrast to *gogona*, *sabuga* — from the noun *sabu*, meaning “separate”, and thus also to “sulk” — relates to the "sacred" power and laws of *atatun vanna* or ancestors, and also of “God” in Christian discourse. As noted by Yoshioka:

> The taboo of *sabunga*... is related to a world in which human beings can not display their power... [and that] is separated from human life. When the taboo of *sabunga* is offended, the offender is punished supernaturally, unlike the offender of the taboo of *gogona* who is punished with human sanctions (Yoshioka 1994: 88).

Laws that govern the restrictions of *sabunga* are more properly called *dautau leo*, which I translate as “original laws”. These laws are said to reside in the *vui tanonda*, or “spirit of the earth”. They represent foundational concepts and “authentic” rules of

---

106 See chapter two for a discussion of the intersecting categories *ratahigi* and *Vira*. 123
THE WAYS OF THE LAND-TREE

morality, thought and speech. As Ifraim Boe explained to me in Bislama, dautau leo (original laws) comprise of “stamba tinging, mo stre toktok mo tinging” (“original concepts, and correct speech and ideas”). These concepts and rules are known and intermittently taught to people by atatun vanua (ancestors), usually through the medium of dreams. Dautau leo is also intimately related to the notion of tamata (peace), but in a different way to aleñan vanua (the ways of the place) and silon vanua (the laws of the place). While aleñan vanua and silon vanua represent the struggle for humans to maintain peace within the changeable and disordered world of human experience (ureure), as the “timeless” wisdom of atatun vanua (ancestors), peace in this context appears as a natural and seamless aspect of dautau leo (original laws).

The aim of silon vanua (laws of the place) can be seen to represent an attempt to devise a substitute or analogue of dautau leo (original laws) as people try to emulate the perfection of their ancestors. Indeed conversely, as Ifraim Boe explained: “dautau leo [original laws] is taught by atatun vanua and is sabuga [sacred]. If every one followed it there would be no fighting, and therefore no need for silon vanua [laws of the place].” The problem however, he went on to tell me, is that “the chiefs of today don’t know how to teach it [silon vanua] and therefore the people are confused.” Thus the relationship between people and their ancestors exists in a state of ambivalent tension, such as is described by the term wasi (tension, entanglement).

One of the aims of silon vanua (laws of the place) is to help people to locate their mwasin welena; their “true ancestral road”. As we have already seen, the idea of roads (bala), as ways or trajectories, is central to the Raga ideoscape, as it is throughout Vanuatu as a whole. The Raga word welena refers to a special kind of road that passes through both physical and cosmological space and time. In cosmographic terms it describes a road connecting either end of Pentecost Island, and therefore corresponds to the road that was originally forged by Bwatmahaña, and that the dead must follow today in order to enter the other-world, ahanoi. This also accords to a very important conceptual trajectory that links living people, along with their knowledge that is designated as gogona (human restriction), with ancestors and things sabuga (sacred).

Welena may also be identified and traversed by people, for whom it represents balan tamata (ways of peace), or balan mwasi (ways of truth). Doing so entails the revelation of practice or sentiment that leads to the obviation of, or congruence with, dautau leo (original laws). Thus it was variously described to me as “the proper ways of
people”, “the real road to follow”, and “true talk and actions”. It was also described as “the road of the ancestors”, and equally, “talk of the ancestors”.

The notion of welena makes clear the importance of Sia Raga understandings of space-time to identity. As appears to be the case throughout Melanesia (cf. Munn 1986, Strathern 1990, Kuchler 2002), in this conception events are inseparable from space and place, and appear as heterogenous, non-linear and multidimensional. Welena was also tellingly described as, “the real road to the past” and “the road that leads to all the good things of the past”. When a person finds themselves in trouble of some sort, an elder or ratahigi may sometimes advise them, “gom no la welena”. As one young man told me, such instruction means to “follow the history of your ancestors”. Recalling Jif Ruben’s land-tree images, the concept of welena implies both a reversal and conflation of time and space. It traces a movement that is both “back” and “down”, one that leads to the foundation (bwatuna) where the forks of the tree merge (hubwe), and thus become one.

**BWATMAHĀNA: THE FOUNDATION DIVERGES**

Some time after the primordial atatun vanua of the first tauva (“generation”) embodied the still undifferentiated cosmos, two of Mugarimaña’s children met one day in the middle of the island at a place in the bush, somewhere above where the contemporary village of Bwatnapne is located.107 These were a woman called Mumate who had become the “quiet” western sea, and a man called Mauri who had become the rough sea of the east. Without realising that they were in fact brother and sister, Mumate and Mauri met once again at Atabulu where they married and had children.108 The first of these children, and therefore the “first man” of Pentecost itself, was Bwatmahāna, primogenitor of the Sia Raga today (interview with Ruben Todali, Avatvotu, May 1999). Sia Raga engagement with the principles of trajectory and division begins with Bwatmahāna.

As the first ratahigi (“chief”) (Yoshioka 1987: 49), the creator of the first imwa (houses) and gamali (“mens’ houses”), and pioneer of the road to abanoi, Bwatmahāna is

---

107 Bwatnapne is an important focal point for Pentecost Island. For the Ambyrene, for instance, this is where their island is said to have been linked to Pentecost by a vine (Mary Patterson 2002).
108 Codrington mentions a place called “Atambulu” as being “the original seat of men” in Raga (1891: 169).
the embodiment of key Sia Raga architectonic concepts. Such concepts lend shape to
Sia Raga renditions of history and cosmology, situating them as an emergent resource of
enduring value. Two of the most important of these concepts are present in
Bwatmaña’s name: Bwat, meaning “source” or “foundation”, and mahaiia, to “branch”
or “diverge”. Bwatmaña is the figure of the one that becomes two.

Bwatmaña appears in many versions of origin history throughout the northern
islands of the archipelago, and where he does so he is always accompanied and thwarted
by his adversary Tagaro. 109 There is also variation between tellings of their entangled
histories within North Pentecost itself. A rather surprising aspect of the Gilau version
of events is the fact that it is Bwatmaña rather than Tagaro that is exulted as the more
important culture hero. Tagaro, by contrast, appears as a scourge from the north who
wields a bloody axe. For the rest of the region it is Tagaro that is more typically
accorded this position, as in Maewo and Ambae. Indeed, in the Anglican Church his
name is often used as a translation for God. In North Pentecost at least, these divergent
interpretations have become embroiled with local political and religious standpoints and
debates. However, common to all such histories of which I am aware are the events
surrounding Bwatmaña’s death. Since it is with this episode that we are here
concerned, there is no direct need to engage with such debates at this point.110 What
follows is a condensed and abridged version of a section of the story that is based on
Yoshioka’s translation of the 1966 writings of the late Sia Raga Reverend, David
Tevimule (Yoshioka 25-39).

Bwatmaña and Tagaro

Bwatmaña resides on Raga while Tagaro resides on Maewo. The
story of their meeting recounts that Tagaro, while out fishing between the two
islands, finds a banana peel floating on the surface of the water. He is also
splashed on the hand by the juice of a coconut. The peel had been discarded

109 See Layard on what he calls the “Tagaro-Qat complex” (Layard 1942: 224, 572). As Yoshioka notes
(1987: 11), Bwatmaña is clearly the North Pentecost equivalent of the Banks Islands’ ancestral hero
Qat. In current Raga orthography the letters “bw” have replaced “q”, as used by Anglican missionaries
until the early to mid twentieth century (see also Walsh, 1966). Following this change, “Qat” should
therefore appear as “Bwat” (“source”, “foundation”). See also Codrington (1891: 156-7).
110 These are important issues that I aim to pursue further in article form (see Taylor n. d.).
by Bwtramahaña, who was eating at his place in Anserehubwe with his friend called Subwe. The coconut juice had spurted from one of their coconuts as they opened them. Finding that the banana and coconut tasted sweet, Tagaro attempted to cross the channel in his canoe but was forced back by a southerly wind. Unable to cross, Tagaro returned to Maewo and called out to Bwtramahaña to throw him more food. Bwtramahaña did so, and this is how fruit got to Maewo.\(^\text{111}\)

Later the sea became calm, and Tagaro paddled across to Raga to see Bwtramahaña at Avadhubwe. During the time that Tagaro stayed with Bwtramahaña, Bwtramahaña showed Tagaro many things, such as how to make the night come and how to sleep. Tagaro, worried that his followers would not be able to find him in the night, taught Bwtramahaña how to make monuments.\(^\text{112}\) However, Tagaro tricked Bwtramahaña into building his monuments below the tide line, and they were covered by the sea. Later Tagaro returned to Maewo, and brought with him Bwtramahaña’s gift of night.

Some time later, after building a canoe for himself, Bwtramahaña went to visit Tagaro at Maewo. Tagaro saw Bwtramahaña approach, and wanted to trick him again. He told his followers to dig a hole in the floor of his gamali in which he could hide, and to bring a stone with which to cover it. When Bwtramahaña arrived, Tagaro told him that he wished to repay in kind the knowledge he had received in Raga. He then told Bwtramahaña to set fire to his gamali with him inside, saying, “Though the fire will be very hot, I will not burn.” Bwtramahaña did so, and as the gamali burned Tagaro lifted the stone and entered the hole, covering himself up with the stone. Then, after the fire subsided, he re-emerged, saying, “Look, I am still here. I do not burn.”

Bwtramahaña believed this to be true. Tagaro told him, “Brother, because of this I know more things than I did before about how to make people. The fire has developed my knowledge. If you do the same as me, you too will share this knowledge and we shall be able to fill our islands with

\(^{111}\) As opposed to cooked root crops.

\(^{112}\) Tevimule’s text uses the word “doroitian” which Yoshioka translates as “monuments” (21). This translation is appropriate in so far as the markers that the two heroes leave are made of stone. Also, as with monuments, things that are considered doroitian are also imbued with a memory, of their producers, or of the event that brought about their existence. In this way Hardacre’s translation for this word is, “a pattern, design, likeness, memorial”, and importantly, “proof” (Hardacre n. d.: 36).
people. Let's go back to Raga where you shall burn in your own *gamali.*”

Bwatmahāna agreed.

At Raga, Bwatmahāna exhorted Subwe not to go close to the fire.

When Subwe asked what fire was, Bwatmahāna answered, “Tagaro eats things cooked with his fire, while you and I eat ripe bananas and coconuts. Tagaro caught all of the things that I threw to him, set fire to them in his *gamali,* cooked them, and ate them with his followers.” Tagaro added, “You eat ripe bananas and so you are weak. If you eat cooked things they will make your body stronger. Come Bwatmahāna, I will burn you in your *gamali* until you are cooked, then you will know the things that I know. We shall also make another island in the open sea to the west, and call it Tabae.”

When Subwe asked where the fire was, Tagaro said, “Here is the fire”. Bwatmahāna said, “But Tagaro, we forgot the fire which burnt your *gamali* at Maewo. You said, “Here is the fire”, but it is not in you hand”. Tagaro then broke off one of his fingers, and flames came out from it.

Bwatmahāna sent Subwe and the children of the giant clam and the button shell away some distance, then he entered the *gamali.* Tagaro set fire to the *gamali* with the tip of his finger. It burnt briskly. Tagaro then breathed on Subwe’s face causing all of the knowledge that Bwatmahāna had given to him to vanish from his head. This was so that Subwe could not take Bwatmahāna’s place as the leader of Raga. Bwatmahāna then began to cry out in pain, “Tagaro, you deceived me, I will leave.” But Tagaro took up his axe, preventing Bwatmahāna’s escape. Bwatmahāna cried out to Subwe to save him, but Tagaro had already blown away his knowledge. Bwatmahāna then climbed up the central pillar of the *gamali* with the intention of escaping through the roof. However the fire was already consuming the *gamali,* and Bwatmahāna burnt with the ridge pole.

Following his death, Bwatmahāna travelled to the west coast opposite Bunlap where he washed himself. His ashes drifting away in the sea eventually coagulated and formed the island of Ambrym. The volcanic fires of both Ambrym and Ambae, the latter of which Tagaro made with the cinders of

---

113 The island is Ambae, *tabae* means to “catch”.
114 Although similar to the story of Mugarimahanga (above), in Tevimule’s version of events people are said to be born from two different kinds of shellfish, the giant clam (*tala*) and the button shell (*matmaita*). These also explain the origins of the two moieties.
Bwatmahaña’s *gamali*, are all embodiments of Bwatmahaña. With the help of his followers Bwatmahaña then travelled along a road leading from the south of the island to the north. Finally he reached Vathubwe, a rock lying just off the northern coastal tip. As he sat on the upper part of the rock (the *rongyari* stone), it split in two. He then passed into *abanoi*.

* * *

The reason why the narrative of Bwatmahaña and Tagaro is so important is that it tells the story of the origin of human engagement with otherness. It thereby provides insight into the ambivalent dualism that has become the fundamental architectonic feature of the Sia Raga cosmological, metaphysical and social universe. In Sia Raga *imwa* (houses) and *gamali* (“men’s houses”), Bwatmahaña – the “foundation diverges” – is elegantly objectified in the central supports, called *gai mahaña* (“supports that diverge”). Bwatmahaña’s homeland and place of death, Anserehubwe (his *bwatun vanua*), is likewise remembered in the central ridgepole that the *gai mahaña* support, called *gai hubwe* (“the support that meets”). (I expand further on these architectonic features of houses in the final chapter).

As Battaglia found of the Sabbarl, this dualism is not simply positive and productive, but has equally negative and destructive tendencies. Thus the entangled careers of Bwatmahaña and Tagaro suggest a fraught relationship. Like the monster Katutubwai of Sabbarl children’s stories, Tagaro’s relationship to Bwatmahaña represents that of “the spectre of the ambivalently valued Other that haunts the texts of human life – texts taken as interactional or “dialogical” constructs, where the Other is historically an aspect of one’s own life” (Battaglia 1990: 38). The processes of birth, growth, procreation, death and knowledge all depend upon the ongoing activation and engagement of that otherness which contains both the power to give and to take away. This burden is here made apparent in the character of Bwatmahaña’s follower Sumbwe, for whom knowledge gained through loyalty to one side is always in danger of being taken away by the other.

For the people of Gilau, Tagaro’s arrival marks the beginning of human violence, and of an era in which *tamata* (peace) no longer constitutes the natural order of things but must be constantly strived for and negotiated. Today, the search for *tamata*
represents the primary stated goal of all Sia Raga ritual enterprise. In the course of striving for social and cosmological unity within an already divided world, division itself becomes part of that strategy.

**TAVALUI: THE DIVIDED WORLD**

When Codrington first noted the pervasiveness of the idea of “sides” as a socio-linguistic category linking the islands of northern Vanuatu, he argued that the extreme cultural and linguistic diversity that he found to be characteristic of the region must have emerged from a more unified source. Thus he wrote of the Banks Islands:

The identity of the language is conspicuous, however mutually unintelligible the dialects may be; and wherever a native of one of these islands may land he may find his due place in the gamal, the clubhouse of the Suqe. What is chiefly remarkable as showing how comparatively modern are these diversities, even of language, is the identity in all these Northern New Hebrides of the division of the population into two “sides of the house,” which obtains in the Banks Islands (Codrington 1881: 291, see also Wilson 1932: 65).

The notion of duality is also a pervasive feature of the Sia Raga conceptual universe in which it is considered that all things should have two “sides” (tavalui), and that everything must have a “partner” (also tavalui). While in some instances such duality is considered in terms of hierarchical opposition – a person’s strong, “good” right side is distinguished from their left side, which is weak and “bad” – it is more often the case that the two are seen to form an ambivalent yet productive complementarity. Thus the form of relationship witnessed in the characters

---

115 On the Small Islands of Malakula, Vao and Atchin, Layard explored the both topographical and conceptual division of society into the “Sides” (nuan) of lodge, stone and island. He also found the linguistic category to be flourishing throughout the northern islands of Vanuatu (Layard 1942: 168). In the diffusionist style of his forebears, Morgan (1877), Codrington (1891) and Rivers (1914), he concluded that this provided further evidence for the theory of matrilineal primacy in the region (Layard 1942: 169; and see Allen 1981a, 2000). Patterson (1976) also discusses northern Vanuatu ideas of complimentary opposition. She notes that the Ambrym term tali ving means “one side of a bunch of coconuts”. Here the emphasis is patrilineal rather than matrilineal: “a man and his father and a man and his son are “tali ving”... Likewise, a woman and her father’s sister and a woman her brother’s daughter are “tali ving”, but not a woman and her children...” She also makes the important point that such terms do not in fact pertain to the definition of categories or groups as such, but rather express the relationship between categories (Patterson 1976: 90-93).

116 Hardacre’s definition of tavalui is “a side, one of two parts” (Hardacre n.d.: 87).

117 See Crowe (1990: 89-95) for a discussion of left hand/right hand distinctions ris a ris what he describes as broader “dualistic, twinning aspects of the Melanesian World”, and northern Vanuatu in particular,
Bwatmahāna and his adversary Tagaro is also present in the physical environment: the rough sea of the east exhibits masculine qualities that are contrasted with the feminine calm of the west.

This pattern of gendered complementarity also provides an ideal for technological design: a male canoe hull is supported by a female outrigger, houses are supported by both the male *varas atamwani* beam and the female *varas vavine* beam. In so far as women complement men, such duality often takes the form of significantly gendered pairings. Here my use of the term “complementarity” is not meant to imply that such relationships are viewed as harmonious. Indeed, while an idealist vision of the world existing in a state of peace (*tamata*) provides the Sia Raga with a beacon of hope, very few people would agree that such a state is realistically possible at present. Complementary pairings are instead seen to perpetuate in a condition of simultaneous support and tension, a dynamic yet volatile push and pull that is both reciprocal and productive, but also potentially divisive.

The division of the entire population into two exogamous matrilineal moieties, *Bule* and *Tabi*, provides the most powerful example of how dualism works as a productive organising principle within Sia Raga society. The two moieties are commonly referred to as *tavalu*,¹¹⁸ which has the basic meaning of “opposite”, “side”, “half” or “partner”. An individual’s sense of belonging to either one of the two major social divisions – of being either *Bule* or *Tabi* – is inscribed from birth as one of the most basic elements of social identity. Inclusion in either of the two moieties provides the basis of one’s social categorisation, and for this reason strangers who arrive to stay in the area for only a few days are quickly defined accordingly. Conversely, to suggest that someone belongs to neither *tavalui* is considered the most serious of insults. One turn of phrase for such an accusation, *matan gai halhala*, is translated by Hardacre as “son of a floating stick” (Hardacre n. d.: 40). This anticipates the arboreal images of kinship described in the next chapter. It also clearly resonates with Jolly’s discussion of the privileging of different kinds of movement amongst the Sa speakers of South Pentecost. In North Pentecost, also, whereas rootedness and motivated movement are highly regarded, “mere wandering or floating is deplored” (Jolly 1999: 284).

One of the many important characteristics of the distinction between one’s own moiety members and those of the “other” lies in the way it permeates the ceremonial and ritual duties that punctuate Sia Raga life. At such occasions, through performing

---

¹¹⁸ Also noted by Rivers (1914, Vol.1: 190).
those duties and obligations that are so important in the creation of the social identity of persons, matrikin and patrikin “become” interminably embroiled within a process of reckoning, delivering and receiving.

Like the role of hands in the making of string figures, tavalui construct the division across which meaningful hala (ways, roads, trajectories) may become linked. Indeed, tension and interplay between the moieties is considered to be essential to the maintenance of efficient and harmonious social relations and production. A strict rule dictating that a person may not marry a person of his or her own moiety is maintained, while major prestations in large part follow a cross-moiety trajectory. Intra-moiety marriages, called bona, are said to sometimes occur despite ridicule and ostracism. Such unions are however very rare, and only one was evident during my visit.

As Wagner found amongst the Barok people of New Ireland, the moieties both contain their own and nurture the other, and thereby “stand in a relation of asymmetrically and perpetually unresolved hierarchy to one another” (Wagner 1986: 49). In this way Layard noted a “creative tension between the moieties, which are at one and the same time necessarily opposed to one another and also essential to one another’s existence” (Layard 1942: 103). Whether performing transactions with the other-world, abami, or in prestations between kin, all ritual action is ultimately concerned with the re-definition of differentiation and relationship between tavalui (sides). The relationship between sides therefore appears as both a separation and a binding together. Between them the Sia Raga anxiously negotiate strategies by which to sustain a perilous equilibrium; to stop the sides from falling away from each other, but also from merging into confusion.

In North Pentecost, as the result of this creative tension the two social divisions are perceived as entangled, or “stuck” to one another. This “entanglement” (cf. Thomas 1991a) is described by the word wasi. Being wasi is itself considered a two-sided predicament, with good and bad qualities. It implies both difficulty and costliness, but perhaps more importantly, strength, tenacity and security. For this reason Sia Raga social life is considered to be inescapable, a situation which may give rise to feelings of resentment as well as assurance. In particular, like a severe case of “tall poppy syndrome”, the tension of otherness is seen to act in such a way as to negate assertions of individual difference. People complain that it is hard to get ahead, that they are
constantly swallowed up by society. As one person told me, to be man Raga is like being trapped in the jaws of a clamshell.\textsuperscript{119}

**ALENAN TUTURANI: THE WAYS OF FOREIGNERS**

Appearing in contradistinction to this appraisal of Sia Raga social organisation are widely held impressions of ale\textsuperscript{n}an tuturani, or the “ways of whites/foreigners”. Tuturani has become an important oppositional category in the Sia Raga classification of their world, providing terminology for marking the otherness of introduced objects and styles. The concept of tuturani gives the Sia Raga a tag for most every plant, animal, artifact and kastom that has crossed their shores since contact with Europeans (c.f. Dening 1980). People may speak of ginan tuturani (white man’s things), including such things as uhi tuturani (fruit: tuturani, pawpaw) and wai tuturani (water: tuturani, alchohol). In this way ale\textsuperscript{n}an tuturani (white man’s fashion) are contrasted with ale\textsuperscript{n}an vanua (ways of the place) as two related but opposing “sides” (tavalut) within Sia Raga classificatory idiom.

Once I told Jif Ruben Todal that my parents were divorced, and that this was not an uncommon situation for children of my generation. In response he suggested that together we write a book outlining the basic principles of Sia Raga kinship, and of moiety dualism in particular, and that we present this book to the New Zealand government. The nation-wide implementation of this social strategy in New Zealand would, he believed, put an end to the break-up of marriages.

When people say that there is no divorce on Pentecost they are articulating their faith in ale\textsuperscript{n}an vanua (ways of the place), and of a social cohesion bound up in the play between “sides” (tavalut).\textsuperscript{120} At the same time, Jif Ruben’s proposal reflects the idea that, by contrast to Sia Raga sociality, the world of tuturani (whites) is “free”. It is a society without structure, and devoid of the restraints formed by the webs of connectedness that bind the two moieties together. The price of this freedom, social chaos, is seen to extend beyond the family sphere. It is also made evident in negative images of theft, violence, self-advancement, and the gap between rich and poor in the West.

\textsuperscript{119} As we have seen, some creation histories recall that clams, talai, or other shellfish are the source of human origins.

\textsuperscript{120} Marital separations do infrequently occur on Pentecost.
What follows is abstracted from a North Pentecost creation history that was narrated orally by the late Father Walter Hadye Lini in 1981. This history, which was transcribed and translated from Raga by Lini and David Walsh, is titled “*Veveren bwatun taurwo, ata la V‘anna Raga*”\(^{121}\) or “A story about the beginning of creation, from Pentecost Island” (Walsh 1981). Following the emergence of the island from the sea, the story begins with the birth of a baby boy from a kind of shellfish. After the boy grows up he meets a sea snake that later transforms into a woman:

"Thus the man and the woman came together and produced children. They two produced ten children while they stayed there, at Atano. They produced ten children, and they [the children] stayed there – and then they two moved on and went so that they would stay at the place of that woman. They both went and stayed there, at Anarasi. They stayed there until they produced some children there. Their children were many – they two arose from there and went up and stayed at Loltongo. They stayed at Loltongo and they produced some children there. They produced some children, and they [the children] stayed there – they two arose from there and went up and stayed at Bwatapni. They stayed there and produced some children there also. They produced some children and they [the children] stayed there, and then they two arose from there and went up and stayed at Vat-tangele. They stayed at Vat-tangele and they produced children there also.

"It – all the children that they two produced – began at Ahivo and went up until it reached Vat-tangele; some were white people and some were black people. Today we call the white people *tuturani* and the black people *atatmato* (Walsh 1981: 368-369).

The people then began quarrelling with a land snake, *teltele*, who eventually trapped them in their village by covering the entrance with a large rock. They then decided that the white people should try to escape by digging their way out of the village:

"The *tuturani* dug a hole – it went down underneath the fence of that village. They dug it – it went until it went down and came out on the coast; but on that coast stood various boats they had made – canoes and sailing ships. When the *tuturani* went down so that they would get away, they took those sailing ships and went with them, and those black people stayed and kept the canoes that lay there.

---

\(^{121}\) Note here the different spelling of the word *taurwo* from that given above (*tauru*).
The *tuturani* went – they went and stayed at other islands on which today *tuturani* are found; and the black people stayed at Raga – so today black people are found on Raga island... Raga people today say that the *tuturani* went with those sailing ships and also with all the knowledge and wisdom, and therefore today the black people stay back from certain knowledge and wisdom which the *tuturani* know today (Walsh 1981: 370; all spelling is as it appears in the original text).

This history differs from those that I was told on North Pentecost in several important respects. The unitary origins and kinship of *atatmato* and *tuturani*, along with the latter’s departure rather than arrival to Pentecost Island, represents a revision that bears relation to the political climate of national independence in which the story was told. However, the narrative components provide a condensation of themes that recur time and time again in Sia Raga histories. Thus it clearly resonates with the story of Bwatmaña’a’s death (above).

In particular, “upward” (*hae*) colonisation of the land along a north to south itinerary followed by division or branching into “sides” reinscribes the crucial orienting pathways by which the Sia Raga understand the both emergent and present relationship of people to knowledge and place. Here, moving from the village of Atano in the far north (at Ahivo, “at down”), then moving progressively southwards through a series of places – Anarasi (at Abwatuntora), Lol Tong, Bwatnapni (in Central Pentecost) – until eventually reaching Vatun ğele at the very south of the island, the peopling of the land occurs along a reverse trajectory to that which was forged by Bwatmaña’a in his journey to *abanoi*. Significantly, histories recounting the nineteenth-century arrival of the Anglican Church and its spread across the island also follow this path (for instance Leona n. d.). Likewise, the departure of *tuturani*, “with those sailing ships and also with all the knowledge and wisdom” (Walsh 1981: 370), represents a splitting into ambivalently composed “sides”. This is understood to exist within much the same kind of relationship as the two Sia Raga moieties, *Buie* and *Tabi*.

In this chapter we have seen how the people of North Pentecost deploy metaphors based on arboreal imagery in order to explain ideas of origin, ancestry, historical emergence and social organisation. In the apical ancestor Bwatmaña’a we saw

---

122 For instance, note the story’s contemporaneity with John Leo Tamata’s father’s acquisition of the name Vira Liñ Tuturani (see the Epilogue of this thesis).
how the concept of foundations or roots (*bwatuna*), coupled with that of bifurcation or branching (*mahāna*), constitute significant features of reference within these metaphors. The importance of trees as images of spatio-temporality rests not only in their shape, but also the manner of their growth. The becoming of the tree is seen to “take place” along these two interrelated trajectories (*ha/a*), one appearing to take the form of lineal sequence, the second the form of divergence or branching. As the land-tree designs drawn by Jif Ruben and others demonstrate, the tree has the capacity to incorporate simultaneously both an atemporal cartography or topography, but also a spatialised temporality and itinerant history.

Anyone familiar with the ethnography of Southern Asia and the Pacific will be aware that the employment of trees as metaphors for understanding social topography on historical terms are common throughout this region. However what is unusual about the Sia Raga example, and similar to the Moorhead people (Rumsey 2001: 28), is that although this topography is considered to have emerged in sequential fashion, it is not perceived to be hierarchically ordered as so often appears to be the case elsewhere. The Sia Raga conceive of historical linearity as articulated with spatial divergence, and in terms of this articulation the past does not appear as a series of substitutions, but rather as layers of renewal. Histories produced within the rubric of this ontology entail a condensation of the language of time into that of space and place. In stressing the presence of historical location and movement, the past is not seen to be wholly “gone”. Instead, through the idea of *we!ena* we see how the past might constitute a crucial path of action. For people in *ureure*, travelling such a path entails an overcoming of crises brought about through the passing of time. This pathway leads to the perfection of *abanoi*, where lies the truth of the people of the place.

---

CHAPTER FOUR

FLUID TECHNOLOGIES: PATHS OF RELATIONSHIP, SPIRALS OF EXCHANGE

The Sia Raga orient themselves as persons through reference to a corpus of relational categories which, like the mazy lines of a sand drawing, intersect and link with each other to provide an intricate mesh of social identity. These categories are regulated and maintained by a range of more or less formalised practices and social conventions – of marriage, nurture, deference, obligation or reciprocity – all of which are grouped under the body of knowledge called siloa vanua (the “laws of the place”). Yet despite the imperative of these rules as bequeathed by the practices and teachings of ancestors, there is considerable flexibility in the alignment of categories and room for individual manipulation. So, in the same way, while from an ideal anthropological perspective of kinship structure these terms may be rendered diagrammatically as a complex self-perpetuating “system” – a joy for those who delight in playing with mathematical puzzles – in reality the terms of that system are rorted and flouted through a constant flux of negotiation and reconfiguration.

The path towards understanding Sia Raga kinship that is negotiated in this chapter traverses across observations of social practice that I apprehended in North Pentecost first-hand, and information provided within the written texts of indigenous commentators. These understandings are further contrasted with images and ideas produced throughout a century of academic debate within the fields of ethnology and kinship studies. By way of a caveat, I should state immediately that much of this chapter engages in what I see as an inherantly problematical project: that is, treating kinship terms and categories as systemically “fixed”, and rendering them as internally consistent within closed diagrams. However, my reason for persevering with this form of analysis not only represents an attempt to convey some of the intellectual delight (and frustration) that these images have given me. Scepticism of the ability of the visual technologies of kinship studies to effectively convey a sense of sociality as lived practice might also be made to relate to the contention made throughout the thesis: that is, that the Sia Raga themselves think of their relationships in terms of abstract images, and that these likewise, “in reality”, deviate from actual practice.124 Sia Raga images and idioms

124 There is nothing entirely novel in this approach for Vanuatu. See especially Patterson (1976), whose work on North Ambrym has stressed the patiality of kinship terminology and the diagrams that have been used to map these, and instead focuses attention on the value of indigenous concepts.
of social organisation draw on an array of familiar objects from the North Pentecost natural and cultural environment, from the botanical – yams, coconuts, trees – to the more specifically “designed” – sand drawings, houses, pigs tusks. In so far as many Sia Raga people themselves self-consciously understand and interpret kinship as a strategy, in which peace (tamata) is the ultimate goal, it is an imperative that their interpretive images and idioms are also effective in conveying the conceptual workings of those understandings.

THE “RAGA SYSTEM”: A BRIEF ETHNOGRAPHIC HISTORY

While kinship was an important topic of interest for early colonial commentators on Sia Raga ethnology, such as Reverend Codrington (1891), the anthropological interpretation of Raga kinship as “system” was initiated substantially in the 1914 publication of W. H. R. Rivers’ The History of Melanesian Society. Like Codrington before him, Rivers had visited North Pentecost only briefly, in his case during the 1908 tour of the Melanesian Mission ship Southern Cross (Rivers 1914, Vol 1: 189). His data was based largely on interviews with indigenous Anglican mission scholars held either on board the Southern Cross or at Norfolk Island. These accounts were supplemented by information gained through correspondence with missionaries resident in the field, such as Reverend N. H. Drummond and Ellen Wilson (Rivers 1914, Vol 1: 189-192). Along with the young Sia Raga catechist Louis Tariwali, it is John Pantuntun who appears to have been his primary ni-Vanuatu informant for both Pentecost and the Banks Islands (Rivers 1914: 199). As a catechist from Mota who had worked for several years in North Pentecost, John Pantuntun’s analysis was itself framed within a cross-cultural comparative framework, a context that is clearly present in Rivers’ writing:

John Pantuntun, from whom I learnt most of what I have to say about relationship in the Banks Islands, had lived for some time in Pentecost and frequently compared the customs of this and his own island in a very instructive manner. One day when speaking of Pentecost he said more or less in scorn that it was a place where they married their granddaughters. Here it seemed to me at once was the source of the anomalies of the Pentecost system… (Rivers 1914 Vol 1: 199).
Two years after the publication of The History of Melanesian Society (Rivers 1914) Raga kinship terminology appeared in diagrammatic form for the first time, in four tables laid out by John R. Swanton (1916: 456-459). Following Swanton’s appraisal, and despite Rivers’ assertion that it represented “the most complicated and extraordinary of all those recorded” (Rivers 1914: 189), the “Raga system” or “Pentecost system” as it had become called, caught only cursory attention over the next several decades (including especially Seligman 1928; but also, Deacon 1927: 327-328; Firth 1930; Layard 1942: 74, 97; and Murdock 1949). With the exception of Firth, who stopped for a couple of days with the resident missionary on his way to Tikopia (Firth, 1930: 58), none of these anthropologists spent any time on the island. Instead they relied on the “fragmented” and “uncertain” work of Rivers (Yoshioka 1985: 27).

The distinctiveness of the North Pentecost system from those represented by the language groups of its southern neighbours was not explored in any detail until the early 1960s when a flurry of articles appeared. These focused particularly around the ethnographic work of Robert and Barbara Lane (Lane 1961a, 1961b, 1962b, 1962c; Leach 1961; Löflller 1960; Needham 1963). The arguments of each revolved around what Rivers had previously identified as the central problems of Sia Raga kinship: that Sia Raga men both share moiety affiliation with and acquire land through their mothers, that they reside avunculocally, and that they marry their terminological granddaughters. Since the coexistence of dual moieties and matrilineal emphasis in the Raga system suggested to the diffusionists a regional survival from an earlier period, these problems were seen to be of vital importance in unlocking broader questions concerning the history of culture change throughout the wider area of island Melanesia.125

In 1974, in the wake of these debates, the Japanese anthropologist Masanori Yoshioka conducted his post-graduate fieldwork in the region of North Pentecost, with kinship as a primary topic of research. As the first person to carry out long term fieldwork in the region, Yoshioka’s data and analysis displays a level of detail and sophistication that goes far beyond previous accounts. His work on kinship has appeared in numerous published and unpublished articles derived from this and subsequent visits, most of which are published in English (1975, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1993, 1994).

125 Examples of Sia Raga kinship being described as in some way archaic or antecedent appear throughout the anthropological record (Rivers 1914 Vol 2.: 189; Deacon 1927: 334-335; Layard 1942: 140; Löflller 1960: 457). For an overview see Allen (1981a) who reevaluates these arguments in terms of socio-political and symbolic issues.
FLUID TECHNOLOGIES

Earlier researchers, such as Codrington and Rivers, found a rhetorical impetus in teleological and evolutionary ideas that viewed the degradation and eventual demise of "primitive societies" as a natural and inevitable outcome of the West's civilising onslaught. The eschatology of "science" likewise underpinned Yoshioka's "salvage" approach. In the most rigorous of his articles he painstakingly attempted to mathematically reconstruct what he called the "traditional system" of Sia Raga kinship and marriage from what he saw as "collapsed" and "confused" remains left over from the crisis of colonialism and missionisation (Yoshioka 1985: 31, 40). This spectre of an original "traditional system" that runs throughout Yoshioka's work accords with the overwhelming Sia Raga opinion that I encountered while in the field. People on North Pentecost also consider contemporary kinship practice to be considerably degraded from the correct practices of amua ("at first"). This too is viewed as an inevitable outcome of the growing prevalence of alengan tuturani (the ways of whites) within Sia Raga society, and of the participation of young women within Western forms of education and urbanisation, in particular.

Having Yoshioka's very detailed and complex analyses at hand while in the field, I turned my own interests in this area to the task of attempting to gain a broader understanding of the idioms and images that Sia Raga people themselves draw on when thinking about kin-based social relations. Nevertheless, in returning from the field I was at pains to reconcile my "interpretive" data with those earlier genealogical and systematic analyses. As I immersed myself in the challenge of appraising my own data in relation to Yoshioka's published work, as well as those of previous anthropologists, I too became captivated by the abstract elegance of North Pentecost kinship as "system" (no longer to appear in quotation marks). From this initial burst of enthusiasm emerged the compilation of a file of simultaneously perplexing and enlightening diagrams, the sum collection of which seemed to say at once everything and nothing about Sia Raga kin categories.

At this time, my supervisor Margaret Jolly encouraged me to return to the work of John Layard, and in particular to reconsider his approach to the visual representation of kinship systems. In Stone Men of Malekula: the small island of Van (1942), published more than twenty five years after he carried out extensive fieldwork in Vanuatu, John Layard had introduced a new technique for rendering kinship data in diagrammatic form. Inspired in part by Gregory Bateson (Layard 1942: 113), this "circular technique" was designed to overcome certain structural problems that he found with charts drawn
CHAPTER FOUR

up according to the firmly established genealogical method (Layard 1942: 107). Layard presented the technique in two separate forms. The first of these was described as “structural” (see image 32), the other “functional” (Layard 1942: 116, adapted in images 37 and 38). What struck me as important about the latter “circular (functional) technique”, and whether this was of concern to Layard is not stated, is that these circular representations resonate with many of the idioms and metaphors that ni-Vanuatu evoke in talking about the processual nature of relations of exchange and kinship – circles and spirals, the growth of yams and pigs’ tusks, in particular – where birth, death and marriage are conceptualized in terms of a broad flow of departures and returns across discernible trajectories. This model in no way replicates kinship-related practice. But, as Patterson also argues, it does go further than the more familiar horizontal/vertical depictions (such as images 34 and 35) towards rendering the connection between kin categories and other relational concepts with “elegance and parsimony” (Patterson 1976: 106).

In Art and Agency (1998), Alfred Gell identified an important connection between the northern Vanuatu artistic practice of what is called uli in North Pentecost (so-called “sand drawing”), and certain diagrammatic interpretations of kinship theory. His claim for a direct “ancestral” link between the kinship diagram that was drawn in the sand for Deacon by a man from Ambrym126, and those subsequently produced by Levi-Strauss in The Savage Mind (1966) may be unfounded (Gell 1998: 90).127

Nevertheless, there is clearly a sense of “kinship” between the two forms, especially in the extent to which they capture a sense of sociality as processual and circular rather than static and linear. This abstract connection between uli and the broader idioms of northern Vanuatu kinship, as well as to the circular visual approaches of anthropologists such as Layard (1942), Levi-Strauss (1966, 1972), Deborah Bird Rose (2000) and others, has seldom been lost on anthropologists in Vanuatu (see images 30 and 31, below). Nevertheless it is a connection that remains largely unexplored in published accounts.128 One important issue raised by Gell’s work relates to the sense of enchantment that I have suggested emanates from the notion of kinship. In moving images, or as abstract conceptual objects, kinship itself may be seen to function as a certain kind of psychological technology. Like the designs on Iatmul lime containers or the

127 Perhaps if he’d made the connection to Layard’s work, this “ancestry” might have been better illustrated.
128 Stephen Zagala is currently undertaking doctoral research on the topic of “sand drawing” in Ambae and surrounding areas. For a survey of this artform, see especially Deacon (1934b).
interweaving patterns of Celtic knot work, kinship diagrams and ulti, as both physical images and analytical concepts, exert a difficult trap-like influence. Such "apotropaic patterns", as Gell describes them, carry an inherently ambivalent agency, one that is as much agonistic and defensive to understanding as it is beneficial (Gell 1998: 74-83).

Image 30: Simon Godin demonstrating an ulti ("sand drawing") of Vatun ɢele, the "door to paradise" (Photograph by Stephen Zagala).
Before going on to present my own adaptation of Layard’s diagrammatic approach to the Sia Raga material, and to relate these to some Sia Raga idioms and finally to marriage exchanges, let us take a detailed look at the structure of Sia Raga kinship terminology. It should be pointed out that the weight of the material presented here generally leans towards a male perspective. While this is also a commonplace in kinship studies, more than anything else it reflects the gendered position that I assumed while in the field. Whether I talked to men or women about matters relating to kin classification and terminology, this was the perspective that such conversations invariably assumed. The salient issue for my interlocutors was to show how I fitted into the picture, not to describe abstract or imaginary relationships.

RELATIONSHIP TERMINOLOGY

In the classificatory language of kinship studies Sia Raga terminology represents a variant of a “bifurcate merging” system, such as is widespread throughout the Pacific region (Keesing 1975; Haviland 1994). That is, there are two moieties that are defined matrilineally and through the distinction between cross and parallel cousins.
Terminological equation occurs as follows; father (tama) is classified with father’s sister’s son and father’s sister’s daughter’s son, etc; father’s sister (vwarwa) is classified along with her daughter, her daughter’s daughter, and so on; one’s own child (nitu) is classified along with the children of one’s mother’s brother, mother’s mother’s brother, etc. (Yoshioka, 1985: 33). North Pentecost terminology displays similar structural characteristics to the “Dieri model” in so far as it may be rendered as a four line prescriptive system based on matrilines with a symmetric terminology (see image 32, from Patterson 1976: 442; also Layard 1942: 117).

Image 32: Four line matrilineal prescriptive system with symmetric terminology, based on the “Dieri model” (adapted from Patterson 1976: 442).
### Same-Moity Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Relationship Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ratahi (mua)</td>
<td>M, MMM, ZDDD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarabe (bena)</td>
<td>MB, MMB, ZDDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahoa</td>
<td>ZS (m. s.), ZD (m. s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tua</td>
<td>B (m. s.), Z (f. s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuaga (tuta)</td>
<td>eB, eZ, MM, MMB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibi</td>
<td>yB, yZ, DD (m. s.) DS (f. s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hogoai</td>
<td>Z (m. s.), B (f. s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibi veve (sibi, bibi, bubu)</td>
<td>FF, FFZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mabi veve (mabi)</td>
<td>SD (m. s.), SS (m. s.), BSS (f. s), BSD (f. s.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Cross-Moity Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Relationship Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tama (tata)</td>
<td>F, FZS, FZDS, ZDH, DH (w.s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vwarwa</td>
<td>FZ, FZD, FZDD etc., ZDHZ, DHZ (f. s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nitu</td>
<td>S, D, DDD, DDS (m. s.), MBD, MBS, MBDDDD, MBDDS, etc., MMBD, MMBS, MMBDDDD, MMBDDS, etc., WM, WMB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibi</td>
<td>H, MF, MFZ, MMMF, MMMFZ, MFZD, MFZS, MFZDD, MFZDS etc., ZH, ZHZ, ZHZD, ZHZS ZHZDD, ZHZDS etc., HB, HZ, HZD, HZS, HZDD, HZDS etc., HM, HMB.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mabi</td>
<td>W, WB, WZ, DD, DS (m. s.), DDDS, DDDD (m. s.), MBW, MBWB, MBDS, MBDD, MBDDDD, MBDDS etc., MMBW, MMBWB, MMBDD, MMBDS, MMBDDDD, MMBDDDS etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Affinal Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Relationship Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahoa</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasula</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bwaliga</td>
<td>WF, DH (m. s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habwe</td>
<td>HZ, BW (f. s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulena</td>
<td>WB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huri</td>
<td>FZH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bracketed terms indicate those more commonly used in address. (f. s.) stands for “female speaker”, (m. s) “male speaker”.

145
Matrilineal connection is the defining characteristic of same-moiety relations. A person’s own moiety members include one’s mother, her female siblings and her parallel cousins, all of whom are called ratahi (or more informally as a term of address, mua). A person’s ratahi reciprocate with the term nitu, or “child” (as do real and classificatory fathers (tama) and father’s sisters (vwarwa) in the opposite moiety). The male siblings of one’s ratahi are referred to by the term tarabe, and they reciprocate with the term aloa. (Likewise, a man calls the children of his own sisters aloa and they call him tarabe.)

When addressing same-sex siblings and parallel cousins, with whom a person also shares moiety affiliation, the reciprocal term tua is used. The root of this term (as discussed below) is also used between a man and his matrilineal grandparents (ie. MM/F, MMB = tuaga; DD/S (w. s.)). On reciprocal terms, therefore, this also includes one’s sisters’ maternal grandchildren (ie. ZDD and ZDS = tibi). By contrast, opposite-sex siblings and parallel cousins of the same generation address each other with the reciprocal term hogosi.

Same-moiety relationship terminology therefore consists of four sets of primary relationships; two intergenerational relationships employ diurnal terminology (ratahi/nitu and tarabe/aloa) and two same or alternate-generation sets employ a single term reciprocally based on the distinction between same-sex (tua) and opposite-sex relations (hogosi). In structural terms, therefore, the people that a man calls tua and hogosi are his
parallel cousins at his own and each alternate generation. The generation of parallel cousins above his same-generation tua he calls tarabe and ratahi (or mua), and those of the generation below he calls aloa. This matrilineally defined pattern of same-moiety relationships is emphasised in Image 34.

Not made apparent in Image 34 are the terms sibi and mabi (for significant reasons that are discussed further below). In the same-moiety context sibi and mabi are reciprocal terms denoting kin who are related through the tracing of patrilineal descent, that is, one’s father’s father and his siblings (sibi) and, for a man, the children of his own sons, and those of his brothers’ sons (mabi).

**Cross-moiety Relationship Terminology**

Image 35: Matrilineal relationships, cross-cousin emphasis (from Yoshioka n. d.: 3).

The two major elements defining cross-moiety relationships are paternity and marriage. Opposite-moiety membership includes one’s father and his brothers who are all called tama, and their sisters, called vwavwa. It also includes all cross cousins. The same classificatory terminology for the tama/vwavwa sibling set is accorded to the children of one’s father’s sisters, and all of their direct maternal descendants (ie. F = FZS, FZDS, FZDDS (tama), FZ = FZD, FZDD, FZDDD (vwavwa), etc.). The reciprocal term for tama and vwavwa, nitu, therefore includes a person’s own children, the children of one’s mother’s brother and also mother’s mother’s brother (ie. S = BS, MBS; D = BD, MBD, MMBD, (nitu), etc.). For a woman these will also include the children
and matrilineal descendants of her own sisters who are in her own moiety (ie. those whom her brother calls alob or tua/hogosi, depending on generation). Included for a man are the children of one’s sister’s sons, as well as the children of one’s own daughter’s daughters.

With the exclusion of affinal relationships, the two remaining terms used to define cross-moiety relationships are also used to define specific same-moiety relationships. These are mabi and sibi. Following Patterson (1976), I would suggest that when used in the context of cross-moiety relations these terms are employed as “masking terms” in the definition of marriageable categories. Sia Raga marriage prescription, which as we shall see is not rigorously followed, state that a man should marry his opposite-moiety female mabi, and a woman her opposite-moiety male sibi. In this cross-moiety context the mabi category comprises the children of a person’s own female nitu (children). Included therefore are the children of one’s mother’s brother’s daughter (ie. MBDD, MBDS), who Yoshioka suggests represent the “ideal” category into which a man should marry (1985: 42). From the male perspective the category also includes one’s maternal grandchildren, although as far as I am aware such marriages do not occur. Part of the reason for this is that the Sia Raga generally prefer marriage partners to share generational proximity, and in this way a man’s MMBDD is also considered to be an appropriate potential partner (mabi). One’s cross-moiety sibi, on the other hand, comprise one’s mother’s father, his brothers, and also his sisters and all of their direct matrilineal descendants. In this way marriage prescription for women conceived in its most elementary form is with the MFZS, or MFZDS. Matrilineally defined cross-moieties relations are emphasised in Image 35.

Vara and bou

The intimate relationship between people and land that is explored throughout this thesis suggests that the land-tree images discussed in the previous chapter (images 23, 25 and 29) might themselves be considered as kinship diagrams. Jif Ruben once assured me that as well as depicting the historic dispersal of people across the land, they also demonstrate halan vavine (roads of women), or halan lagiana (roads of marriage). Indeed, marriage in North Pentecost is conceptualised as taking place across and between particular places (vannua) as much as individual people, as is the case throughout
northern Vanuatu (Bolton 1999; Jolly 1994; Patterson 1976). While these roads are not made visually explicit in the land-trees, for anyone who understands how Sia Raga marriage patterns work it is possible to “think” marriage cycles within the images. In this section I will consider two final concepts which, along with bwatuna (foundations, roots), bala (trajectories, ways), mahanga (divergence) and tavai (halves, sides), are central to Sia Raga interpretations of social organisation and spatio-temporal conceptions of personhood. Collectively these terms represent the fundamental components of the land-tree images (discussed in the previous chapter). They are also fundamental architectonic components of houses (discussed in the final chapter). The two related yet distinct terms vara and hou, which are used to define people within abstract groupings, also speak of the spatio-temporal nature of kinship in North Pentecost, such as are further discussed in this chapter below.

Sia Raga social patterning and categorisation involves a complex and dynamic interweaving of principles incorporating both the matrilineal and patrilineal reckoning of descent. Through the terms that relate to these principles, and in specific situations, people are able to distinguish social divisions at a number of levels. Such a division, at whatever level it is conceptualised, is often referred to as a vara. Thus, not only are the two moieties Buie and Tabi sometimes called vara, but so are individual family groups. So, too, are groups formed through more abstractly co-operative enterprise. Vara is related linguistically to the term vora, to “split” or “divide”, but also to be born or “become” (Yoshioka and Leona 1992: 38). It is also the word used to describe a newly germinated coconut (navara).129 Vara then denotes both a separation (the coconut from the tree) and a sprouting (the young shoot from the coconut).

A hou differs from a vara in its broadest definition in that it is more specifically denotative of ancestral connection. Even so, such a group may also be referred to by the term vara. Ancestral connection in North Pentecost and throughout northern Vanuatu is not only conceived in terms of the passing of blood, but as a continual flow of place-substance.130 Hardacre, in her dictionary of c1920 defines hou as “1. in sequence, generation. 2. layer in tağure,131 iron etc. 3. respect, honour. tav hou holmatara ["We will respect/honour their faces"]. ram hav houau tehe ["They don’t respect/honour

---

129 Like “it”, or “the”, the prefix na is merely a locative prefix, such as is also found in words such as nagamali, nasara and nagarama. Varana, with a locative suffix “of it”, is also used more specifically to refer to the pith of the coconut.
130 I thank Margaret Jolly for the term ‘place-substance’.
131 Tağure is the Raga word for the sago palm, the leaves of which are used in making roof thatching. A woven section of thatch is also called tağure.
me”]” (Haracre n. d.: 55). Here the simultaneity of “sequence” and of “layer” points to a temporality that is perhaps difficult to comprehend from a Western perspective, and which I would suggest is central to understanding the way in which Sia Raga conceptualise social relations in time. As with layers of thatch on a house (see chapter six), through the concept hou the vertical and lateral – the past and the present – merge into one (diagonal) “line” or totality. Thus the relationship between layers is characterised by identification rather than differentiation. As Ruben Todali once told me, “hou speaks of the generations of people”. As with the Ambrymese notion of langlang ne wanten, that Patterson translates as both “layers of men” and “generation”, the concept of hou may “emphasise laterality” (Patterson 1976: 90), especially in the context of everyday practice. But in terms of a broader Sia Raga temporal cosmology there is really no need to radically distinguish past ancestors from subsequent generations, including those of the present.

The concept hou does not then express ideas of simple lineality, such as is rendered in typical Western depictions of “descent”: a unilinear sequence traced top down (or in a “family tree”, bottom up). Rather it involves more loosely interpreted cognatic patterns by which persons and ancestors merge through connection to particular foundation places (bwatun vanua). Thus it relates to ideas of group identity that occur throughout the wider Melanesian and Pacific area; these merge seemingly fixed ideas of “descent” based on biological filiation, with other strategies of group recruitment, such as common ties to place, participation in ceremonial exchange, shared work and consumption (see Allen 2000; Strathern A. 1969; Strathern M. 1985, 1988; Feinberg 1981; Holy 1996).132 Hardacre’s translation also points to an ethos that is contained within the notion of hou, one that clearly has deeply felt moral implications of “honour” and “respect”. Hou not only refers to one’s status within a group (vana), it also signifies one’s ancestral connections to place; the cosmological definition of one’s social identity. It is from the hou that a person’s ihan boe, or “pig names” gained through ritual sacrifice are usually derived. Names attained from this source, rather than, say, the

132 Also, of related interest here, Michael Allen argues that in contrast to patrilineal societies: “groups defined by reference to the matrilineal principle are deprived of that vital political attribute of membership flexibility. It is, indeed, very difficult for such groups to assume the range of political functions commonly associated with their agnatic counterparts” (Allen 2000: 35). Allen goes on to cite Lane (1962), stating: “With the possible exception of north Pentecost no such localization of the matrilineal groups occurs” (Allen 2000: 36). In fact, in my experience, no such localisation occurs on North Pentecost. Instead, Sia Raga matrilineal groups generally accord to Allen’s broad description, being characterised by a dispersed nature that “cuts across rather that unifies hamlets, villages, districts and even islands” (Allen 2000: 35).
patriline, are considered to be more "heavy" (marahi) because, as one person told me, "they dig down more deeply". It is in the context of hou that birth and ritual sacrifice are perceived to incorporate processes of re-embodiment, by which matrilineal ancestors are made manifest in living people in the present (see chapter five).

Yoshioka suggests that in the context of kin-based social organisation vara refers to a "matrilineal line or a matrilineal relation" (Yoshioka, 1988: 20). In this way the matrilineal moieties may also be referred to as vara as well as tavalai (sides) (Yoshioka 1985: 30). My understanding includes Yoshioka’s essentially taxonomic definition, but is once again much broader in that the concept of vara may sometimes be more simply used to describe any social group that is defined laterally in actual practice, and usually in association with particular places. While such groupings might be typically understood as defined through the reckoning of descent, and their association with specific origin places (bwapun vanua), this is not always the case. In fact, such a division may or may not be based primarily on what is typically understood by the term "kinship", as connoting biological connection, at all. Thus Hardacre’s definition of vara, “row, group, verse, family, tribe” (n. d.: 91), better reflects the term’s broader meanings.

In some of the contexts in which vara was employed during my visit it was expanded to include members of both moieties whose shared connection to place was one forged through practice rather than genealogy. Indeed, the entire population of Gilau was often described to me as comprising a single vara, despite being made up of numerous matrilineal decent groups from both moieties. This was especially the case when used in the context of describing the Gilau “community” of shared work. Regardless of the fact that the Gilau community is bound together through ties of marriage and descent, the defining criteria of vara inclusion in this case had little or nothing to do with these. It instead referred to the willingness of people who actively participated in co-operative work within the geographically defined area of Gilau. As John Leo Tamata once explained it to me, one’s vara is not necessarily a fixed category, but may change along with one’s changing circumstances, particularly as people move across the land (conversation at Avatvotu, January 2000).

What this discussion of the term vara brings into relief is the extent to which issues of kinship in North Pentecost, or anywhere else for that matter, cannot

---

133 There is some confusion regarding the term vara in Yoshioka’s work. For instance, he elsewhere describes vara as “a category subordinate to tavalua [the moiety]” (Yoshioka 1988: 20). However he also makes clear that he is only interested in these terms in so far as they relate to the structural aspects of kinship categorisation (Yoshioka 1988: 20), rather than an emphasis on actual practice.
adequately be reduced to static principles of classification and structure. While being
guided by ideas of descent and marriage, alignments of relatedness and the forging of
identity also depends upon ongoing processes involving social practices of production
and consumption that “take place” within particular localities. The planting and tending
of garden crops and their harvest and consumption as food provides the most potent
medium through which such relationships occur. Lane makes this point when he says
that on Pentecost:

...people are products of the land, through the substance transferred to them
in food from the land. Thus any person “nurtured” by the land, regardless of
ancestry, acquires some degree of connection, a point that is relevant in the
post-contact period (Lane 1971: 250).

Patterson also considers locally produced food, that is imbued with a spiritual
power of place, as central to identity. She suggests that the giving and eating of food
grown in particular locations creates “a notion of shared substance” (Patterson 1976).
And as well as being the product of the soil, food is also the product of the work that
people do on that soil. And like food, work also produces relationships.

The concept of \textit{vara} thus expresses the importance of the productive value of
land, work and food as shared activity. Food, as well as pigs and other products, is the
objectification of that shared work. Such things may be exchanged, and in doing so
become separated from their producers in the act of recreating or objectifying other
relationships based on difference. But food that is produced and consumed
cooperatively merely serves to further emphasise group relations (Strathern 1988: 177).
Thus the concept of \textit{vara} accommodates the degree to which people are able to move
across and between what might otherwise be seen as rigid terms and categories of
kinship and genealogically defined group identity, such as occur through acts of
individual strategising or group negotiation. As the above quote from Lane implies, it is
through these ideas that people like foreign anthropologists are able to become real
family members.

The difference between \textit{vara} and \textit{hou} may therefore be explicated as follows: the
former relates to a group that is defined laterally through actual practice while the latter
more specifically pertains to the identification of groups through the reckoning of
descent to common ancestors. Where the terms crucially overlap is that they are both
mediated through the important concept of place, or \textit{vanua}. \textit{Hou} thus refers to the
temporal and genealogical emergence of sociality from particular \textit{vanua} (and in continuing
reference to these), whereas \textit{vara} refers primarily to continually shifting relationships
forged in practice across the landscape. This distinction is implied by their separate deployment within the land-tree images (especially image 29): whereas hou traces the more lineal time-passage of the central trunk, vara (spelled "vora") are oriented across this vertical dimension and instead trace the space-passage of the branches.

While vara may describe the situatedness of one’s identity within a group, hou goes further by referring to the matrilineal sourcing of that identity, including names, land, prestige and power. This extrapolation provides an explanation as to why, when I asked people the difference between vara and hou, they would often tell me that they were simply different words for the same thing. The Bislama translations most frequently given were famli (family), or laen (line). The latter term resonates further with Hardacre’s definitions, “sequence” (hou) and “row” (vara) (see above). As is more generally the case with concepts and terms of kinship, such an understanding also allows for the fact that both vara and hou can be meaningfully and strategically employed by individuals in specific situations. In the same way that vara may be used to define oneself or another in terms of inclusion within an almost limitless range of social groupings, one is also able to claim connection to a great number of different hou. Surprisingly little confusion is caused by the multivalency of terms such as vara and hou in practice. This is because the level of meaning is always made apparent through the social context in which it is employed.

SPIRALLING WITHIN: SAME-MOIETY RELATIONSHIPS AND THE REPRODUCTION OF THE MATRILINE

The Sia Raga consider the matriline to be the source of all sociality, and for this reason women are considered ideologically to be the basis of all production and the rightful custodians of land. The ideology of matrilineal primacy is expressed linguistically in that the common term of address for one’s mother (and classificatory ratahi), mua, is also a homonym of the word for “first” (ie. also mua). Matrilineal primacy is also given credence on historical grounds via the story of Mugarimaña, the first woman and primal ancestor (see chapter three). Such discourse is countered by the fact that women move to the place of their husbands in marriage, rather than the other way around. Also, in the historical reckoning of matrilines it is the male ancestors whose names are more often recalled. With the exception of founding female ancestors, such
as Mugarimaña, the names of female ancestors tend to be remembered only as far back as four or five generations. On the other hand a knowledgeable informant will be able to rehearse his or her male matrilineal pedigree as far back as twenty or more generations.

Women give birth to women in a never ending cycle. Conversely, from the male perspective, children become “lost” in so far as they are classified within the “other side” of society (that is, in the opposite moiety). Layard rendered this basic feature of dual moiety matrilineal societies in what he described as a “purely theoretical diagram” that I have reproduced in Image 36 (Layard 1942: 110, fig 18). Of course the main problem with this diagram (from the matrilineal perspective) is that no distinction is made between the mother and her female children, or between the mother’s brother and his sister’s male children. The Sia Raga do indeed distinguish between mothers and mother’s brothers on the one hand, and women’s children on the other. There is nonetheless a sense in which these intergenerational sibling sets are considered to form a single, cohesive and productive, tripartite unit. For this reason I have adapted Layard’s circular diagram of a similar system (1942: 118, fig. 25) so that these terms are brought into closer proximity. Note that each intergenerational dual sibling set of mother, children, and mother’s brother (shown in each quarter of the diagrams) shares moiety affiliation with that on the opposite side of the diagram (i.e. left/right, top/bottom). Image 37 shows the relationship between kin terms from a male perspective, while image 38 does so from a female perspective.
CHAPTER FOUR

Image 37: Circular representation of Sia Raga relationship terminology, male perspective.

Image 38: Circular representation of Sia Raga relationship terminology, female perspective.
Relations within the moiety are broadly characterised by solidarity and a lack of any overt social restrictions of avoidance or deference. This ethos is most strongly felt in the relationship between same-sex siblings, or tua. Taken as a whole, one’s tua are considered to be one’s peer group, and comprise the individuals with whom a person will usually socialise most freely. In the case of males, this is especially heightened during the life-stage of mwalegelo, at which time young men are allowed considerable social freedom and spend most of their spare time in the company of their tua. It is a relationship that is characterised by mutual support and sharing. I was often told that when a tua asks for anything it must be given, for it is understood that an equal return will eventually be granted. In this way low value exchangeable items of prestige often tend to circulate amongst groups of tua. This was made particularly apparent to me as I observed the circulation of one especially portable and partible class of items during the 1999 independence celebrations that took place over one week at Atavatamanga primary school. Here, throughout the lengthy kava sessions that concluded each evening, distinctively marked and coloured hats and baseball caps could be seen making their way across the heads of separate groups of tua, some changing hands up to five or six times in an evening. As might be supposed, however, tua relationships are not always free from tension, or indeed honesty. It is perfectly acceptable to hide precious belongings from one’s tua, or express resentment at having been forced to give something to a tua that one wished to keep. Nevertheless it is important that such tensions are not too keenly felt, or if they are, that they are not outwardly shown.

The relationship between opposite-sex siblings (hogosi) are very similar to tua (same-sex sibling) relationships in terms of solidarity and support. But they are also underpinned by the fact that men and women are responsible for the social and economic development of the children of their hogosi. It is particularly the case that men are expected to help their sister’s sons in organising their first major bolololi (pig-killing ceremony). Likewise, women encourage and promote their brother’s daughters within the female series of named grades by helping to provide necessary textile and pig wealth.

For the Sia Raga, as in many other matrilineal societies (Fortes 1959), the socially productive link between brother and sister is ultimately considered to be of equal if not more importance to that of a husband and wife (Holy, 1996: 103). However, the role of the mother’s brother in no way usurps that of the father, but is rather seen as complementary to it. Indeed, the cooperative ethos that ideally defines the relationship
of these two men is also signalled in the formal term by which a man refers to the brother of his wife, *bulena*, from the root "*bul*", meaning “attached” or “together” (see image 37). Throughout the course of a person’s life the role of the father as economic provider and source of knowledge will give way to that of the mother’s brother. As well as his own children, a man is expected to provide knowledge and economic support to his *aloa*, who ultimately stand to inherit his land.

From a child’s perspective, one’s *ratahi* (mother) and *tarabe* (mother’s brother) represent an undifferentiated source. Together these people form the components of a single unit. Linked through land and ancestors, the relationship between a man, his sister and her children is understood in terms of a shared flow of substance. The reproductive nature of this relationship is suggested metaphorically through the life cycle of the yam. Take for instance this extract from a collection of writings by the late Sia Raga scholar Reverend David Tevimule, written in 1966 and published in 1985 by Yoshioka as "The Story of Raga: A man’s ethnography on his own society", along with a translation and substantial commentary. My own translation (given below) differs somewhat from Yoshioka’s in several regards (although generally minor):

> My *hogosi* is given. Its second meaning is balanced fellowship. A man and his female *tua* address each other in this way. My *tarabe* is an old thing, or something which endures such as an old yam, old banana, or an old kava plant. The older part of an *aloa* is a man. A yam descends and reproduces — a man descends and is reproduced in his *aloa* that his female *tua* carries in her womb. In Raga or Aroaro a *tarabe* planted his trees and planted coconuts in the ground of his garden while pig, fowl and other things were in his house. In this way he prepared for his *aloa* who are the children of his female *tua*. This is the foundation of my *aloa*.136

> *Aloa* or my *aloa*. It means to surround or encircle, as the land of a *tarabe* or his plantings will be gifted to all his *aloa*. Everything that surrounded him is a part of this gift. One’s *tarabe* once enclosed or encircled. If one’s *tarabe* dies and his land belongs to all of his *aloa*, they will look after his wife and all of his children (Yoshioka, 1988: 38-41).

As Jolly found for the Sa speakers of South Pentecost, the Sia Raga perceive of the nurturance of children as being akin to cultivating crops (1994: 167). The

---

134 Note that here Tevimule does not use the term opposite-sex sibling term, *hogosi*.
135 Aroaro is another, lesser used Raga name for the island of Pentecost.
136 Yoshioka points out that *aloa* here carries the meaning of “my surroundings”, in addition to its use as a kinship term.
137 In Raga, like the sun to which it also refers, the word *alo* means circle, to encircle, or to circulate.
production of food, like human life, involves a never-ending cycle. As Jolly suggests, “…the corpse of the dead must lie in the grave as does the tuber in a hole” (ibid). And just as the land (tano) provides the nutrients that ensures a yam’s regermination, so too does it provide the basis of the ancestral regeneration of the matriline. So what is regenerated is not just blood, but also the “place-substance” of the vui tanonda (literally, the “spirit of the earth”).

Through the potent image of yam cultivation, Reverend David Tevimule’s commentary on the relationship between men, sisters and sister’s children emphasises shared substance as the basis of producing persons, both physically and economically. In one sense they are different manifestations of the same being, what Robert Foster, following Dumont and referring to the Tanga Islands in New Ireland, calls a “collective individual”. In a way that resonates further with what Foster suggests for the Tangan (1995: 216), for the Sia Raga the constitution of this unitary identity is considered to be a precondition for effective lineage replacement. Maintenance of matrilineally-based group identity (bau) requires that dead matrilineage members be replaced by living ones, and that through this process new lineage leaders “return again” (dabagilu mule) to re-embody old ones. Thus the term for a man’s sister’s son, aloa, is derived from the word for the sun, alo, which also means “to circle”. A pig’s tusk also circles in this trajectory, and a pig that has tusks that have grown full circle is called a livola (literally, tooth-circle). I will return to these issues of circles and spirals at the end of this chapter.

Tai Simaño: cutting the young coconut

The regenerative aspect of the tripartite collectivity of mother, child and mother’s brother is initially made manifest in the pre-natal ceremony, tai simango.138 When a woman is known to be pregnant her husband will inform his own father (the child’s same-moiety sib) of the imminent birth. He, in turn, will inform the mother’s father (cross-moiety sib). Together the two male grandparents decide upon an appropriately knowledgeable mother’s brother (tarabe) to perform tai simaño. This usually occurs two or three months before the expected birth. On an agreed day the appointed tarabe (mother’s brother) of the unborn child arrives at the parents’ house.

---

138 This account is based on descriptions conveyed to me orally. Tai simaño is said to be irregularly performed today, and I never witnessed such an event personally.
CHAPTER FOUR

with a very young coconut (*simaño*). After entering, he cracks open the coconut and begins washing his *hoqo's* (sister) pregnant belly with the sweet water (*wai*) it contains. By performing *tai simaño* a woman's brother aids the process of reproduction that began with the insemination of his sister by her husband. The "water" (*wai*) of the coconut is absorbed into his sister's womb through her skin where it contributes to the proper formation of the foetus, and therefore helps to ensure a healthy birth.

The coconut tree features prominently in Sia Raga symbology and provides a potent sign for conceptualising groups of people (see above), as well as the life stages of individuals. For instance, when a child is two or three years old she or he will be encouraged to play with a newly sprouted coconut (*navara*) on the ground of their *bwatun vanua* (foundation place, place of birth). After the child has given up playing with the coconut it is left wherever it lies to grow, remaining as *dovona* (memorial/proof) of their own growth and presence. Throughout northern Vanuatu the coconut is also clearly associated with fertility, and as with other food crops, such as yams in particular, is identified with the never-ending cycle of life and death (Jolly 1994: 167).

Immediately following the performance of *tai simaño* the *tarabe* will disclose to the expectant mother the future of her unborn child—whether it will be a boy or girl, whether it will be a chief, etc. This predestination is made possible by the cyclical nature of Sia Raga notions of personhood. The Sia Raga do not believe that each person is a unique individual, but rather a mixture of distinctive character traits and those acquired through their position as re-embodied ancestors. Through assessing the matrilineal pedigree of the child's parents, the place of birth (*bwatun vanua*), as well as the season during which the birth takes place, the child's *tarabe*, as a knowledgeable matrilineal leader, is able to ascertain the identity of the matrilineal ancestor about to be reborn. In return for his work of divination the mother gives her brother a prestation of one *bwana* and ten *bari* (large and small exchange textiles). This payment is also considered important for securing his future support, especially for providing guidance to his *aloa* in activities surrounding pig killing. In so far as such events will constitute further re-embodiments—a "taking back" of the names of ancestors through the ritual sacrifice of pigs—his support is considered essential.

---

139 On North Pentecost the coconut is also sometimes associated with masculinity, as opposed to the kava plant which is female. This is made explicit in the story of *Aso*. *Aso* is an evil man. He neglects his sister, and his *aloa* kill him in his *gamal*. The first coconut tree then sprouts from his dead body. They also kill his wife (*Moloni*) who becomes the first kava plant.
PATRILINEAL RELATIONSHIPS AND THE SIBI/MABI “PROBLEM”

Also included in one’s own moiety – and more specifically, within one’s own bou – are those grandparents and grandchildren whose “blood” (daga) is said to have “returned” to the matriline by way of paternal relations. The importance of alternate patrilineal generations is apparent in that a person shares a “totem” with his or her paternal grandfather (sibi) and grandchildren (mabi). Referred to as garigarigi, these are usually an animal of some kind, but also include the supernatural beings sarivanua and mwei that were discussed in the previous chapter. Each garigarigi is said to inhabit a particular stone (vatu) that is located within the bwatun vanua (foundation places) of individual bou (“descent groups”, see above). Thus the garigarigi of my own bou, and which I therefore share with Ruben Todali’s other children, inhabits a stone called nawita (the octopus), and is located on Bule ground near Lagaronboga. The garigarigi of Jif Ruben’s bou, the shark (bageo), is located on Tabi ground nearby. Recall that Jif Ruben’s father is believed by some people to have turned himself into a shark in order to return from a labour vessel to Pentecost (see chapter two). Garigarigi are manipulable, not by members of one’s own “totemic group”, but in the case of a man, by his own children who are in the opposite moiety to him, and for a woman, by her brother’s children. As well as being called on to provide aid, garigarigi may be used to bring harm to members of one’s father’s bou, usually by causing sickness to the targeted individuals, or damage to their garden crops.

In terms of the circular diagrams I have presented above (Images 37 and 38), intergenerational paternal relatives of ego and their hogosi (opposite sex siblings) are found in the upper of the two same-moiety sibling sets that are located on the far right hand side of the diagrams; that is, those marked sibi (FF, FFZ) and mabi (SS, SD). Note, however, that these terms also appear within certain cross-moiety relationships. The apparent ambiguity of this doubling of kinship nomenclature has been a noted point of contention within the anthropological record as far back as the work of W. H. R. Rivers. This no doubt provides the reason why Rivers’ informant, John Pantuntun, was able to make the derisive comment that Pentecost “was a place where they married their granddaughters” (Rivers 1914 Vol 1: 199, and quoted above). Elsewhere Rivers writes:

...sibi is used both by males and females for the father’s mother and the mother’s father [see “cross-moiety relationship terminology”, above]....

According to some informants, including those from whom Mr Drummond
inquired, it is also applied to the father’s father, while others said that this relative was properly addressed as *atulaveraku*, i.e. man of my *verana* [read *vara*].

It will be remembered that one informant classed this relative with the mother’s brother so that for this relationship there is definite discrepancy of evidence (Rivers 1914 Vol 1: 194-195).

While the final assertion of Drummond’s unknown informant was undoubtedly wrong, here Rivers picks up on this continuing point of confusion regarding Raga kinship terminology: namely, that the same set of reciprocal terms that is used to mark specific same-moiety relationships (ie. between siblings and their paternal grandchildren) is also used for particular cross-moiety relationships. Most strikingly, this includes those terms that represent the most “correct” relationships of marriage prescription.

Yoshioka has summarised these as follows:

…it is said that a man should marry his female *mabi* and a woman should marry her male *sibi*, although it is prohibited for a man to marry his real granddaughter and for a woman to marry her real grandfather. On the other hand, it is also said that a man is obliged to marry a daughter of a man belonging to the opposite division of the same moiety (1985: 35).

Despite the otherwise exhaustive rigour of his work, this is one important issue that Yoshioka fails to adequately attend to. In the list of terminology provided in his 1985 examination of “the Marriage System of North Raga, Vanuatu”, “FF” appears as both *sibi* and *tuaga* (elder brother) and “SS” as both *mabi* and *tibi* (younger brother) (1985: 32; and see also figure 2 on page 33 of the same text). Nevertheless, despite the fact that one’s father’s father is clearly a member of one’s own moiety, he mainly goes on to discuss *sibi* and *mabi* in terms of cross-moiety relationships and marriage (Yoshioka 1985: 36). When he finally addresses the issue – in a somewhat confusing manner – it becomes clear that he also considers *sibi/mabi* to represent the correct nomenclature for the same-moiety relationship. He interprets the fact that other same-moiety terms are sometimes used in their place (such as *tuaga/tibi*). This, though, he argues represents a practice that has emerged through the recent appearance of “incorrect” marriages occurring as a result of the incursion of Christianity. In a later brief examination he lists “SS” as *tibi* (younger *tua*) and does not list “FF” at all (1988: 23).¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ There is another discrepancy of this kind in Yoshioka’s 1985 list that is probably related: SW (m.s.s) is listed as both *mabi* and *aloa*. Also, no terminology is given for HF.
While I do not wish to dwell on these discrepancies here, I would suggest that they reflect the flexibility of Sia Raga kinship patterning just as much as they do erosions caused by foreign influence or a lack of understanding and analytical flexibility on the part of foreign commentators. As I have suggested above, my own experience is that a person calls his or her father’s father and his siblings by the term *sibi*—or, more intimately, by the inflection “*bibi*”. These “grandparents” reciprocate with the term *mabi*. This is consistent with the general thrust of previous data, including one of the most recent surveys to have been undertaken prior to my own research (Walsh 1990: 116).

The point that the same kin term that is used to describe certain close same-moieties relations is at the same time used to describe highly restricted cross-moieties relations may in my analysis happily remain a “structural anomaly”. Whenever I enquired about the fact that people have relatives that they call *sibi* and *mabi* in both moieties, the response I always received was always one of casual affirmation. Sia Raga people themselves do not see this particular use of kinship nomenclature as in any way anomalous. When I pressed the matter with Jif Ruben Todali, he suggested a distinction between opposite-moieties *sibi lalagi*, “you’re scared of them, they’re *gogona* (taboo)”, and same-moieties *sibi vere* “who you can talk to” (discussion held at Avatvotu, December 2001). While I follow this terminological distinction in the table above (image 33), it should be remembered that the terms *sibi lalagi* and *sibi vere* are not used in usual Sia Raga discourse.

A possible explanation (if one is needed at all) is that *sibi* and *mabi* are used in some contexts as what Patterson calls “masking terms”. That is, “they are used in preference to the “proper” terms of reference because of the particular behavioural connotations of those terms” (Patterson 1976: 140). If this is the case, it is probable that *sibi* and *mabi* are in fact the correct terms for the same-moity relationship, rather than the cross-moity one whose “shame” they mask. This conclusion is also reached by Jolly in her consideration of Sa terminology whose terms for this relationship (*Tsivik* (*bibi*) and *Mabik*) are clearly cognate to the Raga (1994: 105). Regarding North Pentecost, this interpretation is further supported by the very important fact that the word *sibi* is also used in the construction *sibida*, meaning “our (matrilineal) ancestors”. Thus, the same-moity *sibi/mabi* relation shows the important interplay between

---

141 Indeed, the suffix –*k* is merely a possession marker (“*my tsibi*”, “my *mabi*”). In Raga, this would similarly appear as *sibikn*. 162
matriline and patriline in conceptualising moieties, and thus resonates with the term *bou* (described above). It is in same-moiety patrilineal grandchildren (*mahi*) that one’s blood and place-substance are seen to “return”.

SPIRALLING WITHOUT: CROSS-MOIETY RELATIONSHIPS AND THE CYCLES OF MARRIAGE

Outside the *gamali* at Avatotu, as preparations for a forthcoming *bolololi* progressed around us, John Leo Tamata explained to me that in similar fashion to the idea of ancestral regeneration, marriage trajectories are also ultimately viewed as circular (*alo*) in nature (January, 2000). Members of a given matriline are reproduced over time through the routing of ancestral blood and place-substance along particular circular trajectories. Since women in their capacity to give birth are positioned as the crucial conduits of these components, they are directed in marriage to travel along particular roads (*bala*). Indeed, in this sense they are said to be roads themselves (see below). In so far as the correct combination of patrilineal and matrilineal elements is required in order to affect ancestral regeneration, it is essential that this be so. The flow of women across the land and the activation of ancestral return through procreation are crucially linked. As in other parts of northern Vanuatu, it is considered to be of utmost importance that the place-substance (*taqarna*)\(^\text{142}\) of a descent group (*bou*) travels in a circular fashion, whereby it is eventually returned to its source. Such circularity is achieved through the flow of women in marriage between hamlets or *vana*, and ultimately between individual *bou* (matrilineal descent groups).

Sia Raga marriages are patrilocal, and so with the exception of those few marriages that occur between people who live in the same hamlet, women usually move to the hamlets of their husband when they marry. In these typical circumstances, when a woman marries into another *bou*, and moves to another hamlet, the loss that she represents to the people of her *bou* (*place of origin*) is eventually made up by

\(^{142}\) Regarding this term, compare Allen, who describes the North-East Ambaen concept of “*taqarna*” as being similar to the “common Pacific concept of *mana*”: “but whereas *mana* refers to inherent power than enables an individual to carry out routine tasks in a successful manner, *taqarna* specifically refers to a man’s capacity to manipulate supernatural forces” (Allen 2000: 20). This differs significantly to my understanding of the North Pentecost term, which is not confined to males, or specifically to the “supernatural”.

163
the reciprocal replacement by marriage of a female descendant of that woman from the

*hau* into which she had originally been received. In this way, marriage is ultimately seen
to be a process by which women are exchanged between *vanua*.

As indicated in image 37, on a purely structural level Sia Raga marriage
prescription is based on the exchange of daughters amongst men who call each other
*bwaliga*. As Yoshioka Masanori has put it:

*Bwaliga* is a term used only between men who have married ego's female *nitu*,
before their marriages these men are referred to as either *tarahe*, *aloa*, *tuaga*, *tua*,
or *tibi*. In other words, ego's female *nitu* forms the sole marriageable category
to ego's *bwaliga*. Ego's *bwaliga* refer to all of ego's *nitu* as his *mabi*, while he
refers to all of ego's *mabi* as his *nitu* (1985: 32). 143

In this way, while *bwaliga* share moiety affiliation, it is usually the case that they
are members of a different *hau* (“matrilineal descent group”). In image 37, ego is *bwaliga*
to his *tua* on the opposite side of the diagram because each married the other’s daughter
(*nitu*). Similarly, ego’s *tama* (at top) is *bwaliga* to his male *sibi* (at bottom).

Bolton has observed that marriage throughout northern Vanuatu is
conceptualised as a means for opening “roads”, and thereby establishing distant
relationships and cementing alliances not just from hamlet to hamlet or district to
district, but from island to island. The ethnographic example she uses to highlight this
point is a quotation from the Sia Raga *ratahiyi* (“chief”) and Vanuatu Cultural Centre
fieldworker Richard Leona, who told her, “‘a woman is like a stick that you throw’
into a new place, to go before you and open the way there for you” (Bolton 1999: 49).
Household dwellings are also pivotal to Sia Raga understandings of relationship between
people across space, particularly with regards to marriage, and to the interconnected
network of *hala* (tracks, roads) that criss-cross the North Pentecost landscape. Since the
most frequent purpose for building a new house is to accommodate the arrival of a
bride from another *vanua*, *imwa* also reveal links between *vanua*. Reverend Tevimule’s
written interpretation of the Raga kin term for wife reveals this sentiment, though this
time it is the perspective of the husband rather than that of the bride’s kin group that is
assumed: “*Tasalaku* [my wife] is *halaku* [my road] leading to the father of my wife and
the mother of my wife” (Yoshioka 1988: 39). As roads or branches, women are
perceived as vital to the creation of links between men of different *vanua*.

Tevimule’s interpretation of the reciprocal term *bwaliga* is also instructive:

143 For a more complex structural analysis of these terms I refer the reader to the article cited.
Chapter Four

*Bwaliga* or *bwaligaku*, its meaning is *gan* [to pass or span something with another thing] or *bwaligana* [something which is used for spanning]. When a branch of a tree goes close to a branch of another tree, a man can pass from one (to the other) (Yoshioka 1988: 38, all parentheses are as they appear in the original).

Clearly recalling Jif Ruben’s land-tree images, this explanation suggests further ways by which the Sia Raga employ arboreal imagery as an interpretive strategy for understanding the social landscape. Here two trees are imagined, with each representing an “other” moiety or matrilineal descent group. The metaphoric social space of two sides (*tavului*) is at the same time figured as the physical space between actual places (*vanua*), and further, as linked by “roads” (*hala*) formed by the bending of the trees’ branches, thus suggesting the looped trajectories of women in marriage.

Yoshioka writes that, “Two men who are *bwaliga* to each other are clearly conscious that they exchanged women reciprocally” (Yoshioka 1985: 50). My own experience of the term is that men need not necessarily be married in order to have *bwaliga* relations with particular *tua*. In classificatory terms, any given male will have a great many female relatives, of all ages, whom he addresses as *nitu*. Not only may one call the husbands of those female *nitu* who are already married *bwaliga*, but the same may also apply to their husband’s unmarried brothers. Also, since they will have classificatory brothers who are themselves married to the first man’s classificatory *nitu*, they too are said to share a *bwaliga* relationship.

In these contexts, and until actual practice proves otherwise, such usage assumes that a “correct” *nitu*-exchange marriage will eventually take place. In actual fact – speaking from the male perspective – *vwavwa* marriages are also considered acceptable, although to a lesser extent, and are fairly common. Less accepted, but still not uncommon, are *nitu* and *sibi* marriages.144 While Yoshioka interprets such “incorrect” marriages as representing “a collapse in the traditional system in the present day” (1985: 36), I would suggest that such an analysis is unnecessary. As he also points out (Yoshioka 1985: 36), the considerable flexibility of Sia Raga kinship dynamics allows that, with the exception of very close family members, where marriages other than between female *mabi* and male *sibi* occur, people are able to selectively change the terminology with which they address their affinal kin. These terminological adjustments

---

144 Unfortunately I have no statistics to support this claim, but an estimated ratio based on my own observations would be that *mabi* marriages make up 60%, *vwawwa* marriages 20%, and *nitu* and *sibi* marriages 10% each. There was only one same-moiety (*bona*) marriage in evidence during the time of my fieldwork.
do not seem to give rise to any confusion, and categories are worked back into alignment in subsequent generations. As such, in some respects terminological adjustments might be seen to represent partial rather than complete transformations.

During an afternoon spent in conversation with my tuo Haggai and hogosi Agnes, I learnt that had I been in North Pentecost five years earlier I would have referred to one particular male relative (George) as sibi. However, following his recent marriage to one of my nita ("children"), I had instead come to know him as my tama (father). In my experience, George’s case of terminological adjustment was typical in that concession is always made on the “side” (t sculptures) of the father. This allows for terms within the matriline to remain unaltered. In such circumstances it is usually the individuals themselves who choose whether a terminological change is made. I had developed a good friendship with George, and with some amusement Haggai and Agnes suggested that the next time I speak to him I should address him as my sibi. A few days later I found myself at Atamu, George’s hamlet, with Haggai. “Kantamba sibikai” (“Good day my sibi”), I said smilingly to George as I met him in the shade of the gamali. His obviously embarrassed response inspired similar embarrassment in myself as I realised I’d been fooled into fauas pas. As George’s mabi I would never have been able to speak to him so casually as I did then, or as I had throughout the previous months in which I
had got to know him. Here, in evoking our “real” relationship, it became clear to me why I rarely saw George at Avatotu, and if so, why he tended to stay quietly (gogonai) in or around the gamali. Throughout his childhood, and before his marriage, George had been sibi not only to my four brothers, but also to my four hogosi, such as Agnes, who were therefore regarded as potential marriage partners. As such his relationship with these people was characterised as lalagi (see below). Despite George’s efforts to circumvent the social implications of this situation by adjusting the terminology with which he addressed them, this clearly remained an underlying aspect of their relationship.

The nature of the relationship between cross-moieties sibi and mabi is described by the word lalagi. This term is related to the words lala, meaning “scared”, “separate” or “to avoid”, and also lagli, which refers to marriage (lagiana). The lalagi relationship is fraught with social restriction. Though these are said to have been much stronger in the past, young people I spoke to about the subject said that they were compelled to act quietly respectful, and that they felt “ashamed” when in the presence of opposite-sex sibi or mabi, and especially those that were themselves unmarried. Any inappropriate behaviour in such situations will readily be taken to imply a desire for, or indeed the already prior existence of, a sexual relationship with the potential marriage partner. Such behaviour might result in the placing of fines of exchange textiles or pigs, or even a forced marriage.

According to aleñan vanua (ways of the place), and following the theory of niti exchange, it is said that marriages should be contracted through collaboration between real fathers (tama) who are bwaliga to each other, and their hogosi (sisters). This reflects the fact, as we shall see below, that fathers and their sisters are the main economic contributors to marriage exchanges (lagiana). Betrothal was in the past often cemented even before the birth of children through the gifting of bwana (exchange textiles) in an exchange called mahalei (“the road”). When a woman became pregnant, one of her female sibi who already had a child, could, at the behest of her husband (who is bwaliga to the first woman’s husband) give to her a bwana. This prestation would ensure that, should she give birth to a child of the opposite sex, that their children would eventually

145 The definition of lalagi provided by Hardacre – “Father’s sister’s son. One who might claim a woman in marriage” – refreshingly would seem to be made from the female perspective, with “a woman” referring to the imagined female speaker’s daughter.
146 Such as described in Yoshioka’s publication and analysis the Reverend David Teviumule’s text (1988: 34-37).
become married (see also Yoshioka, n.d., no page numbers given). Such arrangements were not always considered to be made between individual parents, but rather between specific *vanua* (hamlets), or geographical areas. As a consequence of this I observed a high incidence, particularly amongst older people, of marriage between sets of brothers from one area and sisters from another. The majority of marriages in Gilau, for instance, are between men from that area and women from Labultamata, Lolotong or Lavusi.

The geographical focus of marriage is not surprising when we consider the relationship between kinship and the kind of images implied in Jif Ruben’s land-tree. Marriage is thought of as something that takes place across the land, and is thus conceptualised as a “way” or a “road” (*hala*). Yet while women moving between *vanua* in marriage facilitates the opening of roads for men to repeatedly travel in both directions, women themselves are usually expected to stay in the *vanua* to which they move and effectively give up their ties to birthplace (*bwatun vanua*). Marriage for women in many respects represents a movement from one situation of containment to another, a fact that is vividly illustrated and impressed upon them in the series of ritualised events that take place in and between houses during marriage rites (see the description of *lagiana* below). In this way a number of women expressed to me regret at the degree to which, since having married into other hamlets, they had become cut off from the people and places of their *bwatun vanua* (foundation places, birth places). Because of their dislocation by marriage, however, women are pivotal to the continuation of knowledge of their origin places. Since it is through their children that people will eventually “return” to these places, it is considered important that women teach their children the origin stories and other histories associated with these.

Today, while marriage is nominally prescriptive in so far as potential spouses are usually identified from particular categories, marriages are in fact formed as a result of a range of initiatives. The most frequent opportunities by which young couples are able to meet are provided by social festivities, such as the all night dances that follow most major *kastom* ceremonies, or at discos hosted by local youth groups. At such occasions young men and women have the opportunity to meet and instigate the discrete sexual liaisons known as *serava* (called *krip* (“creeping”), in Bislama). *Serava*, a frequent subject of speculation and joking conversations, involves young men sneaking off at night to seek a sexual partner in another hamlet. Since the young unmarried women, who must be coaxed, unstartled, out of their beds and beyond the hamlet perimeter, invariably
sleep in close proximity to their parents, *serava* can be a risky pastime, particularly as fines of pigs, *bwana* or *bari* (exchange textiles) can be imposed on those who are caught. While young men figure colloquially in this way as the agents of *serava*, it is necessary that the “objects” of their clandestine activities are equally enthusiastic. In this way *serava* more often involves prearranged meetings between equally consenting young men and women, and thus takes place within the context of already established relationships. Despite associated risks and restrictions, *serava* is a culturally institutionalised practice which often leads to marriage.

Young men of marriageable age (*mwalegelo*) often have houses of their own, and the building of a new house that is separate from their parents is taken as a clear signal that they are seeking a wife. However it is usually through the agency of the woman that a couple’s intentions to marry are signalled. In such an event, she will openly relocate to the house of her partner. Should they disapprove of the match, the parents of either partner may force the relocation of the woman back to her parents’ hamlet. Where no opposition is met with, anywhere between two months or several years may elapse before a *lagiana* (*kastum* marriage) takes place. This depends on the successful negotiation of a marriage “road” between the respective *vanna* of couple’s two families (see below).

Decisions to marry are often made very quickly. In an extreme case, my “*tama*” (father) George from Atumu (mentioned above) described to me how he met his wife, Joyanne, at a *gamali* that he had visited during another marriage ceremony. George told me how he had inexplicably found himself sitting on the opposite end of a mat from where a young woman he had never met before was also sitting. He found her attractive, and they kept looking at each other, but he didn’t know what to say to her. Eventually he blurted out, “Shall we marry?” Joyanne simply replied, “Yes”. George told me that they didn’t speak to one another again until their *lagiana* took place some two years later.

A more typical case was that of my *hogosi* Agnes, who met her husband Mark at a disco at Ahivo. Agnes had talked to Mark several times in the months leading up to the disco, and she had decided that she liked him. On the night of the disco they flirted, and she ended up staying the night at his house. As she continued to sleep at his house it became clear that their parents held no opposition to their choice. Eventually she was returned to Avatovou with a cycad frond indicating the day upon which they would become married.
Although marriage by betrothal at birth is infrequently practiced at present, parents and particularly fathers continue to demonstrate a considerable degree of jural control over their sons’ or daughters’ marriage choices. In such instances men may strategically use the marriages of their children to forge political or economic relationships for themselves or their families. Several years before my arrival in North Pentecost a prominent chief from Lolotong approached another from Gilau to express his desire that their teenage children be married. Having reached their agreement, the two fathers then informed their children of the match. Having met previously at Nazareth school, the two young people then arranged to meet each other in Luganville (where the young girl was studying at the time) to discuss the issue independently of their parents. While they were still not yet married during my visit, they were understood to be betrothed to each other as a result of their own arrangement.

During the course of my fieldwork several instances occurred of both young men and women being persuaded by their fathers to marry against their wishes, and I encountered mixed opinions throughout the Sia Raga community about the relative ethics of such occurrences. In one episode a young woman had been residing within the house of her partner from a neighbouring hamlet for several months. The couple were thereby understood to be bulena (together), and thus committed to marrying. Due to an ongoing dispute between members of the two hamlets, however, the young woman’s father and brother opposed their choice, and violently forced her to return to her father’s house. Shortly after her father announced that she was to marry another young man, this time from her own hamlet. This occurred despite her having fallen ill, with what was described to me in Bislama as “sik blong laur” (love sickness). Relations between the two hamlets were considerably strained over the next several months as members of the young man’s hamlet tried to persuade the woman’s father to allow the marriage between the two lovers to take place. The matter eventually came to a partial resolution following negotiation between the chiefs of the respective hamlets. The woman’s father was ordered to present the young man with the compensatory payment of a circle-tusk pig (livoala). To my knowledge, the young woman was not presented with any such compensation. A marriage eventually took place between the young woman and her father’s choice of partner, still against her wishes, several months later.

The above example clearly shows that while the stated imperatives of marriage and residence represent ideal modes of practice, in reality these are not always born out in actual practice. In this case the marriage that eventually took place was between a
man and his classificatory child (niti). Such marriages are not considered to be completely “straight”, but are acceptable none the less. As I was told, the young woman’s father was never the less considered to be spoiling (spilien) her for reasons other than her fraught personal circumstances. In forcing his daughter to marry within her own hamlet, rather than into another, he was also doubly precluding her broader economic and social potential – for himself, is family, and the wider community. By failing to operate upon her valued ability to create links (bala) across physical space, such as would boost further social and economic flows, he was also ignoring the opportunity of creating a balan tamata, or a ‘way of peace’, between the two feuding hamlets.

LAGIANA: MAKING PATHS OF MARRIAGE

Image 40: Ata Aru and Hilda Toa being congratulated at their mared biong foji (Lagaronboga, June 1999).
Marriage on North Pentecost usually consists of two ceremonies, the *lagiana*, or in Bislama *kastom mared* (marriage by *kastom*), and a Christian church wedding. Even so, people usually need only complete the former *kastom* ceremony in order to be considered “married” (*lag*). *Lagiana* and church weddings, in that order, are usually planned to take place during the same day. However, since time often runs short due to the lengthy and complex exchanges that must take place during the former, the later is sometimes dropped from the program.\(^{147}\) Where a church wedding does not occur on the day of the *lagiana*, it will often take place some months or years later. Church marriages are in this way sometimes performed in order to “strengthen” an existing marriage.

On the second Sunday of May, 1999, I attended a small church service at Lagaronboga in which Haggai and Miriam’s children were to be baptised. This was to be followed later in the afternoon by their two daughters performing *hunhuniana* outside the *gama!i* at Avatvotu (described below). While Haggai and Miriam’s *lagiana* had taken place two years earlier, they had not yet performed a *ajoj,i mared* (Bislama; “church marriage”). Since their relationship was known to have become strained in recent months, the deacon decided to take this opportunity to have them carry out a Christian marriage ceremony. When I later spoke to Haggai about the ceremony he told me that the marriage had been instigated solely by the deacon, and that he and Miriam were only informed that it would take place when they arrived at the church that morning. My field notes for this day recall that the marriage ceremony was carried out quickly and quietly, and that the only participants were Haggai, Miriam and the deacon. In comparison to the following baptisms, in which we all grouped around the little clamshell font located just inside the doorway of the church house, little interest was taken by the other family members present.

Arrangements for a *lagiana* (*kastom* marriage) begin with several *tana* (fathers) of the couple, including their biological fathers, meeting for *dari balana*, the “negotiation of the road” of the major exchanges that will take place at the *lagiana*, and by which the

---

\(^{147}\) With the exception of those people who are aligned to Seventh Day Adventist and Pentecostal churches, for whom participation in *kastom* exchanges of pigs and *bwana* (textile wealth) is discouraged, I am aware of very few instances where a church wedding has taken place before the *lagiana*. Generally speaking from the Sia Raga perspective, the reaffirmation of broad social networks that occurs through the strengthening of economic relations between groups that takes place at *lagiana* is valued as more consequentially “weighty” (*maraht*) than those more ostensibly individual, or more simply social rather than economically collective commitments that are expressed at a Christian wedding.
bride will travel. With these arrangements in place, in the morning of the day of the lepuma, the groom and his relatives set out from their hamlet to “take back” (dav mali) the bride from her parents’ house. She is “taken back” not only in the sense that they will bring her to their hamlet, but also because for the groom’s matriline she represents a restoration of a woman “lost” in marriage to matriline of the bride at some time in the past.

As the groom’s party approaches the house, the sound of women wailing in sorrow is heard from within as the bride’s mawwa (fathers’ sisters) cry over their “child’s” approaching departure. Two or more of the groom’s nalabi (mothers) and hogi (sisters) enter the house to “retrieve” the bride. As they lead her out, the bride is covered with an opened out iwamua (textile), wearing it on her head in the manner of bawamiana (image 41, also see below). She may also be accompanied by one or two of her mawwa, who, in doing so, show their affection for their nita (child).
Throughout the course of the *tabiana* – from the time of her emergence out of her parents’ house, during the journey to her groom’s hamlet, and throughout the lengthy exchange performances – the bride will in this way be “fastened” (*nambi*) by the groom’s family, partially concealed under a *buana* (textile). She will also be accompanied by a *tabiana*, or “gift of thanks”,[^1] which is presented to her by members of her own hamlet in acknowledgement of the work that she has performed there. The *tabiana* (“thank you”) consists of items that are considered essential to the establishment of a new household: buckets, mattresses, lamps, kitchenware, bush knives, a suitcase of clothes and blankets, and the like. Also included are two *tambania* (large baskets containing textile wealth). The contents of one of these baskets is specifically compiled as a part of the *tabiana* (“thank you”), and is therefore seen as the property of the bride. The other is filled with textile wealth belonging to specific *tama* (fathers) and *zwara* (fathers’ sisters) of the bride. These will be given to certain *tama* (fathers) of the groom in exchange for pigs of the “bride price” (*vohp rain*, see below).

[^1]: People make gifts of thanks called *tabiana* in other contexts. For instance, the presents that I gave to members of my family throughout the course of fieldwork were referred to in this way. The term *tabiana* is also more loosely used in much the same way as “thank you” in English. Because the *tabiana* is not conceptualised as a gift to the groom (that accompanies the bride) it should not be considered a “dowry”.

Image 42: The bride’s *tabiana*, and groom Austin (Anmalabua, July 1999)
As people begin to arrive at the groom's hamlet, the grooms' tama (fathers) start preparing the *sara* ("dancing ground") for the series of exchanges that will take place there. This involves the setting of wooden stakes into the ground to which the pigs that will be received by members of the bride's family become tied. These are set in three main "lines": the *hitihiwana*, the *lamawan bibiiana*, and the *votu vauvua*.149

![Image 43: Jif Ruben speaks of the marriage road at the lagiana of Ana Aru (at right) and Hilda Toa (Lagaronboga, June 1999).](image)

The first component of pig-for-mat exchange at the *lagiana* is called *hitihiwana* (literally, "exchanging"). Here the groom gives a pig of high value to the bride's mother in return for *maraba* ("mat wealth") of corresponding value. Based on pre-*lagiana* negotiation, he may also make further exchanges with the bride's mothers' brothers (her *tambae*). These men, it might be noted, are also the classificatory fathers (*tanimu*) of the groom. These exchanges, that are more specifically referred to as *tuvuvarere*, are said in Bislama to represent a *market* (market), and are considered a somewhat peripheral requirement to proceedings. Nevertheless, their long-term structural importance can be highlighted by the unique significance of one of these pigs, referred to as *maugegona*. A

---

149This differs from elsewhere in Vanuatu, such as North Ambrym (Patterson 2001), where *sara* ("dancing grounds") are off limits to women, and therefore cannot be used for conducting marriages.  
150In some instances where pig-givers are not able to produce their pig at the day of the *lagiana*, it is enough that a stake be set to represent it. The exchange may still take place despite the absence of the pig, which it is assumed will be given at a later point.
pig identified as malogona does not always have to be present in the lili'iliana, but where it is present, it is always the first to be exchanged. The particular mother’s brother (taneke) of the bride to receive the pig must also be a father (tana) of the groom who lives in, or near, the groom’s hamlet. Having received the malogona it will become his particular role to oversee the welfare of the bride within her new hamlet, and in particular, to ensure that the groom, his nitu (son), shows appropriate respect towards his new wife. Some exchanges within the lili'iliana are transacted between long term exchange partners, and thus they represent the continuation of previously established exchange relationships. Others serve to establish such ongoing economic relationships.

Image 44: Robbie Todali exchanges bwana and bari for the beogogona on behalf of his brother Kolombas, during the marriage of Ata Aru and Hilda Toa (June 1999).

Second, a series of two stakes are driven into the soil of the sanu upon which to fasten the tanuwen bibiliana, or “gift of dirtying”. This component, which is given to the bride’s mother (at least nominally), is said to represent a gift of thanks for her work of cleaning and breast feeding the bride while she was in her infancy. An envelope is wedged within a slit cut into the top of the first stake. This contains a cash component that is provided by the groom’s father and his brothers, usually the sum of ten thousand
or

In return for pig the bride provides one bwana and ten bari (exchange textiles) to the mother of groom. The main (third) line of pigs are those of the volin vavine, or “bride price” proper. Usually consisting of ten pigs, these are provided by the groom’s tama (fathers). These will be given to particular tamas (fathers) of the bride in exchange for bwana and bari (exchange textiles) of corresponding value. In accompanying support of each of these pigs, the pig-givers’ sisters provide a single bwana (larger textile). Like “icing on the cake”, these textiles are referred to metaphorically as rau lo’go, leaves used for wrapping laplap. They are laid out flat on the ground, in a series stretching crosswise from the pigs of the volin vavine (“bride price”).

With the sara having been prepared, and after the completion of various speeches, the series of exchanges between bride and groom’s family are able to take place. Still “fastened” by the bwana (textile) under which she left her parents house, the bride sits beside the tabiana (“thank you”) at the near end of the sara, usually that closest to the gamali (“men’s house”). The groom meanwhile stands on the sara with his right hand holding the stake to which the first and most valuable pig of the volin vavine (“bride price”) is tied. At this point tamas (fathers) and mwawwas (fathers’ sisters) of the bride

---

151 While this payment (of approximately AUS$130) ideally goes to the mother of the bride, I often heard complaints that the money is often intercepted by their husbands. While it was never made clear to me whether this monetary component appeared as a substitution for some other form of wealth previously present within the volin vavine, or as an new addition, money seems to have been commonly incorporated within the volin vavine from at least the early 1960s. Of the men married before independence, the majority from whom I enquired said that their families had paid twenty British pounds. Since independence the limit of value for tasevan bibibiana was officially regulated by the local council of chiefs (Vatumalalanvanua, see chapter two), and has therefore usually been the same in all lagiana. Previously set at ten thousand vatu, during the time of my fieldwork there was general consternation at the fact that the sum had been raised in some instances to twenty thousand vatu. Since kastom marriage practices differ considerably from island to island, the situation described here is often vastly different where marriages occur across different cultural groups. For instance, a young man from Abwatuntora and young woman from Ambrym developed a long-distance relationship through operating their respective local telephone services. He travelled to Ambrym to meet her, and they decided to marry. As a way of circumventing the problems of negotiating between the two area’s currency values of pig and textile wealth, the woman’s family asked for 101,000vt in bride price along with ten smol pik (“small pigs”, uncastrated boars, or ndiara’g in Raga). This was received during their marriage which took place on Ambrym.

152 Longo, or laplap in Bislama, is a “pudding” based of grated yam, taro, tapioca or banana which is wrapped in large leaves (Heliconia indica: magao in Raga), and cooked in an earth oven.
Images 45 and 46: The bride's rama and wwaawwa circle the groom and accept the volin savine during a lagiana (Amnalabua, July 1999).
Having formally received this pig and mat wealth, the tama (fathers) and swarwa (fathers’ sisters) of the bride then prepare to make return payments of bwana (large exchange textiles), hari (small exchange textiles), and in some instances cash, to the value of the pigs they receive. To do so, with each taking his turn one after the other, the bride’s tamas (who are individual recipients of pigs) unfold first the bwana, and then the hari of appropriate value, layering them flat upon each other. These are then placed on the concealed head of the bride. He then calls out to the particular recipient of his pig, being a tama (father) of the bride, to receive his payment of maraha (textile wealth). It is then the duty of the groom to remove the textiles from the bride’s head (excluding the one under which she was already concealed) and to drag them across the length of the sara where they are actually received by his swarwa (i.e. the sisters of his tama).

Following the completion of these exchanges the bwana is removed from the bride’s head by one of her swarwa (fathers’ sisters). She is then led by the groom’s female relatives, including his swarwa who carry with them the tabiana (“thank you”) up to her new dwelling – the house of the groom. They are also accompanied by the bride’s father, mother, and mother’s sisters, two of whom bring with them coconut leaves. These leaves are carried into the house and placed upon what will become the bride’s new sleeping platform where her father performs a speech in which, with one foot stamped down on the coconut leaves, he tells her that this is now the place where she will permanently reside. This episode marks the end of the bride’s journey to the groom’s hamlet. It also marks the end of the series of major lagiana exchanges – the “road” upon which that journey has taken place.

If a Christian ceremony has also been scheduled, and provided that there is time enough to perform it, this now takes place. The church wedding is usually followed by a pati (Bislama: “party”). This includes the presentation of personal gifts to the bride and groom that are also referred to as tabiana (“thank you”),¹⁵³ or presen (Bislama: “presents”). Like the church wedding, this pati is classified as being a part of the corpus of practices that are designated as aleñan tuturani (the ways of whites). The pati usually

---

¹⁵³ See footnote 148, above.
takes place within a specially built temporary house located near, but not on, the sara ("dancing ground"). People enter the building and congratulate the bride and groom who are seated next to each other, placing their gift-wrapped presents on a mat in front of them. Later in the evening the structure will be used in which to hold the pali itself, involving dancing to music played on a portable stereo, the consumption of western food and drink – biscuits, chippies, cordial – and for men, the consumption of alcohol.154

For most people, the pali is somewhat peripheral to the main alevan vanua (ways of the place) events of the lagiana. These are focused within the gamali, its tanbona ("porch"), and on the sara ("dancing ground"). Evening draws into night time with the preparation, distribution and consumption of food cooked on earth ovens within the gamali, and, for the men, kava drinking on the tanbona. The groom and the bride’s father share in a specially prepared bowl of kava, and the groom’s ratabina (mothers) prepare a separate oven of food for the ratabi (mothers) and tarabe (mother’s brothers) of the bride. Late in the night men begin the savagona, a session of singing and dancing that will continue until dawn. The huddle of men is soon encircled by women, who dance by running around them. A tama (father) of the bride is specially selected to lead the singing. He will choose songs that reflect upon both bride and groom, their families, and on the histories of their respective bwatun vanua ("foundation places").

Hunbuniana

As described above, the central component of lagiana involves a series of cross-moiety exchanges. These are underpinned by intra-moiety prestations of "support" (lai). Essentially, these consist of pigs given by the groom’s "side" for exchange textiles given by that of the bride. The main economic contributors are tama (fathers) and rvavwa (fathers’ sisters) of both the bride and groom, in support of their nitu (child), with the actual act of exchange being mediated through the bride and groom themselves. Initially, therefore, lagiana involves the cross-moiety giving of pigs to the groom by his father with the support of his father’s brothers, all of whom he calls tama and who reciprocate with the term nitu (child). This is mirrored for bride, who is presented with mats by her tama, with the support of their sisters (rvavwa). At the

154 Women are discouraged from drinking alcohol in North Pentecost, and do not do so openly.
In lagiana itself the groom gives his father’s pigs to the bride in exchange for the mats she received off her lama and vavavou. The bride and groom then both channel these return exchanges to their own lama and vavavou. This occurs through the mechanism of hambuminana.

Image 47: Mama William Esilihai performs hambuminana during celebrations (sobwesobwere) following his ordination as an Anglican Priest (Anmalabua, January 2000).

Hambuminana features prominently not only in lagiana, but also the majority of other formal exchange contexts. Hambuminana is particularly important in so far as it makes visible the relationship between formalised exchange and kinship. In doing so it highlights the way in which actions which take place within the context of this convergence contribute to the formation of Sia Raga persons. Hardacre, in her dictionary of c.1920, described hambuminana as “presents”:

...when a child is 8 days old, brothers and sisters of mother bring presents, to mother, who gives them to the child and then the brothers and sisters of the father takes them as their possessions (n. d.: 57, grammar as in the original).

181

181 Her entry is actually “hambana”, in this case “-ana” is merely a verbal suffix.
As Hardacre’s description suggests, *hunhuniana* is a form of transaction in which people give to people by giving through others, and do so in reference to those others. My own first direct experience of *hunhuniana* occurred shortly after I had arrived in Avatvotu, and followed the Church marriage of Haggai and Miriam and the baptism of their three children (described above). On this occasion Atleen, the daughter of my tua (brother) Haggai, was to perform *hunhuniana* for the first time. While *hunhuniana* is routinely performed in other contexts of exchange, performing it for the first time requires a special ceremony that usually takes place when a child is no more than a few years old. This marks their introduction into the field of formal exchange. The event took place outside the *gamali* at Avatvotu. Haggai gave a *bwana* (exchange textile) to myself, and also to three other tua, to ensure that we provide continuing support for his daughter. (This might include, for instance, performing the role as a central *tana* at Atleen’s future marriage). Haggai unfolded the long *bwana*, placed one of its ends on the head of his daughter, and then called out to me to come and receive it. I was instructed to walk three times around Atleen and her *bwana*, touch her lightly on the hips from behind, and then take the *bwana* from her.

Such exchanges do not only take place in reference to children. People routinely perform *hunhuniana* in a variety of contexts, from pig-killing ceremonies to the ordination of Anglican priests (image 47). Put bluntly, *hunhuniana* conventionalises the practice of giving to another, in order that that other may themselves give. As with a great many other Sia Raga practices, *hunhuniana* suggests consonance with Strathern’s stress on the partible and relational nature of personhood in Melanesia (Strathern 1988). Put crudely, Strathern’s analysis of Melanesian personhood is one in which the self is composed as a multiple entity through an array of significant relationships. In this view people are understood to exist as parts of each other, and in certain contexts both absorb and produce their relationships with others. Part of Strathern’s analysis includes a distinction between the terms “person” and “agent”, each of which corresponds to different vantage points within social action:

The acting subject or agent is construed in these systems as a pivot of relationships. I do not mean one who is an assemblage of or the locus of relationships – that is the ‘person’, the form of their objectification. By agent, I mean one who from his or her vantage point acts with another’s in mind. An agent appears as the turning point of relations, able to metamorphose one kind of person into another, a transformer…. The person is construed from the vantage points of the relations that constitute him or her; she or he objectifies
and is thus revealed in those relations. The agent is construed as the one who acts because of those relationships and is revealed in his or her actions (Strathern 1988: 271-272, emphasis in original).

On these terms, the performance of hunhuniana described above involved the reification of Atleen as a person constituted of relations (from her point of view) between five particular tama (fathers). As such she stood as the focal objectification of the relationship between her father Haggai, myself, and the three other tua, who as donors or recipients were the agents of the transactions that took place.

Hunhuniana also operates as the central mode of exchange within lagiana (marriage ceremonies). Here the main transacting “agents” are those men who will thereafter call each other bwaliga (ie. the bride and groom’s tama), and their sisters (ie. the bride and groom’s vwawwa). As the raison d’être of their exchanges, the bride and groom are revealed in these transactions to be situated relationally as “persons”, not only in regard to their own local kin group, and moiety, but also across the both social and physical landscape along which the “road” of their marriage takes place. The transformation that the transacting father’s and father’s sisters affect in their nitu (children) is to bring this difference together, and transform to it into a socially, economically and sexually reproductive unit. In doing so they also ensure that these relationships between the two groups remain ongoing. Although it is the bride who must physically depart from her bwatun vanua (foundation place), it is both the bride and the groom who are objectified as partible aspects of their fathers’ and father’s sisters’ social identities. In light of the social gravity of this situation, little wonder then that the bride and groom participate in lagiana proceedings with none of the joy of western weddings, but instead seem to suffer proceedings with open displays of begrudging seriousness.

SUMMARY

Ideas of circulation and return provide the Sia Raga with central imagery by which to conceive of the relationships that they share with other people, over both time and space. In one image, the matrilineal circulation of ancestral blood and spirit through procreation is conceptualised in the life-cycle of the yam. By way of adaptation of Layard’s “circular (functional) technique” I presented an image by which ideal/typical
Sia Raga marriage and exchange relations may be conceived as taking place between abstract kin terms within this kind of spatialised time. Similarly, the movement of women in marriage – that can be likened to the tracing of circular patterns in the earth floor of a *gahai* – are linked to broader patterns of exchange such as those that take place at a *kagama*, or marriage ceremony.

In dance, agriculture and material culture, the Sia Raga likewise produce an abundance of images involving circles or cycles (compare Rio 1997). As it is elsewhere in the archipelago, the most ubiquitous of these circular images is the pigs’ tusk. Throughout Vanuatu, pigs represent social, political and economic capital, particularly for individuals who are engaged in “graded-society” exchange activities (Rodman, W. 1996: 158). In recent years the image of the tusk has become a national symbol, particularly of finance and of government, and is used and understood generally as an emblem of status and wealth. I agree with previous symbolic analyses that have interpreted the shape of pigs’ tusks as indexical of ni-Vanuatu understandings of production, growth and exchange (Layard 1942, Rio 1997). What I find particularly
interesting about pigs’ tusks is that they are not simply circles, but spirals. As metaphors, apprehending them in this way suggests that the cycling of exchange relations is not a simply repetitive process, but is also productive and regenerative through space-time. The tusk’s spiral of growth, which eventually sees it return to the jaw, also sees it re-emerge full circle (alo), but from a slightly different point. From here the tooth begins to spiral anew, and thus the circular pattern does not endlessly reinscribe itself, but instead implies continual outward movement. While the shape of the new growth replicates the original trajectory, it also takes its own course: it is indeed a part of the same tooth substance, yet it is also travels a path set apart from the original.

This understanding of the pig tusk image is particularly potent when we consider its relation to ideas of ancestral regeneration and the process of birth, growth, death and rebirth. It must also be remembered that in certain contexts – such as at mateana (funerals) and boloboli (grade taking rituals) – the killing of circle-tusk pigs provides the vehicle by which these processes are able take place. Like the tusk that is buried in the jaw and re-emerges to chart a new “circular” course, people who die are buried in the soil of their ancestral foundation places but are also made to return (dabagilig) in the “layers” of subsequent generations. While being fully embodied ancestors, these living people must also chart their own individual life courses. Thus we can see that people are not so indelibly constrained by ancestral ways and laws of the place (aleñan vanna and silon vanna), any more than they are incarcerated within the systemic constraints of kinship terminology.
SECTION THREE: DWELLING
CHAPTER FIVE

SHIFTING HABITATS AND DYNAMICS OF SPACE: GENDER AND THE SACRED IN SIA RAGA SOCIAL PRACTICE

As Lissant Bolton has observed, for ni-Vanuatu the landscape is not considered a stable entity. Rather, she suggests, “in a volcanic zone where islands rise and fall under the ocean, and where hurricanes, earthquakes and even volcanic eruptions frequently modify the landscape in small ways, places are understood to move (Bolton 1999: 44). Landscape is also visibly shaped through the movement of people. As we have seen, the whole of Sia Raga history, both recent and “deep”, is characterised by a constant flux of people moving across the land. Physical evidence of abandoned hamlet and ceremonial sites – in the form of old house foundations or the ancient mwele (cycad palms) that mark the location of ritual pig-killings – are discernible almost everywhere on the upper plateau of the North Pentecost landscape. Such evidence attests to a continuity with today’s situation where whole hamlets may sometimes take up roots and set them down at new locations, often joining with or separating out from larger villages.

In North Pentecost, physical space is transformed into meaningful place through ongoing shifts and modifications of locality – of house planting and replanting, crop planting and harvest. Through these processes it becomes imbued with layers of memory that are etched into the landscape. Where individual and group identity is conceived as both taken from the land and infused into it (Rodman 1985b: 68), the ability of persons to interpret the landscape thus becomes vitally important to the forging and strengthening of those identities. Knowledge of the memory of landscape – of houses built, gardens tended, or of ancestral connections ritually or otherwise affirmed – and an ability to retrace the tracks between historically significant places, helps people to recognize their identity as a series of itinerant linkages, and to thereby legitimate their rights and ties to particular plots of land.

In this chapter I aim to come to an understanding of Sia Raga dwelling places historically by paying particular attention to transformations and continuities of gendered practice that they encode. Part of my purpose is to foreground the next chapter in which specific architectonic features of houses are considered in terms of their relation to the Sia Raga cognised landscape, and to spatialised and itinerant principles of social organisation already discussed (particularly in chapter three). Initially I do so through comparative investigation, especially vis a vis the earlier and
neighbouring studies of Margaret Rodman in North East Ambae (1985a, 1985b, 1987, 1997) and Margaret Jolly in South Pentecost (1989, 1994). In comparing their material to my own I apply further scrutiny to dichotomous analyses which posit household dwellings (in Raga, imusa) as foci of primarily female domesticity, as opposed to the so-called “men’s house” (ganali) as exclusive sites of male activity. I suggest that the apparent differences between ganali and imusa are better seen in terms of a linked relationship of extension and encompassment, rather than of simple opposition. The chapter concludes by discussing some of the ways by which the mapping of Sia Raga bodies in space accords to broader cosmological understandings of ancestral regeneration, fertility and sacred power.

RAHUANA: SIA RAGA LANDSCAPE AND “SETTLEMENT”

Image 49: Passing by Anmalahua with Robinson Todali (behind), on the hala from Ayavoto to Abwaruniora.
Pathways on North Pentecost are called *hala*, a word that is translated as *road* ("road") in Bislama. However, the English word "road" falls short of capturing the vast range of meanings associated with both of these Raga and Bislama terms (for analyses of the latter, see especially Bolton 2003: 71; and Mitchell 2002). In abstract usage, *hala* may describe location, direction or trajectory (*halamare*, above; *halatavalum*, on the other side; *habileletele*, crooked); movement or action (*halbis*, to jump; *halerei*, to swing; *halhalana*, drifting); exchange (*halaboe*, the "road of pigs" in grade-taking ceremonies); and relationships (*dari hala*, to "conspire"; and see also the interpretation of *tasalaku* (wife) in chapter four). People who are seen to be able to make things happen, such as community projects, are themselves sometimes referred to as *hala*. So too are the messengers or couriers who carry goods or information, or facilitate exchanges along physical roads. *Hala* can also be used more broadly to refer to a person’s ways of being, as well as their life course, or career. When Jif Ruben once playfully read the lines on the palm of my hand, these were also referred to as *hala*, with their shape and trajectory containing *doroña* (proof, memorial) of my future.

*Hala* also refers to physical roads, paths, passages or places across or through which things and people may travel; a break in a reef (*halak*) or a wide open space (*hal garaga*). The landscape of North Pentecost is deeply inscribed with the tracks and traces that link people to places, and thereby to other people. Many of the major routes that link hamlets or regions are open to anyone. The *hala maita* (in Bislama, *vaat* *road*, “white road”) that links North Pentecost to the very south of the island is a case in point. While it is subject to rapid erosion, this *hala* provides the main artery for 4WD transport along the length of the island. Despite its physical prominence and communal status, however, the truck road is not generally a preferred route for people travelling on foot. It provides little shade from the sun compared to the myriad of walking tracks passing through coconut plantations, garden lands, paddocks dotted with fruit and nut trees, or through the cool of the bush.

People are not free to follow pathways as they please. As Jolly has noted for South Pentecost, unmotivated movement is deplored (1999: 284), and anyone seen “drifting” unaccountably out of their usual network of pathways is treated with suspicion. Thus the question that is almost always shared between people who meet on a pathway is “*hala behe?*” (“road where?”), or “where are you going?” (also see Patterson 2002).
Men and women tend to establish separate lesser pathways between hamlets, with male routes often taking a more elevated approach. Also, pathways usually diverge as they approach a hamlet. Thus travellers are given the choice of entering into the hamlet or passing by, and thereby circumventing the social obligation that a visit necessarily entails. People are careful not to travel through territory that is considered to be inhabited by powerful ancestral spirits. To do so may invite sickness, or cause a “ghost” (atatun vanna) to follow them into the next hamlet visited, where it might prey on others. For these reasons individuals in large part stick to those pathways that link their hamlets to a familiar network of places: their gardens, the main road, store and church, and the hamlets of close kin members.

The importance of bala in linking people across the land is such that their condition of repair is seen as a tangible indicator of the social vitality of a hamlet. In this way people also speak of settling quarrels as ragaba bala, “cleaning the road” by which the disputants are linked. In both metaphorical and physical terms, by keeping their pathways “clean”, people are seen to be actively invigorating social, political and economic relationships with neighbouring hamlets. Doing so ensures the continuation of their linked participation within the wider social and economic networks, and the ritual rounds of birth, marriage, and death.

The location and size of most contemporary villages differs greatly to the dispersed hamlets of the early twentieth century (see chapter two). Today the majority of Sia Raga reside in one of the several large villages located either on the east coast, the densely populated far-northern region of Ahivo, or along the island’s central truck road. While the establishment of nucleated villages along the west coast of North Pentecost is generally accredited to the efforts of missionaries, my own findings concur with those of Haberkorn (1989: 23), that most hamlets south of the Ahivo district emerged far more recently. With the exception of Latano, which was founded by Roman Catholic missionaries, and a probable swelling of the Lamalanga population due to the growth of the Anglican church, previous settlement patterns, characterised by small hamlets, a predominantly interior location and relatively temporary nature, persisted into the 1950s (Haberkorn 1989: 23). During the mid 1950s Sia Raga families were exhorted by government and prominent local leaders to form collective villages, mainly at coastal locations, in the interests of health and infrastructural “development”. These villages, especially Loltong, Labultamata, Lamuruntoa, Anmalabua and Abwatuntora, remain the largest in the area. Locally, the impetus for this movement is attributed to the vision of
one local man, the first to receive a European qualification outside of the church, Phillip Ilo.

Within the global economic strategies of the West, the pivotal post-war period saw the introduction of a battery of key analytical tools and political programs surrounding the concept of the “Third World” (Wallerstein 1979: 119). It was with these strategies of “development” in mind that Ilo, a Fiji-trained doctor, returned to his North Pentecost home island and immediately set about effecting a profound transformation of Sia Raga sociality. Philip Ilo’s project revolved around the 1957 establishment of a North Pentecost District Council at Abwatuntora. This was the first district council to be established anywhere in Vanuatu (Bebe and Leo 1995: 265). Ilo’s objectives were essentially twofold. First, he aimed to lift standards of health through founding a health centre, also at Abwatuntora, and by encouraging the permanent relocation of people from their scattered inland hamlets to larger nucleated settlements along the west coast. Second, he sought to bolster infrastructural development through the introduction of taxes. In 1964 every adult was required to pay a ten shillings per year head tax. These funds went towards the development of the health centre at Abwatuntora, on cutting roads, and clearing an airstrip at Ahivo. Appropriately located villages also participated in paying a yearly tax of seven pounds for the development of water tanks and pipelines. These were part of wider strategies that envisioned a “modern” island nation, and that helped pave the way for independence.

The introduction of taxes, which were not wholly welcomed, necessitated widespread participation in the cash economy. So too did access to the growing range of *tuturani* products available in trade stores. Partly for this reason, and therefore somewhat ironically, the drive towards “modernisation” and “development” that drew people together into large, primarily coastaly located villages, just as quickly caused many to return to the more fertile and less populated inland plateaus. The mid 1960s onwards have seen a steady reversion to previous dwelling patterns. The area of Gilau, where I mainly worked, is a case in point. Here physical evidence of large-scale habitation is richly inscribed in the surroundings of inland areas. Much to the satisfaction of the older people, the land of Gilau, itself a mute historian, is once again given voice.

Along the path that links Avarotu with Lagaronboga is Laumu, one of the most powerful monuments of Gilau. Here a network of stone piles and sharp topographic contours covers an area of four or five acres. These features mark the remains of what
was once a large complex of buildings and ceremonial grounds. This is believed locally to represent a pre-contact site of major ceremonial, economic and educational importance. Several large _bware_ (grave sites) scattered around the site attest to the sudden population loss that is said to have occurred at Laumu some three hundred years ago, the result of a hurricane, and subsequent outbreak of famine and dysentery. It is remembered that from this time on Gilau was sparsely populated, and in the early twentieth century just five family groups lived within the region. In the late 1940s the population was bolstered by the arrival of several adult men from plantations on Santo and Ambae. Although born elsewhere in North Pentecost, and despite concerns surrounding the potential danger of Laumu _atatun vanna_ (people of the place), these men returned to claim ancestral links to land in Gilau. Their arrival was welcomed by the local _ratabogi_ (chiefs) who wished to renew the Gilau population to its former numbers. In the 1950s, at the behest of Phillip Ilo, the dispersed but growing number of family groups congregated into two hamlets, one at Lagaronboga, the other at Aolgalato (these people later moved a short distance to Labwatgongoru).

Rather than adhering strictly to stated rules of residence governed by ties of kinship and ancestral connection, the unity and structure of hamlets within Gilau reflect William Rodman’s claim for the Longana district of East Ambae, by exhibiting a “catalogue of exceptions” (1973: 108). Competition over community leadership has caused the importance and size of particular hamlets to wax and wane over the past several decades. Movement within the area has been shaped by informal personal ties held between individuals living both within the Gilau area and outside. It has also depended on economic co-operation, political relationships and ceremonial participation, none of which have necessarily followed lines of kinship (c.f. Blackwood 1981).

Today, with six and twelve households respectively, Lagaronboga and Labwatgongoru remain the largest hamlets in Gilau. While throughout the 1960s these two hamlets were approximately of equal size, since then the hamlets of Avatvotu, Lolbubulusi and Atumu have all been established by families moving out of Lagaronboga, and in the case of Avatvotu, bolstered by further arrivals to the area. By contrast, the achievement of stable growth and political unity at Labwatgongoru is attributed to the strong leadership of the late Mathew Voraina. Also referred to by his _ihan boe_ (pig name) Tongoro Gilau, Mathew Voraina passed away some two years before my arrival to Vanuatu.
Contemporary North Pentecost settlements reflect this recent past and may consist of a single household, or as many as thirty or forty. This reflects the fact that hamlets may be either nucleated across several adjacent vanua (I generally refer to such settlements as “villages”), such as at Lolontong and Abwatuntora, or dispersed, as is generally the case in Gilau (“hamlets”). As Margaret Rodman notes for Longana, Ambae (1985b: 60), Sia Raga hamlets themselves tend to be divided into residential segments. Each segment is occupied by a single household, or a small cluster of households (usually not more than two or three) whose members interact closely in matters of production and consumption.

Rodman makes the important point that in predominantly matrilineal societies, such as Longana and North Pentecost, the frequent rearrangement of houses and people within and between individual hamlets allows for the continuance of patrilocal residence (1985b: 58). Since women move to their husband’s hamlet at marriage, the majority of children are born into a hamlet in which most of the adult men are related to the father as matrilineal kinsmen, and are therefore members of the opposite moiety to that of the mother and children (Allen 1967: 94). This is the case in Avatovotu and Lollubululisi, where Jif Ruben Todali is the only adult Tabi male, but where all the children – of his wife’s brothers and of his own children – are Tabi (see below). The current norm is for hamlets to be based around an agnatic core of patrilineally related males: groups of brothers and their sons of the opposite moiety. While land and property is ideally inherited through the matriline, people are able to make claims to land by actively displaying patrilineal allegiance, particularly through dwelling for extended periods on the land of their fathers, and/or through providing prestations of pigs to the siblings of their deceased fathers at mortuary ceremonies. (These are usually biological fathers, but might also involve their fathers’ brothers, whom they also call tama (father)). Men may also cement rights to their fathers’ land through strategic exchange, especially by paying off any outstanding debts that their fathers have accrued throughout their careers within the bolololi. In this way, although it is generally said that when a man dies his wife and children should “return” to their own matrilineally defined vanua – that is, a hamlet of one of their mother’s brothers – this seldom occurs in practice. For this reason, while formal prestations to the matrilineal relatives of a

---

136 This estimate is based on my own experience. Figures gleaned from the 1999 census (Collingwood-Bakeo to Taylor: personal communication) are misleading with regard to village size (calculated at 21.8 households per village, Collingwood-Bakeo to Taylor: personal communication). See the Prologue (footnote 6).
deceased male might be expected of his children in order for them to acquire rights to
their father's land, as occurs in Longana (Rodman 1985b: 59), here it is not the case.
Instead, at North Pentecost mateana (funerary ceremonies) it is the reverse that occurs,
with pigs, exchange textiles and money being given by close siblings (tua and bogosi) and
mother's brothers (tarabe) of the deceased to their fathers (tama) and children (nitu) in
the opposite moiety. These prestations, called mabalu, are conceptualised as a return
payment for the "bride price" (rolin vavine) that was paid to the family of the deceased
for his sister when she married the mother's brother of the deceased's children (see
chapter four). Thus there is a crucial long-term connection made between the giving of
bride price and claims for land.

Just as hamlets appear and disappear over time, there is also a constant
movement of people and their households between and within hamlets. Margaret
Rodman, who has examined the subject of inter and intra-hamlet movement in Logana
in great detail, suggests that a good deal of house construction and replacement reflects
changes that are part of broader domestic and life cycles: "Marriage, the birth and
growth of children, the renewed dependence of old age, all are changes marked in the
building of a hamlet" (Rodman 1985b: 68). In North Pentecost, other events and
transformations that prompt the relocation of residential populations include disputes
over land, proximity to gardens, changing alliances of religious, economic or political
affiliation, and the location of schools and churches.

There are also frequent arrivals of relatives from more distant locations, such as
Port Vila or Luganville. During the course of my fieldwork, members of the hamlet of
Avarvotu were joined by Willy Dogo, a closely related nitu (child) of my brothers. Willy
had returned to the island from Port Vila where he had lived continuously since leaving
with his parents as a child prior to 1980. He wished to escape the pressures and lack of
freedom that are widely associated with urban living. He also sought to reaffirm his
connection to place.

Even though Willy remained in the area until my departure, he would not be
considered a fully permanent community member until he completed building a house
for himself and his family. Ongoing participation within the shared production and
consumption of food crops is crucial to maintaining one's connection to place and kin
group. Maintaining a house is important in political terms. A person's house represents
a tangible reminder of their commitment to place. For this reason people (and
particularly men) who reside permanently outside of North Pentecost are often careful
to maintain their house on the island. Despite the apparently ephemeral and mobile nature of houses, Sia Raga people therefore share an intimate sense of relationship with them, as well as the *vanua* upon which they are built.

During the first week of the new millennium I undertook the stock-in-trade anthropological project of “mapping the village”. While I approached the task with the begrudging resignation of something which “just has to be done”, I was surprised by the results. During my slow walk through the twin hamlets of Avatvo and Lolobulushi I was accompanied by Haggai Todali, who answered my questions and provided a brief commentary on the landscape, houses and other points of interest that we focused on. What I found most revelatory was the amount of movement that was revealed to have taken place within and between the hamlets over the course of just a few short years. All of these movements hinged around the core relationship of Jif Ruben Todali and his wife Eileen Mutona (image 50).

Jif Ruben was born and raised in Avatvo, and this is where the graves of both his parents are located. When he returned to Gilau in the early 1950s, after a lengthy period of work and travel, he took up residence with other returnees in the recently conglomerated hamlet at Lagaronboga. Shortly after this time he married Eileen, and over the course of three decades they produced eight children: four boys and four girls. During the early 1980s Jif Ruben moved his family to Lolobulushi. This *vanua*, he told me, represented his “straight” matrilineal (*Tabi*) land. As his children grew into adults, their changes of social status and mobility were reflected in a growth in house numbers.

One of Jif Ruben’s daughters married out of the hamlet and another departed to teach with the Anglican Mission in Big Bay, on Espiritu Santo. Jif Ruben’s other two unmarried daughters continued to reside in the hamlet, one of whom had a child. In so far as they had not yet married, neither had a household of their own. Instead, during the time of my fieldwork they resided in the house of their absent brother, Silas, along with their mother, Eileen. Jif Ruben slept in the *gamali* with me, until his son Kolombas’s house was finished, at which time we both relocated there. Of his sons, two married and produced children, and with his permission built dwelling houses at Lolobulushi. One of these men had also begun to build a *gamali*. The other two had also built houses, this time down at Avatvo, a place that is classified as their own matrilineal (*Bale*) land. In Avatvo they were also joined by more recent arrivals to the area, being the families of two of Eileen’s brothers, Marsden and Willy. Reflecting these movements, the physical appearance of the twin hamlets, including the number and
location of houses, was in an ongoing state of change. Signs of ongoing residential movement in Avatarotu and Lolbubulusi were clearly visible in the presence of old earth foundations or the collapsing shells of houses more recently abandoned.

**Key for Image 50:**

a. The household dwellings of Haggai Todali, his wife Miriam and their children.
b. Gamali under construction by Haggai Todali.
c. Abandoned household dwellings of Robinson Todali’s family (now located at g.)
d. Partially abandoned household dwellings of Ruben Todali and his wife Eileen. These were re-established following my departure, and especially since the marriage of
Kolombas Todali (see n.). This represents the original household of all of their children, including their sons Robinson (household now at g.), Kolombas (at n.), Silas (m.) and Haggai (a.). Also their daughters Anika (married out, but see k.), Amy (absent), Eileen and Agnes (see m.).

e. Ruben Todali’s sara, with cycad palms (mwele) upon which he killed pigs in the early 1980s.

f. This imwa was both unfinished and abandoned by Haggai Todali and his family, who instead decided to settle at a..

g. The newly established household dwellings of Robinson Todali, his wife Marie and their children (previously located at c.).

h. Chicken enclosures.

i. The graves (bwaru) of Ruben Todali’s parents, Vira Livlivu and Amy Lalau.

j. The household dwellings of William Lolo, his wife Melka and their children. William is Eileen Mutona’s brother (Ruben’s brother-in-law).

k. The household dwellings of Marsden Lolo, his wife Nesta and their children. Marsden is Eileen Mutona’s brother (Ruben’s brother-in-law). The unfinished imwa was in fact being built by Anika Todali’s husband, Justin (Ruben Todali’s son in law).

l. The gamali at Avatvotu (abandoned shortly after my departure). Two cycad palms (mwele) upon which Jif Ruben killed pigs in February, 2000, are situated on either side of the entrance. The ibwiri (porch canopy) was completed in preparation for this pig-killing ceremony.

m. The household dwellings of Silas Todali. During my fieldwork Silas was absent from North Pentecost. This imwa was instead utilised by Ruben Todali’s wife Eileen, and their two unmarried daughters, Eileen and Agnes.

n. The household dwellings of Kolombas Todali, including an abandoned imwa, an unfinished imwa, and an unfinished imwan gabi (kitchen). These later two buildings were completed during my fieldwork. When this occurred, Ruben Todali and myself relocated to these from the gamali (at l.). Kolombas married shortly after my departure, and thus Ruben returned to his household dwellings at d..

o. A sara, with cycad palms (in fact numbering more than thirty) upon which Ruben Todali, his sons Robinson and Kolombas, and also Willy Dogo killed pigs in February, 2000 (see also l.). Also the location of many old and more recent bwaru (graves).

p. Community kava plantation.

q. The abandoned imwa of Robson (Ruben Todali’s brother’s son, from Lagaronboga). Upon completion, this imwa was never used.

* * * *

The considerable time, organisation and resources that go into the building of new houses (described in detail in chapter six) coupled with the frequency by which people shift or rebuild their dwellings means that in any one hamlet at any given time there is usually at least one new building under construction. Despite containing a total of only five married households, works in progress were abundantly obvious in the two hamlets: flattened out earth foundations awaiting the sinking of a house’s first post; completed trusses yet to be covered with roof thatch or walls. Abandoned projects were also apparent, the most notable of these being a house built before my arrival by Robson, one of my tua (classificatory brother) and a young bachelor from Lagaronboga.
Robson had completed building a new house (which included a concrete floor) on his father's Tabi land. This rama was located just outside the perimeter of both hamlets. However, after spending just a few nights in the house he was forced to leave, having been frightened away by local akam rama (“people of the place”).

The buildings that are most frequently encountered in Sia Raga hamlets are mara. These are the dwelling houses of individual nuclear family groups. Like their counterpart, the gamali, the nature of these constructions share similar characteristics to those found throughout the wider area of northern Vanuatu (see especially Coiffier 1988, and Speiser 1990 [1923]). Out of the 1,004 North Pentecost households surveyed during the national census of 2000, 72% of dwellings were grouped under the category “traditional house”, 15.5% under “traditional/permanent”, 10.5% were described as “permanent” and 2% as “temporary” (Collingwood-Bakeo to Taylor: personal communication). Here, a “permanent” house is one that is primarily made of Western materials, such as brick, concrete, board and corrugated iron. A “traditional/permanent” house usually consists of a combination of concrete and brick foundations, with bamboo walls and thatched roofing. In the long run such houses are no more permanent than their “traditional” counterparts in terms of habitability, but they do tend to leave more indelible marks on the landscape.
While some imwa display considerable variation in design, particularly where introduced building materials are incorporated, a “traditional house” is typically built at ground level above a floor of beaten earth or concrete, and is constructed of vegetable fibres: wood, bamboo, sago palm leaves, reeds and cane, in particular. They are rectangular in shape, measuring between five or six metres wide, eight to ten metres long, and about three meters at the highest point. Their roofs are A-framed, and inclined at an angle of about thirty or forty degrees. (More specific architectural details of both imwa and gamali are provided in chapter six).

It should be note however, that today, household-dwellings more usually consist of at least two separate houses; one for sleeping and for storing personal property (simply called imwa), and another for cooking (referred to more specifically as imwan gabi, “house of fire”). In some cases two or more households may share a single kitchen house. This is particularly common where single bachelors or recently married men have built sleeping houses within their parents’ household plot, and continue to utilize the kitchen of their parents’ household. Kitchen houses are very probably a development of the colonial period. So too are the structures that conceal long-drop toilets. Lulu bantai, (“bad hole”) are also usually dug one-per-household and gamali, and are located just outside the hamlet periphery. In North Pentecost oral histories, the advent of both toilets and kitchen houses is associated with the health and development initiatives introduced during the early 1950s by the Sia Raga doctor Phillip Ilo (see above). Separating cooking and sleeping houses lessened the likelihood of people being caught in fires, and more importantly aimed to reduce the damaging effects of lung inhalation.

Kitchen houses are usually built following the same architectural design as imwa. However they may also be much more basic constructions involving, for instance, a four-posted shelter that is roofed with a few sheets of corrugated iron. However, even in cases where they appear to be virtually identical to imwa, one important detail of imwa architecture is almost always absent from kitchen houses: a closing door. While residents of neighbouring hamlets do frequently visit one another, they do not do so casually. Rather, anyone who is not obviously just passing through the vanua of a hamlet and who stays for even a few minutes must be hospitably accommodated for by the

157 Described as a “bush kitchen” in the national census of 2000, these represented 93.3% of North Pentecost kitchen facilities. Of the remaining households, 5.2% were described as having a “kitchen inside”, 1.2% had a “place to cook outside” and .3% oddly had “no place to cook” (Collingwood-Bakeo to Taylor: personal communication).
Image 52 and 53: A smoking *imwan gahit* at Avatotu, and its interior (below), with *tanbainia* hanging at right.
inhabitants. This usually involves inviting the visitor into a kitchen to eat and talk. Kitchens therefore represent an important threshold marking the boundary between public and domestic space. People are not free to enter other people’s imwa uninvited, even when they live in the same hamlet. Kitchen houses by contrast are much more “open”, especially to extended kin-group members who are welcome to enter and partake of the food leftovers that can be usually be found in one of the saucepans inside. Despite this fact it is interesting to note that in North Pentecost it is within kitchen houses rather than imwa proper that textile wealth is usually stored. There is a practical reason for this in that the smoke that rises from the cooking fires in kitchen houses, over which the great baskets (tanbunia) in which the textiles are stored, helps to preserve the suppleness of the pandanus fibre from which they are made (image 53, previous page).

Also prominent in Sia Raga hamlets are the much larger buildings called gamali. These are the North Pentecost version of the houses that in the past were specifically associated with the regulation and transmission of male status and knowledge, and in many respects continue to be. “Men’s houses” or “male club houses”, as they have usually been referred to in anthropological literature, appear in a variety of manifestations across the whole of northern Vanuatu (see Speiser 1990 [1923], Coiffier 1988).

North Pentecost gamali are built one per hamlet. These buildings are vast, hall-like spaces without internal walls. They average some eight to ten meters in width and twenty to thirty metres in length, but are sometimes considerably larger. On the inside, the walls are often lined with raised platforms that are used for sitting on, or, in the case of male guests, for sleeping. A large earth oven is usually situated near the front entrance. Equipment used for kava preparation are stored at the rear of the building: large roughly shaped wooden dishes (bulin), coral hand-grinders (basia), coconut shell cups (laba) and stands made of empty bully beef tins (togo).

Raga gamali are typically located at or near the centre of hamlets where they are fronted by an open, porch-like space, called a tanbona. The tanbona is often defined by a raised stone wall, and/or by a earth clearing kept clean of grass (image 54, next page). During major rituals tanbona are partially covered with a canopy (ibwiri) of leaf thatch or tarpaulin that extends out from the front of the gamali (image 55, next page).
Like kitchen houses, *gamali* do not have closing doorways, and anyone may wander in and out of the front “lower” area. In many respects *gamali* are the social and political focal points of hamlet life. This is particularly so for men, the majority of whom will join others on most nights of the week within the “upper” (bae) or rear half of a *gamali*, in their own or a neighbouring hamlet, to socialise and drink kava. While it is said that women were in large part prohibited from entering *gamali* of the pre- and early colonial
past, in today’s situation women dominate the “lower” (hivo) half of these buildings where large earth ovens are situated. Indeed, the fact that I once attended a meeting and fund raising event of the local branch of the National Council of Women that took place within the gamali at Adowaani would suggest that the term “men’s house” is no longer apposite to these structures.

Image 56: Women sharing portions of freshly cooked bweta (taro) in the gamali at Avarvou.

As well as being used as a place in which to conduct public meetings, gamali are routinely utilised in everyday life as a place in which to work at such tasks as mat or basket weaving, constructing sections of roof thatch, or for relaxing. However it is during periods of heightened ritual activity that the social importance of gamali is especially highlighted. At such times the great earth oven that is situated in the lower half of the gamali, and that may be as much as a meter deep and two metres wide, is used to cook food for the sometimes hundreds of people present. Food preparation is shared along gender lines. This contrasts greatly with previous practices where women and men prepared and ate their food separately (see below). Men are primarily responsible for preparing the ovens: for collecting the cooking stones and firewood, for building and lighting the fires, and for the removal and replacement of the hot cooking stones. They also butcher any carde, pigs or chickens that are to be cooked therein, while women prepare the taros, yams, and other vegetables. The final distribution of
many baskets of cooked food is presided over by a particularly appointed male, usually of the rank Mōh. He calculates the number of people present through the implementation of a *macle* (cycad) leaf.\(^{138}\)

Image 57: Justin uses a *rain macle* (cycad leaf) to count guests: "*kaikulera blong selan*" ("island calculator"), as he once told me (Avalu, January 2000).

Cycads are an important outside feature of *gumali*, and are usually planted somewhere near the entrance (see images 54 and 61). As discussed in chapter three, cycad leaves are not only utilized as instruments for counting guests during feasts, but are also important markers of the jural authority of *ratahi* (chiefs). As community buildings, *gumali* are important signifiers of hamlet leadership. Presiding *ratahi* are responsible for the smooth running of the social and political activities that take place within them. Here also, by their authority, disputes are settled, legal judgements are levelled and fines are levied. Indeed, in a sense, *gumali* are considered to be synonymous with their *ratahi*.

Large nucleated villages may contain two or more *gumali*, each of which will be built on a separate *vania* and headed by a different *ratahi*. Together these men appoint

\(^{138}\) If the gathering is particularly large, the number of hamlets present are counted (referred to in this instance as *"gumali"*).
a presiding leader for the settlement as a whole, and/or allocate a different area of jurisdiction for each leader. Also common are settlements of a single household. In such cases the adult male will usually not build and maintain a *gamali*, but instead frequent the *gamali* of a nearby hamlet, such as that of his own father and brothers, or the father of his wife. Such cases often highlight the strategic nature of residence location and its relationship to kinship. So, for instance, Jif Ruben’s daughter Anika and her husband Justin chose to build their house in the middle of a coconut plantation, at a place that represents the border between Gilau and Adovonai, the hamlets of their respective parents. From this location Justin and Anika participate equally in the affairs of both hamlets.

![Image 58: Rehearsing the dance *tigo lúfana* on the *sara* at Labwatongoro (December 2001).](image)

*Gamali* are frequently positioned adjacent to or overlooking a hamlet *sara*. While these open ceremonial spaces clearly operate in dialogue with *gamali*, the nature of this relationship is not always immediately apparent. Indeed, in some instances *gamali* and *sara* may be located some distance from one another, and separated by household dwellings. They may even be located at some distance from the hamlet, and historical
evidence suggests that this is where sara may have been more usually positioned in the past.\footnote{evidence suggesting that this is where sara may have been more usually positioned in the past.}

Centrally located sara are usually readily identifiable as clean, open spaces. These are utilised as a kind of yard in everyday life, and are places upon which to rehearse dances, kick balls, gather and talk (image 58). For those more peripherally located and left to overgrowth, the profoundly revelatory process of “cleaning the sara”, work that is performed by women immediately prior to a pig killing ceremony (botolofi), is greatly emphasised (image 59). Such was the case in preparation for the botolofi that occurred at Avatotu during the course of my fieldwork. What previously had seemed to me an unused and somewhat overgrown paddock, one that was undifferentiated from its immediate surroundings, was transformed into a complex historical site consisting of gravesites and botanical ritual markers.

Image 59: Women cleaning the sara at Avatotu prior to a botolofi (January 2000).

Cycad palms in particular line the edges of sara (see images 43 and 64). These mark the sites in which men have performed sene (the killing of ten or more circle-tusk pigs) in the process of ascending through the series of named grades. The primary function of sara is to act as a microcosmic field of exchange. They are therefore

\footnote{The dancing grounds outside the villages were smooth, beautiful, shady, flat spaces between borders of palms and gaudy brilliant crotons” (Wilson 1932: 37-8).}
important in providing the space upon which marriage transactions occur (described in chapter four). *Tara* are however most directly associated with *buklale*. In these ceremonies a great range of rank emblems are bought and sold: including the right to wear certain leaf emblems (*swi*), textile and other body adornments (*lrih*), names (*bun boe*), as well as various rights and privileges (image 60). In negotiating the *bula* (roads) by which these transactions may take place, literally hundreds of *bwana* and *buri* (exchange textiles) change hands. However, the defining item of exchange wealth is pigs (*boe*), and thus it is said that the main purpose of *tara* is *bwana* (literally, "pigging"). In giving or receiving pigs at *bolololi* (grade taking ceremonies), men who *ramboe*, or "run with their pigs", imitate the soaring flight of a hawk by zigzagging across the entire space of the *tara* (image 61). This communicates their surveillance and mastery of the broader field of Sia Raga ceremonial economy.
Despite containing only one *gamili*, hamlets often support several *sara*. *Sara* represent a rather personal locus of male identity in so far as they “belong” to particular closely related groups of males, usually a group of brothers and their sons living in a single household cluster (regarding Tomman Island *armat*, in southwest Malakula, compare Curtis 1999: 60). *Sara* have often been described as “dancing grounds” in anthropological literature, and indeed the performance of dances to rhythm and song by all members of the community is an important component of the majority of activities that take place there. However, it is in reference to the lavishly complex ceremonies called *bololo*, in which men exchange and kill pigs in the process of acquiring status, that *sara* are primarily defined. On these occasions women also assert, contest and transform their social and economic positions, especially through exchanging textiles.

Church houses are also usually associated with particular hamlets, at least in so far as they are built on an adjacent *vanna*. However, churches do not “belong” to the hamlet or *vanna* in the same way that *imwa* and *gamili* do. This is not surprising considering the relatively “private” nature of hamlets (and especially household clusters), as opposed to the ideal that churches be open to public use. Indeed, where public
pathways lead through a hamlet that contains a church house, such as at Labulramata and Lagaronboga, they will also lead to or through the church glebe. The glebe will be bounded within its own distinctly named ranha, one that is separate to that or those of the hamlet itself. In some cases the previous names of these ranha have been supplanted through the church's presence. So the ranha upon which the church at Lamalanga is situated is known as mithu, from the English word "mission".

The building of church houses is usually facilitated by the input of a mixture of local labour, cash contributions, and in some cases financial or other material support that is provided by the wider church administration. There is thus considerable variation in the architecture of churches, much of which reflects the degree to which resident clergy can access church funds, a factor which is in large part based on their place within the church hierarchy, and the number of parishioners who regularly attend the church. Thus the Anglican church house of St Patrick at Lagaronboga (the only church presently located in the Gilau district), whose sermons were read by Peter Ngau, a catechist, is a comparatively small structure built entirely from local materials and by local labour. The Anglican church at Amatobo, that services the populous region of greater Autu, and which is headed by a fully ordained
priest, is by contrast a large western-style building with generator-run electric lighting, and its own large water tank.

A hamlet may also support one or more stores (though it should be pointed out that many hamlets have neither a store or a church house). Following the same reasoning as churches, Sia Raga businessmen tend to build their stores on or near public pathways, and indeed the vast majority of stores are located along the island’s main truck roads. To a greater extent than churches, stores represent places where people can meet and talk together without being compelled to attend to the kinds of social obligations and expectations that adhere to household dwellings situated within the *vanua* of a hamlet. As with council buildings and schoolhouses, airstrips and health centres, the socio-economic practices that stores represent are seen to reflect *aleñan tauturani*, or “whitemans’ fashion”. They are therefore less burdened with the more “emplaced” ways of *aleñan vanua*. Such contexts accord to Bolton’s distinction between the “public” or common spaces created within new and exogenous contexts of services and communication, as opposed to an indigenously defined system of “private” space:

The new contexts created by the condominium and the nation – the schools, the hospital, stores, roads, airstrips, and government offices – were excised from this system and operated independent of it, creating common territory where no common territory existed before (Bolton 2003: 82-85).

While I agree with this distinction in the large, and particularly with the assertion that such places are treated as more open or common than the more general forms of indigenous space, in North Pentecost the two contexts can also be seen to overlap. For instance, throughout the course of my fieldwork the government primary school at Atavtabunga was in danger of being forced to shut down due to pressure from people who wished to claim tenure rights for the land on which it was situated. This showed that such spaces are indigenously defined and created as much as they are by the superimposition of exogenous forces. Sia Raga spatial practices based on social distinctions of gender and hierarchy also tend to adhere to these newer forms of space. Thus at large “public” gatherings, such as a school fête or roadhouse market, people tend to congregate into age, kinship and gender-based groupings in much the same way as they do within hamlet life. It is also the norm for women and men to sit on different sides of the church (women to the left, men right), also noted by Jolly for South Pentecost (Jolly, 1989: 226). These and related issues are discussed at more length in the final section of this chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE

COLONIAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE GENDERED SPACE OF IMWA AND GAMALI

North Pentecost imwa constitute what are primarily domestic dwelling spaces focused around the nuclear family. Gamali, or "men's houses", have a more political and ritual focus that is in large part defined by men. Household dwellings in North Pentecost display a much greater architectural variety than gamali, and this accords with Margaret Rodman's description of settlements on North East Ambae (1985a). Although most people continue to build their household dwellings from local materials, a range of imported materials and designs are increasingly being incorporated. By contrast, and with the exception of nails and the occasional roof-patch of corrugated iron, all gamali are built out of local plant materials. They also tend to follow standardised principles of design. As well as examining such differences, in this section I am interested in the linked relationship between imwa and gamali, particularly in terms of changes in spatial practice that have occurred over the course of the last century.

Imwa

Prior to missionisation, North Pentecost household dwellings were characterized by low A-framed thatched roofs that brushed the ground on each side, and with front and rear walls made of reeds tied together vertically. When I showed a group of older people a photograph of such an imwa, dating to c. 1906, everyone insisted that such buildings were the norm in the past. They suggested that subsequent changes in house construction had been introduced as a part of the 1950s health reforms of indigenous doctor Phillip Ilo (see chapter one, and above). However, the fact that only a few older men could remember having seen such a building suggests that these changes occurred with great rapidity, and were probably underway before Phillip Ilo's return. During the early to mid-twentieth century the roofs of imwa became raised off the ground with walls woven of flattened bamboo slats. Woven bamboo also became used for the construction of internal partitioning. Within the raised walls shuttered windows appeared, the overall effect being that household dwellings began to take on a much more Western appearance in form, if not in the materials with which they were built.
As Sia Raga people rapidly converted to Christianity throughout decades spanning the turn of the nineteenth century, and as the population plummeted, instances of polygyny also fell into decline. In North Pentecost, however, polygyny seems largely to have been confined to high-ranking chiefs. So while these social changes no doubt contributed to shifts in Sia Raga dwelling patterns, it would also be easy to overstate their significance. The Anglicans, as with missionaries of all denominations, found polygamy absolutely unacceptable (Jolly 1989: 225), and refused baptism to those who practiced it. Instead they encouraged the reconfiguration of social relations around the model of the nuclear family. According to local knowledge, polygyny eventually disappeared completely some time around 1950 (interview with Ruben Todali, Avatotu, July 1999). Polygynous households would have consisted of several imwa, one for each wife and her children, located nearby to their husband’s gamali. The move to monogamous practices was in this regard complicit with a shift of

---

160 Bishop Wilson described in his diary of c. 1896 a meeting with a young chief: “a powerful, blackbearded young fellow, stolid and serious looking, a man who has won his position by prowess in war. He is a heathen still and altho’ offering the church nothing but friendship, having six wives there is no place for him within it” (Wilson, n. d.: no page numbers given).
familial focus to single *imwa*. Anglican missionaries also discouraged gender-segregated eating and sleeping practices. Despite the dramatic reduction in polygynous marriages around the turn of the century, spatialised gender practices within household dwellings and *gamali* (see below), as well as within the church, have in many regards continued, albeit in considerably transformed ways.

Due to a lack of historical data it is unclear whether pre-colonial Sia Raga eating and sleeping arrangements accorded more with their neighbours to the south, or to those on Ambae and Maewo, west and north. In South Pentecost, during the time of Jolly’s field research in the 1970s (Jolly 1994), household dwellings (here called *im*) were divided in half, with separate front and rear compartments separated by a transversal log. While men and women were not restricted in their movement within these *im* in any strict way, the front area nearest the entrance was designated as a feminine space while the enclosed rear of the building was designated as masculine. In this way the sleeping platform of the husband was located at the rear of the house. This was separated from that of the women and children who slept in the front division. Each compartment also contained separate cooking fires, one reserved for ranked males, the other for unranked males and women. While men often chose to eat and sleep in the “men’s house” (*ma!al*), especially during and after rituals when sexual abstinence was required, they could also do so in the shared household dwellings (Jolly 1989: 217-218).

By contrast, the pre-Christian situation described by Rodman for North Ambae is one in which women and men ate and slept in separate dwellings, *velei* and *na gamal* respectively. Upon moving to their husband’s hamlet at marriage, women acquired their own houses (*nulel*) and cooking shelters where they slept with their children, and as a rule did not cohabit with co-wives. While young girls continued to live in their mother’s house until they became married, boys joined the other adult men within the *na gamal* as they approached puberty. Accordingly, it appears that the kind of separation between male and female space that occurred within *Sa* households was not required within the female-centred household dwellings of Longana (1985a: 271-272).

Oral testimony coupled with the scanty historical material that I have been able to uncover on the subject of housing history in North Pentecost suggest that prior to religious conversion initiated males did habitually cook in the *gamali*. Whether it was the

---

161 It may be noted that Rodman sees this shift from the perspective that it was the transformation of domestic dwellings into Western style homes that “promoted the nuclear family structure by striking a blow against polygamy” (Rodman, 1985a: 273).

162 In North Pentecost, divisions in both *imwa* and *gamali* are referred as *vwavan imwa* (the “landing places” of houses), and the transversal logs that separate each section are called *gatuhi*.
norm for all men to sleep in the _gamali_ all of the time is however unlikely. That men at least cooked and ate in the _gamali_, and therefore also on separate fires from those utilized by women and children, is clarified in the following remarkable passage from Bishop Wilson’s Diary of July 23, c.1899:

Ulgau tells us that the amicable looking old chief Molsal, at Varewarev, and his people had only just finished eating a man who had broken Molsal’s _Tamata_ [declaration of peace] by shooting a man with bow and arrow. Word was sent round to all the chiefs and it was decided by them to eat him. He was shot, and eaten in the _gamal_ we stayed in. On such occasions, says Tom [Ulgau], they eat without regarding usual native custom, i.e. the meat cooked for men and by them is sent out of the _gamal_ to all the women and children. The custom in this island is for men to eat only what is cooked by men, and women that by women. Rats are eaten when caught – Tarivaga gives all the catches in my house to his sisters! – and snakes. The school people appear to have given up eating snakes. The chiefs do not always order a man to be eaten who had broken their ‘Peace’. They may burn them to cinders instead (Wilson, n.d.: no page numbers given, grammar as in original).

Just as Wilson, or any other early commentator for that matter, offers no insight as to why Sia Raga men and women ate food from different fires, there is also no reason offered as to why this rule did not apply to instances of cannibalism. Cannibalism was apparently widespread throughout the northern islands, and in most cases appears to have been ritually significant (see Speiser 1990: 215-222; Layard 1942: 617-627; Harrisson 1937).

Unfortunately, as far as I am aware, none of the missionary commentators provide such a picture of Sia Raga sleeping habits. However the overall impression that I have formed from the range of opinions gleaned from local oral testimony suggests that it was only older men of high rank and unmarried _mwalegelo_ who slept in the _gamali_ on a regular basis. Adult men and their wives would share a house (or houses) until such time as all of their children had moved on to form households of their own. The husband would then often relocate to focus his attentions of political leadership and

---

163 Tom Ulgau was a catechist from the Banks Islands who worked for many years in North Pentecost.
164 This accords to a very similar passage in Coombe’s _Islands of Enchantment_ (1911: 9) also quoted by Speiser (1990: 218). Compare also Layard (1942: 624). Jif Ruben told me that the last instance of human execution by burning in North Pentecost occurred in 1927. This was of a chief’s wife found guilty of adultery.
In the same way, one older informant told me that when a man's wife dies it is appropriate that he relocate to the gamali to teach. This corresponds with a continuing ideal of abstinence and sanctity in old age, such as is embodied by Jif Ruben, as was emphasised in his acquisition through pig sacrifice of the “pig name” (ihan boe) Togtgon Vanua, “staying on the land”.

This view also appears to be supported by the claim made by many knowledgeable informants, that another important architectural form also existed in pre-colonial Sia Raga hamlets. These were sometimes referred to me in Bislama as “nakamal blong woman” (“women’s gamali”), or in Raga as imwan hana naun vavine (literally, “houses of the sickness of women”). These buildings were probably some form of women’s menstrual and/or birthing houses. They are also said to have displayed the same architectural form and sentiment of imwa and gamali. Unfortunately I was unable to gain any detailed information concerning these houses as they had largely passed from living memory. None of the older people with whom I spoke could remember having seen such a building first hand, though all insisted upon their previous existence. However it was suggested to me that one such house, or group of houses, existed in every hamlet. I have come across no specific mention of these in the missionary record, and this suggests that they disappeared early in the colonial period.

Speiser provides the only anthropological account of Pentecost women’s houses. He argued that they represented “menstrual houses”, and that in Vanuatu they only appeared in association with specifically “matrilineal societies”, such as are found in Ambae and Maewo, as well as North Pentecost (1990 (1923)). This claim is corroborated by Layard with regard to Vao (1942: 74). If the primary rationale behind these buildings was to seclude women from the men to whom their sacrdly powerful (سابغ) menstruating bodies posed a danger (see below), it seems unlikely that such buildings would have been required where men already slept in separate houses (ie. within the gamali).

The following passage from Speiser in large part supports my broader findings, although some significant differences emerge too. Unfortunately, however, it is more

---

165 I was also told that these buildings should more properly be called imwan vwalvwe11 in Raga. Unfortunately I am unable to provide a gloss for the Raga word vwalvwe11. Yoshioka also mentions these buildings by the same name, describing them as “menstrual houses” (Yoshioka 1994: 91).
likely a Central Pentecost hamlet that is described than one from the Raga-speaking northern tip.\(^{166}\)

In northern Pentecost we again find men’s clubhouses. As in Santo, the length of the house depends upon the rank of the most distinguished man using it. The men’s clubhouses are saddle-roofed huts of no great height with quite low walls of driven tree-fern posts. Three rows of hardwood posts support the roof. The front gable wall consists of rammed stakes and the rear one of diagonally arranged bamboo laths. Inside, a trunk laid crosswise and so thick that the pigs cannot leap over it, divides the hut into two parts. The front one is a vestibule, the rear one contains the fireplaces.

These *gamals* are near the dancing grounds, but they are lived in only at feasts, for the men usually live in their huts, which are a long way off. Only the family enclosure of the ‘chief’ is near the *linesara* or dancing ground; there he also has, close to the clubhouse, his own hut, which is distinguishable from the huts of the women.

The women’s huts are small saddle-roofed huts similar in construction to the men’s clubhouses. Near the chief’s enclosure there is also usually a spacious hall-like hut used as a workshop for the manufacture of the large money mats; storehouses are not seen.

At each end of the long dancing grounds there is a shelter. Under one of them is the chief’s grave; under the other the wooden slit-gong drums are kept. There are said to be menstrual houses here. In northern Pentecost the fences are almost always made of thick staves and it is rare for stone walls to be encountered (Speiser 1990 (1923): 108-109).

If Sia Raga men did sleep in the household dwelling, as in South Pentecost, it is highly unlikely that they would have shared the same raised platform as their wife. In this way we might conclude that *imwus* displayed the same or similar characteristics and were utilised in much the same ways as Jolly describes for Sa *im* (outlined above).

Today, as in the past, Sia Raga people continue not to share conjugal beds. To do so is considered to place a man’s physical strength and spiritual “power” (*roroio*) in jeopardy, especially if he has already partaken of kava that evening. Instead, men often have their own room in which to sleep. This is partitioned off from that or those of their wife and

\(^{166}\) I make this assertion for two main reasons: first, the dyeing of *bwana* (“money mats”) that Speiser describes as requiring a separate “workshop” does not take place in North Pentecost. Instead, here people trade pigs for this service to be carried out by their neighbours in Central Pentecost. Second, Speiser himself seems only to have travelled as far north as Bwatnapnc Bay in Central Pentecost (Speiser 1990).
children. Internal walls are, I was told, a recent addition to Sia Raga house architecture, an ailenan tuturani (white man’s style) that also implements the bamboo weaving style said to have been introduced from Ambae. Dwelling houses are usually divided into three sections: a front section, serving as a daily “living room” in which guests may be sometimes invited, and a more secluded rear section that is itself divided into two separate sleeping rooms.

Gamali

Far from being opposed to one another, imwa and gamali are linked through a relationship of encompassment. In this way there is always a possibility for the transformation of household dwelling into men’s house, as occurred during my stay at Avatvotu (see chapter one). In so far as a process of sacralisation is associated with the official “opening” of gamali (discussed below), but not to imwa, the reversal of this process does not occur. My assertion that imwa and gamali on North Pentecost encode the same essential characteristics is also supported by the fact that both their architecture, and the symbolic attributes that are attached to these, are identical. As we shall see in the next chapter, rather than appearing as a specific architectural form, gamali simply extend and embellish architectural and spatial principles that are found in imwa. One important difference, however, is that household dwellings include a single front entrance while gamali typically have entrances at both ends of the building. This difference seems to provide the main inspiration behind Rodman’s assertion that Longana household dwellings represent “containment”, in opposition to the “passage” of na gamal (1985a: 274, see below). Importantly, I observed that when the gamali at Avatvotu was still used as an imwa, the building had only one front entrance. When it was officially opened as a gamali, a further entrance was created by cutting away at the woven bamboo of the rear wall.

Rodman has also suggested that Ambae na gamal have come to represent images of cultural convention as opposed to the inventive character of household dwellings (1985a: 275). While North Pentecost gamali are indeed viewed locally to be emblematic of “cultural authenticity” (ailenan vana), from the perspective of Sia Raga men, the idea that gamali might represent a continuity with the pre-European past is understood to be an ideal rather than a reality. When I repatriated to Lamalanga a copy of c.1906
photograph of the local *gamali*, residents were openly amazed at the architectural differences they saw. When I discussed particular features of their present *gamali*, including the beams, posts and woven bamboo that made up the front and rear walls, many of these were dismissed as *ginau tuturani* (whiteman’s things).

![Image 64: “Gamal at Lamalana, Raga.” J. W. Beattie, 1906 (Collection of the National Library of Australia, Canberra). Note the stone *voda* (stone wall) surrounding the *tanbona* (porcha), and also the many *mwele* (cycad palms) indicating that the open area at front is a *sara*.](image)

Sentiments of loss and nostalgia often accompanied the conversations that I shared about *gamali*, as well as a tendency to highlight the profound changes that are considered to have taken place therein. For some much older men, such as Jif Ruben, the most dramatic of these changes are remembered to have taken place very early in the course of their own lifetimes. Of particular importance is the disappearance from *gamali* of the sequence of *matan gabi* (sacred fires) which regulated the movement of men and knowledge within these buildings. The disappearance of *matan gabi* is interpreted locally to be the main contributing factor allowing women, uninitiated males, to make inroads into the previously more exclusively ranked male domain of the *gamali*.

In *gamali* of the past, strict regulations were placed on the movement of people. These regulations accorded to the division of floor space into a hierarchically arranged series of compartments, each of which contained a separate cooking fire, or *matan gabi*. 

218
In the anthropology of northern Vanuatu these have usually been referred to as “sacred fires”, or “hearthts”. In contrast to the word *gabi*, which pertains directly to fire (or, in that context, firewood), *mata* (or *matai*) is one of those particularly fecund Raga words that seem to elude literal translation into English.  

Appropriate resonances here include the meanings “source” or “outlet”, “eye” or “centre”, and “valued” or “critical feature” (such as the blade of an axe, or the bulb of a torch). Each *mata gabi* related to a separate grade of the *subwe*, and men cooked and ate only from the fire of their respective rank. Of this previous arrangement, Codrington made the following observations:

> At Whitsuntide Island, Araga, the word *Loli* takes the place of *Suqe*, but the thing is the same. All the male population are in fact members of the society; wherever there is a dwelling-house, there is also a *gamal*. The divisions with the ovens, *mata gabi*, are twelve; (1) *ma langgelu*, the stage of youth; (2) *gabi liv hangvulu*, the oven of ten tusks; (3) *ma rotu*, (4) *gabi rara*, the oven of the erythrina leaf, which is the badge of the rank; (5) *voda*, the stone-wall seat by the front of the *gamal*, on which no one below this rank may sit. These five are the inferior steps which fathers see that their boys take as soon as possible, and as quickly as they can afford to buy them up. Though the lowest is nominally that of grown youths, no child is too young to be admitted for whom the father, or more properly the mother’s brother, provides the entrance payments and presents of pigs and mats. Here, too, though in principle the mother’s kin should take charge of the boy’s advancement, the father in practice generally makes it his own business. The sixth step, *moli* is the first that is important; the youth takes the great *loli*, *ma loli gaivua*, and assumes a name with the prefix *Moli*. There are three steps of *moli*. The ninth rank is *udu*, the tenth *nggarar*, the eleventh *livusi*, the last *vira*... Internal division is severe; one who should intrude into the division of the *gamal* above his own would be clubbed or shot. To rise to the higher *moli* and the steps beyond is the ambition of every young man, and his friends are bound to help him; for this sacrifices are made, and *mana* sought from Tagar (Codrington 1891: 114-5).

The disappearance of *mata gabi* from *gamali* can be readily seen to have occurred in concert with the shift in dwelling and marriage practices described above; away from...
the gamali and polygyny and towards the single imwa of a nuclear family. Declining male populations due to introduced illnesses and participation within the labour trade would also have been consequential in decreasing the numbers of men available per fireplace. Many older Sia Raga men with whom I spoke stressed that the main catalyst for changes of spatial practice within the gamali was the relocation of pedagogy that occurred as a part of conversion to Christianity during the early decades of the twentieth century.

As the primary locale for the education of males moved away from the gamali and into the Church schoolhouse, gamali ceased to be so intimately linked with male hierarchies of status and the systematisation of knowledge that these encoded. Conversely, the idea that the gamali represents a local version of the western-style schoolhouse is a metaphor that is often used today in discussions about the purpose of
these buildings. During the first six months of my stay in Avatovotu I was located in a gamali that was soon to be opened. This derived as much from the intentions of Jif Ruben Todali and Kolombas Todali, that I be immersed within an environment that was appropriate to my education in aspects of Sia Raga lore, as to any factors of practicality.

I received conflicting reports regarding the position of women within the gamali of the past. While many people in North Pentecost generally attest that the gamali was strictly off-limits to women and uninitiated males, it was also stated to me on several occasions, by older men or women in each case, that women of high rank were also able to take part in the male system of grades. Such women were also said to take their place at the corresponding matan gabi (sacred fire) of the gamali.

Today, Sia Raga women continue to participate in pig-killing rituals, and in doing so attain name-grades and purchase emblems within their own system which is linked to the male bolololi. The economic importance of women’s economic power is perhaps most vividly illustrated to men at particular points during a bolololi (male grade-taking ritual) when proceedings are dramatically interrupted by spectacular displays of female wealth, knowledge and displays of prestige. The arrival on the sara of women proudly displaying the leaf emblems of their rank at barwa, and the terrific organised chaos of the dancing that follows, or the flurry of activity that takes place during lalui bwana (exchange of bwana) are events that powerfully divert what are otherwise seen as quintessentially male proceedings. At such points men, who generally have little knowledge of the particular subtleties of these activities, become overwhelmed and profoundly impressed by the complex performances or transactions taking place.

Imwa should not be seen as exclusively female spaces in terms of either contemporary practice or symbolic sentiment. Likewise, while particular restrictions are placed on women with regards to activities and movement taking place inside gamali (such as the drinking of kava in particular) this does not mean that these buildings should be seen as entirely male. At the same time, as Jolly points out, although women as a general rule do not take an overtly active part in public meetings within gamali, this fact does not mean that women are entirely excluded from public life (Jolly 1989: 222). Indeed, Sia Raga women are major contributors to ritual and political-economic activities, though their actions within these spheres more usually take place in association with imwa and sara, rather than within the gamali. Even so, though they may be somewhat lesser actors within the context of the gamali, women are able and do
attend the various meetings that take place there. While they may not be centrally active as speakers, women take part in the many supplementary discussions that occur around the margins of such meetings, and are thus able to exert some agency therein.

Interestingly, the same encoding of gender difference through spatial arrangement that took place in Sa houses (above), and that I have argued was probably also the norm in North Pentecost, has in today’s situation been transferred to practices within Si Raga *gameli* where women have free access to the front half of the building. Today’s *gameli* usually contain a single large earth oven, rather than the many *matam yabi* of the past. Building an oven fire, as well as preparing and sharing out food cooked therein requires shared male and female work. The oven is therefore typically located in the front half of the building, which is open to both male and female movement. The rear half, which is designated as *sabinga* (sacred restriction) to women, is where kava is typically prepared and consumed by men. Given that the majority of gendered activity within *gameli* revolves around the preparation of food by women and of kava by men respectively, in practice they become divided into separate male and female spaces, front and back. The fact that this layout bears a striking similarity to that described and illustrated by Jolly for Sa *im*, or household dwellings (1994: 218), relates to my assertion that the spatial ideas that underpin household dwellings and “men’s houses” in North
Pentecost, and probably throughout northern Vanuatu, are fundamentally guided by the same conceptual principles. In particular, movement towards the rear or “upper” (hne) end of gamali accords with increasing knowledge and sacred restriction (sabuga). As will become apparent in the next chapter, this conceptual trajectory incorporates the same fundamental characteristics as those already explicated through the analysis of Jif Ruben’s “Land Tree” images, and which permeate more broadly across the Sia Raga ideoscape.

**Imwa and Gamali: blurring the boundaries**

Citing missionary influence as the historical catalyst for changes in house form, Rodman’s argument as to why household dwellings have been subject to “innovation” while men’s houses have remained essentially “conservative” revolves around a series of linked oppositions that she identifies as being of central symbolic importance to Longana notions of individual and cultural identity. These are: *na gamal*: valei :: public : private, male : female, activity : rest, large : small, pigs : mats, exchange : savings, passage : container, and in an apparent contradiction which she eventually resolves, conservative : innovative (Rodman 1985a: 274). Rodman argues that household dwellings function as “containers”: of exchangeable personal property and, equally important, of women who are associated with mobility and “flightiness of character”. Through these connections household dwellings exist as objects of architecture that are more apt, culturally, to be de-conventionalised than “men’s houses”. Household dwellings, as containers of women and wealth, are the proper vehicles for change, she says, “because women are culturally defined as changeable and wealth exists to be given away” (Rodman 1985a: 277). By contrast, since gamali are characterized by a communal maleness that is ultimately rooted within the “traditional”, and in this way represent containers of customary knowledge, they are less likely to become a focus of individual (feminine) innovation. This is especially the case since, Rodman argues, “the *na gamal* has not been the focus of indigenous or expatriate modernising efforts” (1985a: 272).

My understanding of the social history of North Pentecost suggests, somewhat to the contrary, that the “modernising efforts” of missionaries have in fact had a profound effect on the use and appearance of both *imwa* (“domestic houses”) and *gamali* (“men’s houses”). Of related but still more direct consequence have been the influence
of important of local leaders, such as Louis Tariwali and Doctor Phillip Ilo. As I have argued above, this is particularly seen in the disappearance of the hierarchy of sacred fires that were associated with the sequence of male name grades. This major transformation accompanied a shift of male pedagogical focus, from the gamali to the church and schoolhouse. It also accorded with related shifts in the gendered use of space within and between both of these architectural forms.

In many other respects the oppositions detected by Rodman for Longana appear to resonate across the calm waters that link Ambae to Pentecost, but I am also mindful to heed the cautionary note sounded by Jolly (1989: 220). She suggests that although the Sa speakers of South Pentecost form a clear ideological equation between perceived gender differences and the contrast between household dwellings and men’s houses, we should, none the less, be wary about going further to equate these with what she describes as “a Eurocentric dichotomy of domestic and public life” (1989: 220). In North Pentecost, as in the south, men are also active members of households where they take part (if not always equally) in the daily domestic activities that take place there. Today men usually sleep in household dwellings, along with their wife and children. The activities associated with the preparation of daily meals that are cooked and eaten in the adjacent kitchen houses are also shared. Likewise, in today’s situation at least, North Pentecost gamali are women’s spaces as well as men’s, albeit in a more restricted sense.

As trees, both imwa and gamali may be planted and replanted. As such they are representative of the emplaced foundations and roots (bwatuna) of particular groups and individuals, but also of their growth and movement. Gamali may well be situated as icons of particular aspects of ale'nan vana (ways of the place), and these may be largely defined by the activities of men. However, like imwa, gamali are important as sites of both “convention” and “innovation”, and also of female identity and practice.

Rodman’s dichotomous schema might be challenged on several other fronts. For instance, while household dwellings may well be indicative of rest, this is no less the case for gamali which, for men at least, are often used for sleeping in overnight, and also as places of rest during the day. Imwa and gamali are equally sites of activity, be it cooking, weaving or kava preparation and consumption. Indeed, this later activity, usually seen as particularly associated with so-called men’s houses, is also sometimes performed by men (and women) in the kitchens of household dwellings.
Rodman's equation of the terms "men's" versus "domestic" houses with pigs versus textiles ("mats"), and, by extension, male versus female, also seems to be too radically drawn. The ethnographic record provides extensive evidence that women throughout Vanuatu are the primary force of labour in pig husbandry (eg. Jolly 1994: 71-72; Rodman 1996: 161, Speiser 1990 (1923): 144). Furthermore, not only did Speiser note that throughout Vanuatu, "valuable pigs are often sited at the dwelling house and are thus completely domesticated", but also that "women often feed piglets at their own breast" (1990 (1923): 143-4). In accordance with this previous situation, in Vanuatu the control of pig wealth as well as exchange textiles generally takes place at the level of immediate family members. That is, those who share the dwelling space of a single or close cluster of imua. Similarly, while the economic work of exchanging textiles and pigs is for the most part carried out by women and men respectively, this is not exclusively the case. In the same way that men are often called upon in a variety of situations to provide textile payments to both men and women, women as well as men engage in the ritual slaughter of pigs, thereby ensuring that they "take back" the ibun bee (pig names) of their ancestors.

My point in seeking to break down these dichotomies is to contend along with Sahlins (1985: xxvii) that the use of radical binary contrasts in attempts to understand aspects of social history is often not only phenomenologically misleading, but also
analytically debilitating. As Strathern has pointed out (1988: 73), these might in Western terms represent coherent theoretical sets, however in setting up boundaries between imagined spheres of action – private set off against public, male against female, for instance – so distinguished spaces become assigned particular values that are based solely on difference, and that are likewise accorded to different forms of action. As a result, “where the values are mapped… onto a distinction between things to do with men and to do with women, an ideational boundary between the sexes becomes the medium through which the possibility of action itself is presented (Strathern 1988: 76).

One important correlate of the argument made here about houses therefore relates directly to issues of gender relations. The kind of view that underpins Rodman’s analysis, one that is ultimately grounded in a dyadic Western view by which gender is treated as a cultural construction directly attached to sexed bodies, has become subject to major deconstructive analysis since the publication of her article (c.f. Manderson and Jolly 1997; Butler 1993; Strathern 1988, 2001). I would like to suggest here that the basic understandings behind Strathern’s (1988) arguments regarding of the permeability and partibility of Melanesian personhood might also pertain to Sia Raga houses. As Rodman has illustrated (1985b, 1997), houses are certainly partible in the physical sense, and give off bits of themselves as part of the process by which new houses are built. Since the fibrous materials of houses do not usually survive any longer than a decade in the humid and seasonably unpredictable northern Vanuatu climate, impermanence is also a characteristic of the building materials from which houses are made. As Rodman observed for Longana, the fact that the usable materials of old houses are recycled and included in “new” ones means that, “in a way, houses link both people and other houses over time” (Rodman 1987: 38).

More abstractly, particular kinds of houses, such as *imwa* and *gamba*, might be seen to accord to a gendered distinction of male and female. But it is only from within a strict Western model of the individual that the two points of this duality must be kept at arms length. In the final section of this chapter I consider the cosmological significance of spatial practice, particularly in relation to Sia Raga ideas of gender, fertility and ancestral regeneration. The implications of this discussion are consistent with one of the overarching arguments of this chapter concerning the structural nature of the relationship between *imwa* and *gamba*: that at different times and in different contexts houses may contain or reveal either or both male and female qualities, both of themselves and of their inhabitants. Thus I would contend that household dwellings
and “men’s houses” are not best seen in oppositional terms, but may be considered in terms of a dynamic relationship of trajectory and encompassment from a variety of levels.

**Ancestral Regeneration and the Sacralisation of Space**

Throughout the course of this chapter I have illustrated the point that Western dichotomies provide an inadequate paradigm for understanding the relationship between people and space in Northern Vanuatu. Dual constructions such as male and female, or public and private (or domestic), do not map easily onto the ni-Vanuatu social landscape or built environment. Part of the reason for this relates to Strathern’s assertion (1988) that clear distinctions between object and subject are not present in Melanesian conceptions of personhood. Rather than being viewed as concretely male or female based on overt biological differences, persons are considered in relational and multiple terms, as amorphously constituted through ongoing and contextual exchanges with significant others. Ni-Vanuatu cosmological views and ontologies of fertility and reproduction are also crucially connected to the configuration of spatial practice, interacting within what Curtis has called a “space-status-sacredness nexus” (1999: 70). As a result of particular regenerative processes, such as childbirth or the ritual slaughter of pigs, both people and spaces are infused with differing intensities of ancestral power or sacred energy. Paradoxically, as Jolly suggests, under these circumstances heterosexual avoidance and sequestration – to which I might add homosexual – are seen to secure rather than inhibit fertility and natural fecundity:

Repression, prohibition, abstinence might be seen not only to produce desire (after Foucault 1978) but, in contrast to a view of sexual avoidance as an indigenous “contraceptive”, to generate human and cosmic fecundity. In stressing the negativity of avoidance, analysts have thereby often assumed the viewpoint of a male subject anxious to avoid women’s body pollution, or semen depletion (Jolly 2001b: 178).

It is in consideration of the dynamic relationship between ancestrally regenerative powers, fertility and “sacred space”, as discussed by Jolly (1989, 1994, 2001a, 2001b), that I conclude this chapter. In doing so I pay particular attention to the Sia Raga concepts of *sabuga* (sacred restriction) and *gogona* (human restriction) that were
discussed in chapter three, as well as to the linked processes of menstruation and childbirth for women, and pig-killing for men.

One day I walked through a rare patch of intact tropical rain forest with my *nitu* (child) Robson to visit my *ina* (brother) Robinson and his wife Marie at a remote area of garden land. It was late March, the start of the annual cycle called *damraňo*, when the leaves of yams become dry and show that the tubers growing below the earth are ready for harvest. Robbie and Marie had begun digging out the yams that they had planted the year before. As they extracted the tubers from the rich, dark soil, Robbie began objecting that they weren’t as large as they should be. He joked that Marie had been tending the garden while menstruating, and that the growth of the yams had been stunted as a result. Marie smiled and shrugged, saying, “well, if you won’t tend the garden, someone’s got to”. I later discovered that this was not the only cause for the yams’ lack of growth. Much to Robbie’s disgrace, according to the women who told me this story, some months earlier Marie had given birth to their third child alone, in the hut that she and Robbie had built beside the bush garden.

A month later I was drinking kava with a group of men in the *gamali* at Avarvotu. Conversation turned to issues surrounding the approaching marriage of Michael, a young man from Lagaronboga whose “fiancé” Gloria was residing with him in his house. It was noted that Michael had recently begun to lose weight, that he was often tired, and that his “power” (*toroňo*) was decreasing. This was attributed to Michael and Gloria’s sexual activity. In particular, the couple had been having sex on evenings in which Michael had already drunk kava. Kava in North Pentecost is explicitly associated with female bodies and fertility, that is at certain times powerful and dangerous to men. Perhaps like an overdose, having sex after drinking kava had not only had a detrimental effect on Michael's physical strength, but had also drastically decreased the couple’s fertility, at least for the short term. It was also debated whether the couple had been engaging in sexual intercourse in the bush, either within or nearby particular *ute sabuga* (places of sacred restriction), the territory of ancestors and other *atatun vanua* (people of the place). As Haggai explained it to me, having sex outside of one’s house or hamlet is fine, and people do so commonly. But in doing so, people should be careful to avoid grave sites, overgrown bush, and any other places that are known to be *sabuga.*

The two episodes recounted above illustrate an important dynamic between the fertility of crops and people, place, ancestral power and sexed bodies. As Yoshioka
notes, and as I discuss further below, women are *sabuga* to men during childbirth and menstruation, a state from which they are released through washing with water (Yoshioka 1994: 91). During such times, and also during pregnancy, women must avoid gardens and eating certain foods – particular species of birds and seafood, especially. They must also refrain from cooking for others. Observing these restrictions helps to ensure the health and fertility of those around them, especially their sexual partners. It also protects their own health, and in the case of pregnancy, the health of the foetus. However this condition of *sabuga* (sacred restriction) does not only adhere to female bodies, but also at certain times to men. This is particularly the case for men who have engaged in pig-killing, and have thereby effected ancestral connection and transference. The purpose of pig-killing is explicitly associated with the processes of ancestral regeneration. As such it is also likened to childbirth.

North Pentecost birthing practices have no doubt transformed greatly since the onset of colonialism (see Yoshioka 1994: 90-91), as they have throughout the wider Pacific (see Lukere and Jolly 2002). The most overt changes probably came later in the colonial period, especially following the establishment of a public health centre at Abwatuntora in the 1950s. Nowadays, while many women choose to give birth at home, or find themselves in situations such as Marie’s described above, the vast majority of births are assisted by nurses working at the health centre. Birthing in the past typically took place either in the household dwellings or in the women’s houses called *imwan vuvevuweuweu* (discussed above). The delivery of babies was assisted by knowledgeable female specialists, and ideally by a categorical sister of the birthing woman’s husband.

My own findings regarding the post-partum period basically accord with those described by Yoshioka (Yoshioka 1994: 90). Women and their newborn children were sequestered within the building in which they had given birth for a period of ten days. Here they were attended by two or more of their husband’s sisters. They were forbidden to wash any of the blood and afterbirth that remained on their bodies, and the placenta and umbilical cord were kept nearby. The blood of afterbirth was and is likened to menstrual blood, and likewise during this time women are considered to be sacredly dangerous (*sabuga*) to men. After this period the two husband’s sisters (the child’s *vwava*) would carry the child from the house to perform the brief ceremony called *gabi bulebule*, or “bringing the fire together”. They were met by the mother’s father (the child’s same-moiety *sibi*) carrying a burning *wenwewe* (a fibre sheath that
ENCASES THE FLOWERS OF COCONUT TREES). WITH THIS TORCH HE WOULD ILLUMINATE THE CHILD'S FACE, THEREBY REVEALING THEIR ANCESTRAL CONNECTION. SISTERS OF THE CHILD'S FATHER ALSO GATHERED LONG SLENDER LEAVES OF GARA PLANTS (CROTONS) AND CAST THEM ABOUT THE HAMLET AND PATHWAYS, THUS SIGNIFYING TO PASSERS BY THAT A CHILD HAD BEEN BORN (IN THIS CONTEXT THE LEAVES ARE CALLED NOINOA). IF THE CHILD WAS A BOY THE LEAVES WERE LEFT STRAIGHT, IF A GIRL THEY WERE TIED IN A LOOP. HAVING EXITED THE UTE SABUGA (SACRED PLACE) IN WHICH SHE HAD GIVEN BIRTH, SHE WAS ALLOWED TO WASH BOTH Herself AND Her BABY, Thus RELAUNCHING Herself FROM THE STATE OF SABUGA.

DESPITE CHANGES IN THE LOCATION OF BIRTHS AND THE SPECIFICATION OF MIDWIVES, THERE IS MUCH CONTINUITY WITH THESE PREVIOUS PRACTICES. GABI BULUBULU AND THE CASTING OF NOINOA REMAIN AN IMPORTANT PART OF BIRTHS. MORE PARTICULARLY, WHILE THE PERIOD OF CONFINEMENT IS NO LONGER EXTENDED TO TEN DAYS, WOMEN DURING LABOUR ARE STILL CONSIDERED TO BE SABUGA TO THEIR HUSBANDS, AND FATHERS DO NOT GO NEAR EITHER MOTHER OR CHILD UNTIL THEY HAVE BEEN CLEANED OF AFTERBIRTH.

TURNING TO THE EXAMPLE OF MEN AND PIG-KILLING, I WILL NOW BRIEFLY DESCRIBE EVENTS THAT OCCURRED DURING AND AFTER THE BOLOLOLI AT AVATVOTU. THIS TOOK PLACE DURING FEBRUARY, 2000. IN THIS CEREMONY FOUR MEN – JIF RUBEN TODALI, HIS TWO SONS ROBINSON AND KOLOMBA, AS WELL AS THEIR CATEGORICAL CHILD (NITU) WILLY DOGO – EACH ATTAINED DIFFERENT LEVELS OF STATUS WITHIN THE GRADED SOCIETY. THROUGHOUT THE DAY, FROM MORNIN G THROUGH TO A BRILLIANT SUNSET, LITERALLY HUNDREDS OF PIGS AND TEXTILES CHANGED HANDS, AND A GREAT MANY DANCES WERE PERFORMED AS A PART OF THE PROCESS BY WHICH THE FOUR MEN WERE ABLE TO PURCHASE VARIOUS EMBLEMS OF "RANK", AS WELL AS THE PIGS THEY WERE ABOUT TO SLAUGHTER.169 The focal point occurred at ten p.m., with each of the four men killing pigs, and thereby attaining a new iban boe (pig name). Pigs had already been staked out, tied to specially planted cycad palms (mwele) and decorated with contextually emblematic cordylines and crotons (gara).170 These were either in rows of ten along the sara (in sequences called sesa), or individually planted beside ancestral graves and the hamlet gamali. Each pig had been specifically chosen according to value, based on tusk curvature, and most were either livoala (full circle tuskers) or greater.

170 THERE ARE A GREAT VARIETY OF CORDYLINE AND CROTON SPECIES IN VANUATU. IN NORTH PENTECOST, SPECIFIC SPECIES ARE USED AS NAME-GRADE EMBLEMS, OR OTHERWISE APPEAR IN ASSOCIATION WITH SPECIFIC RITUAL PROCESSES WITHIN THE BOLOLOLI. CYCAD PALMS ARE BROADLY EMBLEMATIC OF THE HIGHER MALE NAME-GRDES, AND WITH THE AUTHORITY OF NATALI AND THEIR ABILITY TO IMPOSE VARIOUS RESTRICTIONS ON THINGS, PLACES AND PEOPLE.
Chapter Five

Image 68: Kolombas Todali preparing to *wēhi boc* (kill pigs) during his *bolololi* at Ayavou (February 2000).

First the bodies and faces of each man were painted red. This signified the pigs' blood that they were about shed. The faces of various male and female same moiety kin members who were to perform supporting roles were likewise painted. The sacrificial sequence was then performed at a frenzied pace, accompanied by complex rhythms of slit gong drumming, song and dance, and a great deal of raucous yelling, laughter, and pig screeches. As each of the four men took his turn to "kill" (*wēhi*) his designated pigs, striking them on the head with the butt of an axe, one of his mother's brothers

---

17. "Kill" (*wēhi*) appears in inverted commas because some of the pigs were in fact already physically dead. In North Pentecost pig killing rites, pigs that have died of natural causes may still be "killed" in ritual. In such a case the skull of the pig is used (with tusks intact). Dead or alive, an individual pig may be ritually killed only once. Robinson, Kolombas and Willy each performed *wēhi* (the killing of ten pigs) on the *sau*. For Kolombas this included killing several very large pigs that were staked out beside particular graves that are located there. If Ruben, who had already performed *wēhi* on several occasions at previous *bolololi*, killed pigs that were staked beside the hamlet *gëmali*.
called out the *ihan boe* (pig names) that he had thereby acquired. Kolombas with the most, for instance, took four names: Garae Siĩ Vanua, Livus Vanua, Udu Vanua and Vira Mahaña. By contrast, Willy took two: Tari Vodolua and Mol Ngoso. After further pig and textile exchanges the *bolololi* concluded as a whole. By this time it was already two a.m., and the rest of the night was spent in performing the *savagoro* (session of song and dance) that accompanies most major Sia Raga ceremonies. Jif Ruben, Robinson, Kolombas and Willy, however, spent most of their time within the *gamali* in the special compartments that had been set up for them.

The four men were confined within their respective *ute gogona*, or “places of human taboo”, for the next ten days. Each compartment was approximately three metres square, located along the sides of the *gamali*. During their confinement they were forbidden to wash the paint and blood, or any other matter, from their bodies. Thus in following these procedures a clear link was made between these substances and afterbirth. Similarly, they were also forbidden to cook. This task was instead performed by particularly designated men, one for each of the four, each of which was of the same named grade as the man he attended. Each of the four men’s food was prepared on a separate *matan gabi* (sacred fire) located at the centre of each compartment, and any waste was kept within the compartment until the period of confinement was lifted.

![Diagram showing the relative position of each *matan gabi* following the *bolololi* at Avatvotu (February 2000).](image)

*Image 69: Figure showing the relative position of each *matan gabi* following the *bolololi* at Avatvotu (February 2000).*
In accordance with past practices, the compartments were spaced according to the level of named-grade attainment that each man had achieved. Willy’s compartment (B, on image 69), who had reached the stage of Moli, was thus located “below” (hivo), closest to the doorway (yet this was located “above” the communal oven (A)). Robinson (C) and Kolombas (D), both Vira, were located at a parallel within the “upper” (hae) section of the gamali. Jif Ruben (E), who had moved beyond them by taking an individual name of the rank Tungoro, was located at the extreme upper end of the gamali.

Let me now relate these procedures to the distinctions of “taboo” that define them. My own findings and analysis differs from Yoshioka’s who argues that a clear dualistic division exists between the categories of gogona and sabuga. These, he suggests, are based not only a distinction between human and sacred restrictions, and of associated cosmological “spaces” (located metaphorically on opposite “sides of the leaf”), but also on gender. Gogona, he writes, “includes men, power controlled by human beings, and the human world [tareure]; the other [sabuga] includes women, power not controlled by human beings, and the world separate from the human world [abanol]” (Yoshioka 1994: 93). In my understanding (see chapter three), the reason for the four men’s confinement was that, through the course of making boloboli, each had in fact entered a state of sabuga, or “sacred restriction”. Furthermore, in so far as they had each taken on different named grades and purchased different “emblems”, they had also become charged with differing levels and qualities of romono (sacred power). As such, each man was also sabuga to the others, and was therefore forbidden to eat food that was cooked on any of the other sacred fires. The designation of their confinement as gogona did not then preclude their own individual states of sabuga. Instead, it represented the need to regulate their movement and actions in terms of this.

After his period of confinement elapsed, Kolombas was able to exit the gamali. (The process of release from the ate gogona is usually the same, and since his was the only one that I witnessed in full on this occasion it is Kolombas’ case that I discuss here.) On the porch (tanbona) area he then killed a low-value pig by bashing it on the head with a stone taken from his sacred fire. He was then led out of the hamlet to a particular area of land (vanua) by John Leo Tamata, who carried with him four bamboo shoots filled with water. At different points around the edge of the plot John poured water over Kolombas, washing the dirt, paint and blood from his body and onto the ground. Through being cleansed Kolombas became released from the state of sabuga, and his
“charge” of sacred power (romono) was transferred onto the plot of land. John also erected small wooden frames at each corner of the plot, and over these he draped cycad leaves (mwele). These signified that the plot was now gogona (human taboo), and restricted from general use. This process routinely follows post-bolololi confinement, and men may place restrictions on anything from an area of coastal reef to a penned herd of pigs, but more typically choose an area of garden land. The ban from harvesting or otherwise utilising the area is lifted when a brother of the man who has performed bolololi gives to him a circle-tusker pig, usually after a period several years (compare Yoshioka 1994: 81-82).

As we have seen, following the killing of pigs at bolololi men undergo parallel processes of avoidance, sequestration and cleansing as women who give birth. Through this process, as Jolly notes for the Sa speakers of South Pentecost, the intrinsically female powers of regeneration and fertility are appropriated by men as their spiritual potency (Jolly 1994: 162, 2001b: 264). Gell argues that throughout Polynesia childbirth is imaged as a kind of splitting, one that recapitulates the original separation of the world of night, ancestors and the original gods with that of light, life and human activity (Gell 1995: 21-35). The core of Gell’s argument is that Polynesian life prior to conversion to the transcendentalism of Christianity was fundamentally shaped by ontological anxieties about immanence. Polynesian ideas of immanence, he suggests, are (or were) based on the conception of a world very much dependent on processes of differentiation (splitting, division) and countervailing pressures towards fusion, absorption and collapse:

The essential strategy of counter-immanence (averting the danger of being absorbed, de-differentiated, etc.) was the recapitulation, in one form or another, of the process of separation on which both the cosmos in general, and the being of the individual, were founded…. And just as the original cosmogonic act was the opening up of a domain, within the plenum, which was relatively non-sacred… so the means of ritually securing the subject was the opening of a space between the subject and the sacred domain whence he originated (Gell 1995: 25).

Gell goes on to identify “closure” and “multiplication” as the two basic strategies through which the integrity of persons could be maintained against the immanence of cosmological collapse: “closure” being “the provision of extra reinforcement, hardening the target of spiritual danger”, while “multiplication” is “the strategy of reduplicating the person in myriad forms” (Gell 1995: 26).
Appropriating Gell’s argument to the Sia Raga context discussed here, women are understood to be single entities (mua, first), but are also able to divide, or self-differentiate. Thus the word for childbirth, bora, also means “to split” or “divide”. It is also recalled that the first woman was called Mugarimaña, “the mother clam gapes open” (see chapter three). It is through their ability to divide that women become the means by which ancestors are brought from abanoi, the other-world, (back) into the present world (ureure). In this ability women are at particular times considered to be more intrinsically “sacred” (sabuga) than men, and are better protected against sacredly derived power. Men on the other hand are essentially single entities who are easily endangered by the fluctuating sabuga of women. Men must themselves accumulate sabuga and grow powerful through the activation of division by other means. The ritual sacrifice of pigs, involving the transaction of ancestral power from the other-world (abanoi) provides one such means through which men are able to affect such a division. Accordingly, however, in climbing through the ranks of the bololo, men become increasingly powerful (roroiro) and dangerous to the people around them, from whom they must also be set apart. They also become more “complete” as persons by beginning to take on female qualities, themselves eventually becoming, each at the same time, “chiefs” and “mothers”, or ratahigi.

Through the processes of childbirth and pig-killing Sia Raga women and men ensure the reproduction of ancestral essences within living people in the present. Discussion of the related ideas and practices that pertain to these processes has also brought into relief the pivotal ways in which concepts of sacredness shape and define spatial practice in North Pentecost. In the earlier sections of this chapter I described some of the comparatively formalised ways by which spatial practice is defined along gender lines. I also showed how these spatially-defined relationships have changed over time, particularly within the different houses that make up a hamlet. This history made clear that the relationship between imwa (household dwellings) and gamali (“men’s houses”) – and by extension, men and women – is better viewed in terms of fluid relationality and linked encompassment rather than rigid dichotomy and opposition. The final section showed that restraints in movement and spatial access, both within the hamlet and across the landscape, often emanate from fluctuating levels of sacred power that is at different times attached to people and places. Strategic avoidance of the sabuga

---

172 Hardacre’s definition of the term bora includes, “1. to be born, to happen”, and “2. to divide, split” (Hardacre n. d. (c.1920): 18)
of sacredly charged people and places helps to ensure the health of the community. Paradoxically, it also ensures the ongoing efficacy of the same fundamental processes of reproduction and ancestral regeneration that give rise to these sacred states.

Having walked the roads of the North Pentecost landscape, and examined the ground linking hamlets and houses through space, I now take a final step into the cool shade of Sia Raga dwelling places. The following chapter examines the detailed architectonics of Sia Raga houses, the meanings attached to their physical form, and the intimate messages of their embodied presence.
CHAPTER SIX

SIA RAGA ARCHITECTONICS: KNOWLEDGE AND AGENCY OF HOUSES

For our house is our corner of the world... it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word.... An entire past comes to dwell in a new house (Bachelard 1964: 4-5).

If houses are “animated”, as many have suggested, on North Pentecost they are compulsive talkers, always locked in conversation: with the habitat in which they are built, with their occupants, with each other, within themselves. The main concern of their talk – history articulated through biological idiom – is one that is shared throughout the South-East Asian and Pacific regions, and beyond (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995: 23; Fox 1993b: 17, Wasserson 1990: 124-126). This chapter explores house “design”: both in the architectural sense of a “construction plan” or template, and also in the sense of a “mental plan” or strategy by which the house itself may be seen as both a repository of knowledge and an agent that participates in the creation of ideas and images of the world. This is what I mean by architectonics.

As Weiner suggests, “what we do when we build is what we do when we create the tracks and paths of our cognized landscape” (1991: 183). Likewise, houses throughout the Pacific both contain and reveal for people a spatialised sense of being and remembrance. In Raga this occurs through the architectonic incorporation of those same space-time principles that were explored in chapter three. Sia Raga houses are therefore part of a broader corpus of grown and made things that “give shape” to their renditions of past and present. Through these things, the links that bind people together, with their ancestors and with their land, are materialized and crystallised.

The Sia Raga distinguish between two main forms of knowledge, both of which are fully expressed in house architecture. The first of these is practical or technical knowledge, called *ilo*. Such knowledge is required in planning and constructing houses, as well as in negotiating the exchanges that must take place in order that a *gamali* be officially “opened”. The second sort of knowledge, called *mataisao*, involves the extraction and interpretation of meaning (*binihiva*) from things and events. It also implies a profound understanding of history (*verburi*) and “culture” (*aleñan runuad*).\(^{173}\) For *mataisanga* (“wise people”) the complex architecture of houses is an elaborate frame of

---

\(^{173}\) *Ilo* is translated as “*savv*” in Bislama, from the French, “*savoir*”. *Mataisao* becomes “*moat*”, from the English, “*wise*.”
signification that may be “read” on many levels. Drawing on a range of familiar cultural metaphors – such as “roots”, “branches”, “ways” and division into “sides” – houses embody Sia Raga ideas concerning ancestral history, social organization, cultural behaviour and taxonomic classification. Grasping the many meanings that are built into Sia Raga houses entails an understanding of the broader shape and texture of Sia Raga society and culture. In this way they share characteristics of structure with many other things: the shape of the house is also the shape of the island, of the tree, of the leaf, of the body (both individual and collective), and of the history or explanation (verburina: “talk of its causation”).

Flowing from the work of Claude Levi-Strauss (1983, 1991), in recent years there has been a resurgence of anthropological interest in houses as powerful social symbols. We might be tempted to see the Sia Raga as providing yet another version of Levi-Strauss’ category of sociétés a maison (“house societies”). In his formulation “the house” represents a broadly conceived social grouping that endures through time: through combined agnatic and uterine principles of succession, by the strategic employment of both endogamous and exogamous marriage alliance, and through the transmission of names, titles and other prerogatives integral to group existence and identity (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995: 7). These characteristics are all generally present in Sia Raga social arrangement, and all are implicated within the defining architectural structures of the local group, imwa and gamali.

Carsten and Hugh-Jones note in Lévi-Strauss’ writings on “house societies” a lack of detailed attention to the most obvious feature of houses, that is, their physical characteristics (1995: 12). They are also critical of his analytical project, suggesting that the invention of this new category that simultaneously attempts to resolve problems of descent-group and alliance models whilst still relying on them, “raises as many problems as it solves” (1995: 19). Perhaps so, but in their apparent vagueness Levi-Strauss’s writings on “house societies” do resonate with Sia Raga architectonics. Levi-Strauss draws attention to the idea that, as a social institution, houses may overcome or transcend apparent structural contradictions by combining together series of opposing principles or social forms. He writes: “The whole function of noble houses, be they European or exotic, implies a fusion of categories which are elsewhere held to be in correlation with and opposition to each other...” (1983: 187). Carsten and Hugh-Jones explicate this point as follows: “In ‘house-based societies’, where neither descent, property nor residence taken alone are criteria for the constitution of groups, alliance is
both a source of antagonism and the principle of a rather brittle unity, the house as
name, concept or building providing an image or demonstration of the unity achieved”
(Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995: 8). This fundamental feature of sociétés a maison echoes
the ambivalent oscillations between similarity and otherness that, in chapter three, I
suggested characterise the culturally pervasive Sia Raga idea of “sides” (tavaliu).
Through detailing and examining the main architectonic features of Sia Raga houses I
aim to show how the inhabitants of these forms intimately enfold themselves within the
ideal, neither simply dual nor necessarily antagonistic, of a unity built of difference.

In this chapter I concur with the general thrust of anthropological analyses that
reveal houses to be “tangible classifying systems” that inculcate and reinforce the
taxonomic principles that underlie social formation, thus providing “the principal locus
for the objectification of generative schemes” (Bourdieu 1977: 89). In discussion of the
dialectic between people and their environment, Bourdieu considers how the schemes
that houses incorporate might be “read” by their inhabitants. For him the process of
reading houses is not ordinarily a conscious activity, but rather an ongoing process of
embodied practice that takes place within the “habitus” of daily life, and by which
people accumulate mastery of the fundamental schemes of their culture. In this way the
house may be seen as an opus operatum that, as Bourdieu puts it, “lends itself as such to
deciphering, but only to a deciphering which does not forget that the “book” from
which the children learn their vision of the world is read with the body, in and through
the movements and displacements which make space within which they are enacted as
much as they are made by it” (Bourdieu 1977: 90).

Yet it is also the aim of this chapter to demonstrate that Sia Raga houses go
beyond being mere interpretable templates. Houses in North Pentecost are ancestral
and social embodiments, and as such they are animated with an agency that carries the
real-world efficacy that these terms imply. As Thomas describes of Maori wharenui,
houses throughout Oceania are art forms that do not simply seem to “create ‘images’ of
people that are less substantial than the people themselves”. Instead, ancestors are re-
created in houses as “real and immediate presences” (1995: 63). Sia Raga houses, and
their constituent parts, are more than personifications. They are persons. Houses are
communal not only in the sense that people collect and interact within them, they also
interact with them.

I begin this chapter by describing as briefly as possible the social context of
house-building, as well as the main architectural features of Sia Raga houses. Most of
the information that I have recorded on the subject of Sia Raga houses came from interviews and discussions with Jif Ruben Todali and his sons. Most of these conversations both took place in, and made reference to, the gamali ("men’s house") at Avatvotu. Strictly speaking, therefore, this chapter is about that particular house. However I also visited many other gamali during my research, and on several occasions participated in the construction of imwa (household dwellings). In doing so I observed that both imwa and gamali have an essentially equivalent architectural structure, and further conversations confirmed that the knowledge built into their shape is largely shared. Just as imwa are smaller than gamali, and possess fewer detailed features, some gamali are also constructed on a much larger scale (usually longer) than others. Therefore, although this chapter is ostensibly concerned with a particular gamali, much of what is said pertains equally to all gamali, and indeed applies to imwa. Architectonically, the former simply embellish the later.

**HOUSE CONSTRUCTION**

Houses are grown before they are built. Particular species of trees, bamboo, sago palm, cane, and a variety of vegetable fibres used as ropes are all crops that are planted, tended and harvested specifically for the purpose of house building. Considering the many years that it takes for some of these components to reach maturity, house planning must be considered as an ongoing, long-term exercise.

The successful construction of both gamali and imwa depends on a vast range of specialized technical knowledge (ilo): of appropriate materials, of measurement and proportion, skills for preparing materials, sinking posts, fastening beams and fabricating sections of roof thatch. Sia Raga houses are "collective" not only in the sense that people congregate in them and are joined together by them, but also in that their construction demands collective knowledge and work.

In the case of imwa, such work tends to be organised at vara level. The most frequent reason for the building of new imwa is marriage. In the weeks leading up to a marriage a house is built in the groom’s hamlet in preparation for the arrival of the bride. Close relatives of the groom, especially those who are also members of his vara and share ancestral links to the same vanua, undertake the construction of the house. On some days this work team may include upwards of fifty people, mostly from the
Images 71 and 72: Building an innwa for Michael Tamata, at Lagaronboga.
groom’s own hamlet, but also kin group members from surrounding locations. At such
times, expressions of both *ilo* and *mataisao* are apparent: the technical names of the
various house components are used by practical necessity during construction, but there
is also ample time to reflect upon the social and symbolic significance of these. At the
end of a day’s work, those people who have helped then receive a payment, referred to
as *vagumi*, of food and kava from the house owner.

Much of the work involved in house building is gender specific. Building a
particular marriage house in fact begins many weeks prior to actual on site construction
with the harvesting of materials from gardens belonging to the groom’s same-moiety
members. Though men can, and do, often help them, women are in large part
responsible for the harvesting of roofing materials, and for the time-consuming task of
weaving the many hundreds of individual sections of roof thatch (*taŋure*) that are
required to make a well-drained roof (described in detail below). The work involved in
selecting and collecting wood for posts and rafters, as well as harvesting bamboo and
weaving it into is considered to be men’s work, as is final construction of the
house on site. While most men possess the knowledge (*ilo*) that is required to build a
standard *imwu*, men with specialized skills might be employed to make a better house.
For people who desire and can afford housing that implements Western styles and
materials, the skills of a trained carpenter are employed. Along with car mechanics,
carpentry is one of the few relatively lucrative professional trades on Pentecost.

Unlike *imwu*, the building of *gamali* is carried out exclusively by men. In this case
construction work is organized by a single man, usually the hamlet *ratahiq* (chief), who
will be recognized as the custodian of the *gamali* upon its completion. With extra
considerations of size and additional architectural features, the building of a good *gamali*
— one that will be admired for its strength, sense of aesthetic proportion, and
“authenticity” — requires further specialized skills and knowledge (*ilo*). *Gamali* attract
particular praise when they are firmly built. Vertical posts must be thick, sturdy and
deeply planted, beams must be tightly fastened, and roof thatch must be close fitting.
The double-layering of roof thatch (*taŋure*) is a method that draws particular praise.
Recalling the double-bind of the Sia Raga sense of community, the “tight” quality of a
well-built house in which the “two sides of the house” (*tavalun imwu*) are firmly joined, is
expressed as *wasi* (see chapter three).

---

174 A very similar division of labour according to sex is also noted by Jolly of Sa house building practices
(1994: 75).
CHAPTER SIX

As I have previously mentioned, gamali are established and maintained by individual ratahigi (chiefs) whose authority they represent. In North Pentecost it is necessary that the rights to build various parts of the gamali are eventually paid for by these gamali custodians, usually after construction is finished. In this way gamali are explicitly recognized as constituted through social networks of exchange that extend beyond the boundaries of the hamlet. The number of payments necessary depends on the size of the gamali. In the case of Avatvotu, which represents the contemporary norm in having five central posts, Kolombas was required to make thirteen payments. These included one for each of the five central posts (gaimahaiia), one for the ridgepole (gaibubwe), and one for each of five designated roof sections (tangure). Payments were also required for the ibwiri (front canopy), as well as for the tanbona (porch area). Each payment was made in the form of a single pig of the tusk size bogani ("pig-eat" – in this case the tusk has protruded from the gum and is fully visible) and each went to a separate recipient.

The main pre-requisite of eligibility to receive such a payment is that the recipient must himself have made such a payment at some point in the past, and will therefore be a ratahigi who already holds the rights to that particular architectural feature within his own gamali. In this way, gamali components are treated in exactly the same way as the status emblems that are purchased by men and women at pig-killing rituals – such as particular leaves, textiles worn around the waist, feather headdresses, arm and leg bands, etc. In exchanging rights to utilize these, such material objects appear as detachable parts of persons. They are therefore understood to be relationally constituted – with other gamali, but also with other people (c. f. Strathern 1988).

The payments of pigs made by gamali custodians are also attended by a moral implication for their recipients who are expected thereafter to take a continued interest in the affairs of the new gamali, and its occupants. As a result of these payments, simply called volin gamali (paying for the gamali), the newly constructed gamali becomes linked to a wider network of other gamali located within surrounding hamlets. It therefore becomes invested as a microcosm embodying widespread webs of leadership, authority and exchange, such as are isomorphic with the broader social landscape.

175 In the past, other payments were required for major transverse logs (gaitugi gogona), for extended cross-beams adorning the front of gamali (buan gabani, "bamboo wings"), and for ritually important plants located in the vicinity of the gamali.
The building of gamali begins with the sinking of vertical posts in an evenly spaced straight line. These posts, which protrude about eight metres from the ground, will be the central supports of the house. Imwa usually have three central posts, though gamali may also have five, and ten is considered to be the ideal number that was typical in the time of amua (the pre-European past). Posts are selected for strength, and they must also fork into two at an appropriate height. Collectively, the central posts are known as gaimabaña, “supports that diverge”. (Each of these central posts also have individual names, as discussed below). The forks themselves are called livon gai, the “teeth of the supports”. In the case of gamali, but not imwa, further vertical posts are located on either side of the central gaimabaña. These are referred to by the same name(s).

Running the full length of the structure is a central beam or “backbone” that is said to “lie down” (eno), nestled between the forked teeth of each gaimabaña. Although the central beam is in fact often composed of two or more separate lengths of wood joined end to end, it is considered a single entity, called gaihubwe. While gaimabaña are the “supports that diverge”, gaihubwe is the “support that joins” or “meets”. In architectural terms, the ridgepole is recognized as the support that joins because it marks the meeting point of each of the two “sides of the house” (tavalun imwa), each of which forms a mirror image of each other.

Running lengthwise, parallel to and on either side of the ridgepole are a series of secondary tie beams. There are eight tie beams in total, four on each side forming complementary pairs. The outermost horizontal beams of gamali are called gaitvara (support of the rows), a reference to the kin category vara and the tracing of matrilineal descent groups. These mark the outermost part of the house truss. These low beams are supported by short vertical posts, called turatura (props), which these days are usually

---

176 Gai, which has the basic meaning of “instrument”, is a common prefix in nouns describing tools or structures made from wood. It is also used in counting: gaitumwa, gairua, gaiotlha, etc. (1, 2, 3, etc.). Significantly, the term gai may also be used in describing the appendages of the human body, the arms, legs, and fingers, as well as individual bones.

177 Gaimahanga and gaihubwe are both listed in Hardacre’s c.1920 Raga Vocabulary (n. d.).

178 However it should be reiterated that the term vara is also used more generally to refer to any social group that is defined laterally in actual practice, usually in association with particular places (see chapter four).
CHAPTER SIX

Image 73: Basic *imwa* truss.

![Diagram of basic *imwa* truss with labels A to H.

A. *Gaimahaiia*: “supports that diverge”
B. *Livon gai*: “teeth of the supports”
C. *Gaihubwe*: “support that joins”
D. *Tavalun imwa*: “side of the house”
E. *Bwehale*: “shoulders” / “roads”
F. *Varasi*: “rows”
G. *Turatura*: “props”
H. *Gaigugusi*: “arms clasped around the body”

Image 74: Basic *gamali* truss.

![Diagram of basic *gamali* truss with labels A to J.

A. *Gaimahaiia*: “supports that diverge”
B. *Livon gai*: “teeth of the supports”
C. *Gaihubwe*: “support that joins”
D. *Tavalun imwa*: “side of the house”
E. *Bwehale*: “shoulders” / “roads”
F. *Varasi atamani*: “row of men”
G. *Varasi varine*: “row of women”
H. *Gavara*: “support of the rows”
I. *Turatura*: “props”
J. *Gaigugusi*: “arms clasped around the body”

245
between one and two meters high and are fastened with walls made of woven slats of bamboo. In the past the outer posts were little more than a foot in height, and often consisted of a wall of tree fern posts. This allowed the overhanging roof of the house to brush the ground (see chapter five). The central tie beam of each side is called *bwehale*. Also interpreted as “shoulders”, the linguistic allusion here is to “ways” or “roads” (*bala*). These are supported with further vertical posts, which like the central posts are called *gaimahaña* (supports that diverge). On either side of each central tie beam (*bwehale*) are two further tie beams, one above (inner) called *varas atamani*, and one below (outer) called *varas vavine*. These are not supported by vertical supports (*gaimahaña*), but instead simply hang off the tie beams (see image 74), thus keeping the tie beams in orderly rows. In this case *vara* refers to particular social groupings, as we have already seen in chapter four. *Atamani* and *vavine* are “man” and “woman”, respectively. The positioning of male above female is found in other forms of material culture, such as certain basket forms. Both men and women I spoke to suggested it represented the positioning of male authority over women. In the case of household dwellings (*imwa*) there are no *varas atamani* or *varas vavine*, just a single beam on either side of the ridgepole that is referred to simply as *varasi* (rows). Likewise, the outer most horizontal beam is called *bwehale*.

The eight horizontal tie beams and the ridgepole that run the length of the *gamali*, along with the vertical posts that support them, comprise the essential frame or truss of the building. These are given further structural support, however, by two sets of smaller struts (lateral and oblique) that span cross-wise between the *beru*. (These are not included in Images 74 and 75). As well as having individual names (see below), these struts are more generally known as *gaibulu* (“support together”), or more simply *gai* (supports).

Layered on top of the horizontal beams are many lateral rafters, called *gainggusi* (meaning to “clasp one’s arms tightly around the body”). (Major rafters that are located directly above the vertical posts also have individual names, such as those discussed below). *Gainggusi* are typically made of a particular variety of bamboo, called *buavatu* (“stone bamboo”), or they may also be made of slender tree branches. Rafters branch out from the ridgepole on both sides, and slope downwards across the horizontal tie beams until slightly overhanging the last. They are fastened (*haloi*) to the truss, parallel to each other, as “roads in order” (*halvaravarat*), with rope from a kind of reed called *ariu*.
The *gamali* at Avatotu comprised approximately two hundred bamboo *gaiga*, some sixteen hundred metres in total length.

The final stage of house building involves the fastening of woven bamboo walls to the side of the house, and the layering and fastening of sections of roof-thatch (*taği*ro) onto the rafters. In the weaving of *taği*, long slender leaves of the sago palm are looped around a length of durable cane, called a *nene*, and each leaf is held in place by a small cane pin, called a *laiia*. The completed individual sections of *taği* thatch are then woven onto the rafters in successive layers, one on top of the other (*daguria*), each one being placed two or three inches above the last. The process starts at the outer sides of the house and works inwards towards the ridge where a secondary, much thinner ridgepole is fastened (*hubwehugwe*). A *gamali* of average size will eventually incorporate around one thousand individual sections of roof-thatch, each incorporating some fifty individual *taği* leaves.

**HOUSE, TREE, BODY**

A survey of northern Vanuatu kinship and kinship-related nomenclature and idioms discloses much evidence for a widespread linkage between indigenous theories of social organization, images relating to human anatomy, and house imagery in the area. These are themes that are shared throughout the Pacific and South-East Asia (see especially Fox 1993a, Webster 1990, Neich 1993). In his book, *In the Wake of the Southern Cross*, Wilson observed of moiety organization and idiom in the Banks Islands, that:

With the exception of Merelava, they all belong to one or other of the two groups, or *veve*, into which society here is divided. The word *veve* here means mother, and every child born belongs to the mother's *veve* and not to the father's. Were a man to marry any woman of his own *veve* it would be like marrying his sister. The two *veves* are compared to two sides of the house, and one marries into “the other side of the house” (1932: 65).

Likewise, on Vao, Layard encountered a dual-moiety system divided into “Sides of the Island”, “Sides of the Stone” and “Sides of the Lodge” (1942). Even on Ambrym, where a dual-tripartite social system occurs, members of each section are said
to negotiate their relationships through their own *bulafatao*, or “doors of the house” (Patterson 1976: 86).

Deacon observed that Seniang *amel* (“male clubhouse”), which were similarly built to dwelling houses in this area of Malakula:

as a whole appears to be thought of as a head. Its front is spoken of as *no on amel* (“The face of the amel”); its door is the mouth (*nimbongon amel*); the lower part of the roof on each side, together with the ground immediately beneath, is “the ears” (*nindilghin na amel*). The two principle upright posts, that at the front and that at the back (often there are only these two), are called respectively the “man-post” and the “woman-post” (*numbou morot* and *numbou milamp*). At the top of the “man-post” a face is carved; this is the “face of the post” (*ne on numbou*). The inner meaning of this conception of the *amel* and the naming of its different parts were not explained (1934a: 34).

Before going on to discuss North Pentecost houses, it is important to note that such connections of collective and individual bodies are also interpreted within other Sia Raga forms of material culture, such as baskets and exchange textiles. To provide what is perhaps the clearest example of these, *bwana* is the Raga name given to the beautiful long pandanus textiles that are a distinctive part of economic life in Central and North Pentecost, and on the neighbouring islands of Ambae and Maewo. On North Pentecost, *bwana* are plaited almost exclusively by women. However, unlike Ambae, Maewo and Central Pentecost, the art of dying these textiles does not take place locally. Instead, the Sia Raga pay for *bwana* to be dyed red by the Sowa speaking people of Central Pentecost (see Walter 1996), a service which they pay for in pigs.

Also in contrast to Ambae and Central Pentecost (compare especially Bolton 2003, 2001, 1996; Walter 1996), and with the exception of a few specific and well known designs, the dyed-red patterns of *bwana* are not accorded any great significance, but are rather seen as surface embellishments to the more meaningful components of the plaited textile itself. *Bwana* are usually about one metre wide (excluding the “tassels”, or *ramuna*), and somewhere between four and six metres long, although they are sometimes made considerably longer.

When I asked my *ratahi* (mother), Eileen Mutana, the main purpose of *bwana*, she replied, “*huri tam nubwai atatui*”, “because we wrap people [in them]”. This reply referred to the fact that in preparation for burial the bodies of deceased persons are wrapped in many *bwana* (and today also calico) that are brought by members of the deceased’s moiety. As well as being used to physically enclose human bodies in death,
bwana are said to represent formally both the human body and the social body of North Pentecost. The woven body of a bwana as a whole is called rebel (literally, the human torso) while the unstitched ramuna (tassels) are referred to as lima (fingers).

Furthermore, the vinusina (which was translated to me as "backbone")\textsuperscript{179} is the name given to the central seam which runs down the length of bwana, and which separates the textiles' two major architectural divisions. On either side of the spine of the bwana are further plaited "lines" referred to as houn bwana, in reference to cognatic decent (ie. the hou of the bwana). On different occasions I was told that the two divisions, called nundu, represent the two moieties, bule and tabi. They were also accorded with the distinction between male and female. I was told that the lateral crosses that traverse each side (called matlio) indicate the balan ravine mwasigi, or "the true road of women" in marriage, this being a reflection of the rule of exogamy that accords to the moieties. While I did not explore the architectonic features of bwana in the same depth as houses, it is clear from these fragmented details that within their form an equation is made between the human body and the social body, both of which are made up of "sides" that simultaneously join and separate through the existence of connecting "roads" or "ways".

These linkages between body and social body are also revealed in houses, as the above description of gamali architecture and architectural terms demonstrates. They are also clearly composed of the same features that Jif Ruben Todali employs in producing his land-tree images (see chapter three). On this level of design, the shape of houses may therefore be interpreted as a template which is isomorphic with other things or ideas. But they must also be seen as fully animated forms or agents, as they are by their inhabitants. This understanding of the interpretive knowledge (mataisao) that is attached to houses reveals them to be much more than constructions of wood and thatch. Houses are embodied manifestations of ancestry, living bodies.

I once accompanied Kolombas Todali to Labultamata where he was to officiate at a fowl-killing ceremony (gonato). Shortly after the completion of the ritual we found ourselves talking with a group of men inside one of the village gamali. A large earth oven was being prepared in which the fowl and pig that had just been sacrificed would soon be cooked. The gamali quickly filled up with smoke which we avoided by lying down on mats, flat on our backs. From this position, looking up at the roof, we watched as drafts of wind sucked and blew the smoke in and out of the doorway, and

\textsuperscript{179} The human spine is more commonly referred to as hui gaitigui.
through vents situated at either end of the *gamali*. When I commented to Kolombas how curious this looked, he offered the following reply:

Yes, the *gamali* is breathing. A house is the same as a man, its door is its mouth. It must be open for you to speak out from it, for things to come to you, to eat and survive. If there is no door, nothing will come to you.

On another occasion and in another *gamali*, Kolombas told me:

If you didn’t have *tonuhoa*, *kava* and *gudutu*, the house wouldn’t be able to stand up. It’s the same as two hands and two legs. If you don’t have a backbone you can’t hold your ribs together, they can’t join. Your belly, or your body, its the same as a house. Our mouths are as the door of a house. Everything that approaches can come inside, is welcome to come. Its meaning is the human body that sleeps. Its arse is here [at the rear of the *gamali*], the place that is taboo. Oh, the story of the *gamali* is long. (Interview recorded at Avaroru, September, 1999).

Image 75: *bulu malogu* (*kava* grinding dishes) and other objects left to decay within the *gamali* at Abwatunabuliva following the burial of Charlie Aru (May 2000).
Kolombas’s description suggest that gamali are, like us, living human bodies capable of breathing and speaking, ingesting and defecating. Given the processual nature of houses, such comparisons are not at all uncommon throughout the world. As Carsten and Hugh-Jones point out, houses continually transform what passes through them, and also like people, “are born, live, grow old, die and decay” (1995: 43-45). Such a connection between human bodies and houses as bodies is reinforced at the death of prominent individuals whose houses and their contents are abandoned and left to decay.

Waterson has stated that throughout South-East Asia, “the idea of the house as a ‘living’ thing is often reinforced by the use of anthropomorphic imagery” (1990: 129). Such imagery certainly appears in Sia Raga houses, but why the quotation marks around the word ‘living’? On North Pentecost the isomorphy of bodies and houses goes beyond being a symbolic mapping of anatomy onto architecture. Here houses are bodily presences in their own right, sentient agents that participate in the shaping of the human bodies they enclose.

Historical knowledge of ancestral origin and the merging of people with the land is an important feature that is also built into the form of Sia Raga houses. This is most vividly illustrated in the central posts and ridgepole. As well as referring (as their names do) to the physical characteristics of the posts themselves, gaimahaña (central posts) and gaihubwe (ridgepole) are embodiments of the primogenital ancestor Bwatmahaña and his home at Anserehubwe, the vanua upon which he built the first gamali. We might recall that Bwatmahaña was tricked into being burnt to death within this gamali by his nemesis Tagaro. Trying to escape, Bwatmahaña “climbed up the central pillar of the gamali…. However the fire was already consuming the gamali, and Bwatmahaña burnt with the ridge pole” (Yoshioka 1987: 39). Following his death, Bwatmahaña forged the road to abanoi, that “out of time” other-world repository of ancestors. In doing so he merged with the earth, but this also marked the division of the universe into two cosmological realms. Within these two central architectural components, the central posts and ridgepole, the house then clearly displays a coming together of two primary principles of Sia Raga ontology: of splitting and division (mahaiia), and also of convergence and unity (hubwe).

---

180 This is related to a story about the clearly cognate character of Qat, from the Banks Island, that is told by Wilson in his book In the Wake of the Southern Cross. Here Qat, in order to hide from a giant named Bwasavara, hides by “merging” with a post of the house in which they slept (1932: 68-69).
Another crucially related way in which the central posts of gamali and imwa communicate these central ontological principles is through their individual names. These names are prefixed with the term mu, a contraction of the root term mua, meaning both “first” and “mother”; thus muliu, mugani, mugita (see below). While these are the more commonly used names, it is equally appropriate to refer to them through employing as a prefix in place of mu – a term of endearment that is used for one’s male children, tari: thus tariliu, tarigani, and tarigita. Interestingly, when I was first told of these alternative names I asked whether the prefix tari referred to the kin term for a mother’s brother, i.e. tarabe. While I was told that this was not specifically the case, my interlocutor nevertheless suggested that this was still an appropriate interpretation. This matrilineal emphasis is said to pay homage to the post-marital residence prescription which demands that a man should build his house, and gamali, on the vanua of his mother and mother’s brothers.

In terms of the imagery of the house, therefore, central posts called gaimabañña (supports that diverge) do not only represent the apical ancestor Bwatmahaña, but also a mother (and mother’s brother) who gives birth to a son. As mothers (mua: first), women are considered to precede men, and it is recalled that in creation history even Bwatmahaña’s generation (tauva) is preceded by the first woman, Mugarimaña, the “mother clam gapes open”. Where creation is conceptualized not as occurring ex nihilo, but through a process of division or differentiation, such a connection between cosmogony and birth might be expected. In fact, the Sia Raga word for birth, bora, also means “to split” or “divide” (see chapter five).

In their form, Sia Raga houses show us how multiplication and closure might in fact be considered part of the same process. This apparent paradox is especially present in the sloping roof whose lateral rafters – as with “arms clasped tightly around the body” – can be seen to both diverge from the centre, but at the same time converge at the centre. While divergence is clearly featured in the house’s central posts, called gaimabañña (supports that diverge), the notion of convergence is also signalled in the ridgepole, called gaihubwe (the support that “joins” or meets). In this way the house shows that while the one may diverge into two and continue to split into many, collectively those fragments are still held together, ultimately, as one. This image recalls Mimica’s argument concerning the Iqwaye counting system, where “One single finger like one body are already symbolic equivalents of the entire cosmos. Thus one by itself is already the intimation of infinity” (Mimica 1988: 95). I would argue that Iqwaye counting, as
described by Mímica, is very much akin to the poesis communicated within Sia Raga understandings of trees, bodies and houses, and very probably of houses throughout the northern region of Vanuatu.

Since houses are trees reconstructed, it is perhaps not surprising that their architecture reflects tree-like narrative qualities, such as foundations and growth, trajectory and division. Indeed, the architecture of houses, when considered on the horizontal plane and trajectory, bears a striking resemblance to the land-tree drawings discussed in chapter three. Following the trajectory of these narratives, on-site house building begins with the sinking of centre posts (gaimahaina) that form “branches” that “diverge” from a single source. Lying within the forks of the centre posts is a ridgepole that represents the “meeting” of the two “sides of the house”, or, idiomatically, the two moieties. Each “side” is distinguished by four “rows”, “roads” or “ways” that span the length of the house, the matrilineal descent groups of Jif Ruben’s images. The vara of each side also contain both male and female qualities. These are overlaid with the many crosscutting “arms” of the rafters. These are themselves crosscut again by the hundreds of roof-thatch sections (taḡure), and still further by many thousands of individual taḡure leaves. As well as being a single body, the house then also conceptualises encompassed sociality, and various levels of social grouping therein.

Sia Raga houses are not merely static “images” or representations. Within their architectonic form they demonstrate the emergent processes of present sociality, from the singular to the dual, and into further abstract groupings. Bachelard has written that “An entire past comes to dwell in a new house” (1964: 5). This is doubly so for North Pentecost houses. As with Jif Ruben’s land-tree drawings, the narrative form of houses merges the temporalities of historical emergence with that of a fully-formed “present”. This ambiguous co-presence is achieved through recourse to the image of the tree image – a moving image – both of, and upon which houses are built.

Finally, one further important feature of house architecture that I have not yet discussed concerns the hundreds of meters of vegetable fibre rope (ariu) that are used to tie the posts, beams and thatch together. The many various methods of fastening particular parts of houses are also described as bala (roads). Beams and thatch are secured by vegetable fibre ropes along spiralling pathways that recall the Sia Raga metaphors of relationship and exchange that were discussed in chapter four: the growth of yams, pig’s tusks, and the “roads” of marriage, in particular. These architectonic “ways” recall also the double-bind of Sia Raga sociality, and so a tightly fastened house.
is also described as *wasi*. Like the two moieties, houses are seen to incorporates the idea of an ambivalent dualism of two sides (*tavalun imwa*) that are bound together in a relationship of tension. Through the elaboration of both tree and body metaphors the house therefore comes to “stand for” society as a whole. They also go further by conveying something of the character of relationships composed therein, as an ethos or moral force.

**LISTENING POSTS**

As we saw in the previous chapter, the axis by which Sia Raga houses are oriented horizontally, and by which the Sia Raga are themselves oriented by their houses, runs from front to rear. To walk through the entrance at the front of a *gamali* and onwards through its central path (*sarivuana*) towards the rear of the building is to trace a trajectory “upwards” (*hae*) into increasing knowledge and spiritual power. To turn and walk “down” (*hivo*), back towards the entrance again, is to follow the path in the direction by which that knowledge and power is transferred. In the past this trajectory was explicitly marked by a series of sacred cooking fires (*matan gabz*) and associated compartments. Each fire accorded to a separate named grade within the subwe. Within the *gamali* men were restricted to eating food from the fire of their respective grades of attainment, and socialised most closely with those men with whom they shared the name and status of that grade. With the disappearance during the early twentieth century of sacred fires from Sia Raga *gamali* (see below) the restrictions of spatial practice that pertained to them have also been significantly transformed. Throughout the course of colonial history the rigidity of these former arrangements has given way to a dual scheme of lower and upper sections. Whereas in the past women where by-in-large forbidden from entering the *gamali*, in today’s situation women have relative freedom of movement within the lower section, that is, the half nearest the entranceway. This space is also where a now more generally used, single large cooking fire is located. Men tend to congregate in the upper part of the *gamali*. It is here in the

---

181 There may have been important exceptions to this rule. While most older people usually asserted that the *gamali* was formerly utilised by males persons only, I was also told that some high-ranking older women were able to gain entry to the *gamali*, particularly those who entered the male grade taking system as is said to have occasionally occurred.
more “sacredly powerful” (sabuga) area of the gamali that kava (moloğe) is prepared and consumed.

While I have already explored these transformations of spatial practice in the previous chapter, I raise them here in order to provide context to the present section. While matan gabi (sacred fires) are not currently present in Sia Raga gamali, one important architectonic feature that continues to speak clearly of the trajectory of knowledge within houses are the gaimabaña (central posts). In doing so, they also go further in explicating the corporeality of houses in terms of growth and development. Here I continue the discussion of gamali architectonics by looking at some of the more specific characteristics, personalities and messages that adhere to individual features of gamali and imwa.

As mentioned above, while collectively they are called gaimabaña, the central posts also have individual names. These names generally follow the same order, regardless of their number. Thus in a three-posted house muliu is always the first (that is, that which is located at the doorway), mugani is the second, and mugita the third. There is however an exception in that in the case of their being more than three posts, the third will be called mugariño (“mother-touch”) and mugita will become the fourth.182 The fifth will be called muroño (“mother-heat/apprehend”), and so it goes until ultimately the tenth post, mudoro (“mother-desire/love”), is reached.

While the significance of the prefix mu- (from mua, “mother”) has already been discussed (above), the relationship between the individual names of centre posts further develops the ideas of trajectory and growth which adhere to houses. To begin with the least explicit of these, the post names allude to human sensory and cognitive development. The idea of “surpassing” by which the first post is characterized (and in this context might refer to birth) is followed by eating then tasting, touching, seeing, and hearing (in that order). These mainly sensory attributes are followed by the more consciously meaningful acts of reaching, speaking and examining, and finally desiring.

As mentioned above, the word liu (from the first of the post, muliu) has the basic meaning of “overtake” or “surpass”. Not only referring to the fact that one must pass by this post in order to enter the house, as might be supposed, it also contains a much

---

182 This schema accords generally with Yoshioka who provides a diagram of a gamali (which was probably located at the village of Labultamata) where four sets of two posts make up the central gaimahanga. Yoshioka refers to these sets as Muliin, Mugani, Mułago and Mugita, in that order (Yoshioka 1983a: 3). Thus, in this instance, what I was told to call mungongo (“mother-touch”), is called mulago (“mother-walk” [my translation]).
fuller meaning, or binihiva ("thought within"). Individual post names refer to particular personal qualities or attributes that pertain to them, in relation to the developmental stages discussed above. Being integral to the posts themselves, these qualities are treated as exemplars of social knowledge from which, as ancestral personifications, people may benefit. When spoken about in this context of mataisao (wisdom) the posts are referred to as male persons, as "men" (atatū), or as "chiefs" (ratabigi). Thus the names point to the particular social characteristics of the posts, but also their persuasive moral personality. The following are examples from an interview I held with Kolombas Todali within the gamali at Avatvotu in September, 1999:

K. T.: OK. Mutiu has got wisdom, and I will demonstrate by way of an example from the sea. You have to catch small fish before you catch big fish. But if at first you paddle your canoe over the outer edge of the reef and here you drop your line, you don’t catch any fish. It's like this: Mutiu, he has something that he can give to you very quickly, and that you can take. But you will get up, and you will go and look for this thing from another man. However, when you go to ask this other man, he says he doesn’t know of what you want. Now you look to come back to the first man but he tells you, “No, sorry. You have surpassed me already, and now I can’t give you what you want.”

Likewise, at the second post, gami means “eat”. The thought of this post is that he must always eat first (in this context posts are always referred to as men). Food taken straight out of the oven burns the hands, and these must be wiped on mugani. Gita (from mugita, the third post), means to “look” or “see”, as in the following:

K. T.: He just sits and watches. He understands, but he won’t tell. It is for him only [to know]. If you ask him, he will say, “I looked at what they did, but I don’t want to say. I only look.”

J. T.: Do you mean the post?

K. T.: Yeah. Because all the activities that take place within the gamali, that we do every day, he just watches. And there is another side to him. He watches and he plans the road that everything will follow within the gamali.

There are many other individually named posts within the gamali, and each is personified by the qualities that are implied by that name. Through these posts we see that as ancestrally inhabited objects gamali are also agents of social surveillance. Thus as mugita watches, muroño is the post that listens (roño, to “hear”, or to “apprehend”), and musiro examines (suro, to “examine”).

256
CHAPTER SIX

As well as bearing witness to events that take place within the *gamali* the various posts or rafters also teach important principles of social morality. Thus *gaibuluroro* (the “support that runs together”) is a man who supports his *ratahig* (“chief”) and doesn’t seek alliance elsewhere. More negatively, *Gategelalo* (the “support that wrongs within”) is, as Kolombas told me, “...a rubbish-shit man. A man, who, once we have agreed to something, later goes to the chief and tells him something different. You spend a long time planning for something big, but he stabs and stabs at it until you can no longer do it.” “A *politik man*, Jif Ruben interjected, “a member of parliament”.

Kolombas’s explication of the embodied significance of house features suggests a constant dialogue; between those features as embodied people that instruct their inhabitants on aspects of human development, and of those features embodying the characteristics and trajectory of that development in themselves, through their relationship to each other. Apprehending these dialogic qualities from this perspective requires that houses or their parts be viewed as agents not only through the psychological effects of technological design (c.f. Gell 1992), or through their incorporation within exchanges or relationships involving people (c.f. Gell 1998, Strathern 1988). Sia Raga houses are living, sentient agents in their own right, not only in terms of what they communicate to people, but also in terms of the relationships they share amongst themselves. As Thomas describes with regard to the art of Maori *wharenui* (“meeting houses”), the people that inhabit the posts and rafters of Sia Raga houses are not considered to be any less substantial than the people themselves (1995: 63). In these material features, and despite the absence of figurative “images” such as appear in Maori *wharenui*, ancestors are present to bear upon debates and meetings, to eavesdrop on private conversations, and to bear witness to the transmission of knowledge, the mourning of the dead, and the movements of people.

Houses and their constituent parts are valued for their ability to communicate ancestral knowledge non-verbally. In this way they are the same as the ancestrally important rocks, grave sites and plots of land that also mark the North Pentecost landscape. But how, then, do they communicate? In Sia Raga understandings, one important difference between such “things” and people involves the ability to talk. As I stated in the prologue to this thesis, speech for the Sia Raga is today the responsibility of people, but in the past this situation was reversed. Since people have learnt to speak, the land and other ancestral entities have become quiet. Now, it is said that people must speak for such things, for they cannot talk themselves. The ability to talk (*vet*) is,
however, an ambivalently valued human attribute. As a fundamental aspect of ureure, the lived human world, it is known to be changeable and subject to corruption. In this regard it is contrasted with silo, the “authentic” or “true” (mwasi) laws, and unheard “voice” of ancestors (see also chapter three). At certain times, however, human speech is considered to be gogona, and where this is so it is considered to be a true approximation of the silo of ancestors. When a person is understood to be speaking the authoritative truth, particularly with regards to ancestral knowledge, this is known as silon leu, the “voice of ancestral laws”.

It is within this context of ancestral knowledge as mediated by living people that I understand the recorded interview with Kolombas and Jif Ruben Todali to have taken place (from which I have quoted above). While I regularly held lengthy discussions with Jif Ruben, about gamali and numerous other subjects, on this occasion it was Kolombas who performed the role of principle interlocutor. Jif Ruben instead chose to remain in the background, quietly listening, and only interjecting occasionally to back up a point or to make a joke. Kolombas is the main receptacle of Jif Ruben’s considerable knowledge of Sia Raga verburina (history) and aleñan vanua (ways of the place), and in this way might be thought of as having been speaking to me for Jif Ruben. Indeed, throughout these discussions it seemed to me that Jif Ruben’s attention focused more on the accuracy of Kolombas’s delivery than to my own responses. More significantly, in terms of the understanding of houses as meaningful agents that I have explored in this chapter, Kolombas can be seen to have been speaking for the very posts that he was speaking about. They, in turn, and like Jif Ruben, were listening, critically engaged with this discourse.

CONCLUSION

In discussing Jif Ruben’s land-tree images I suggested that the movements they incorporate provides a technology by which their producers may rehearse their understandings of Sia Raga social relations in space. Gamali and imwa clearly incorporate the same essential features of this technology. As three-dimensional “presented objects”, rather than simply two-dimensional graphic “representations”, we might also be encouraged to consider their patterns and structures in terms of their capacity for visual enchantment; their incorporation of technical processes that hold the power “of
casting a spell over us so that we see the world in an enchanted form” (Gell 1992: 43-44). The feeling of containment that might be expected within Sia Raga houses when viewing them from the outside is balanced by a visual effect of spaciousness produced by the complex patterning of the inner roof. Looking up inside a gamali, the roof is seen to be built of a series of crosshatched layers. Each layer appears to multiply and miniaturize the last, thus producing a sense of distance that is made all the more enchanting for it’s layered, three-dimensional “depth”. It is a roof that covers, but it also seems to extend upwards, almost into infinity. The overall effect of this abstract arrangement of lines is of an endless movement of fractal repetition, a narrative of endless division, from one to two (gaimabaña), from two to four, and onwards into the infinite layers of taŋure leaves that make up the roof. In this sense of physical form, this is one of many ways by which houses may be cognised as being “alive”. Through the incorporation of a set of dynamic part-to-whole relationships the house seems to be imbued with a quality of inherent agency that engages the viewer in a mazy dance in which eyes become readily lost (Gell 1998: 76). As Gell suggests, such patterns are never fully grasped by perception, but are instead “always in the process of becoming possessed” (1998: 81). This is the same process that I have previously suggested accompanies the apprehension of certain other images of social organisation and kinship, such as kinship diagrams and “sand-drawings” (see chapter four).

Sia Raga houses are not built or embellished as part of some kind of competitive psychological warfare struck between individuals or groups, like the Trobriand canoe prow-boards or the Maori wharenui as discussed by Gell (1992, 1998). Like these, however, they are enchanted with the social and technological processes of their own construction. The product of “some barely comprehensible virtuosity” (Thomas 1998: viii), these complex networks of kinship, alliance and exchange are built into their very fabric and form. Sia Raga houses are also more essentially “enchanted”, and through the voices and messages of the ancestors that inhabit them, they continually articulate to their inhabitants multiple pathways to knowledge and understanding.
In December of 2001, during a six week return trip to North Pentecost, I asked John Leo Tamata if I could record an interview with him on the subject of the recent history of Gilau, and that he relate this to the story of his own life. John is a remarkable man whose desire and ability to follow the kinds of pathways described in chapter two has seen him travel widely, throughout the archipelago of Vanuatu and across the world. In 1963, at the age of thirteen, John left Pentecost to attend high school at Lolowai, on Ambae. After graduating he departed Vanuatu for Nouméa where he worked for several years as a tiler. In the late 1970s he returned to Pentecost to visit his family, only to find himself pressured by his father into working as a campaigner for Father Walter Lini’s emerging Vanua’aku Pari. Following independence in 1980 he was employed within various Government posts managing the generation of foreign aid and its distribution throughout Vanuatu. This work took him to America, Britain, India,
AND STILL THEY GO TO THE MOON

Australia, Fiji, and many other foreign destinations, the experiences of which he has woven into an array of fascinating and humorous stories. As with *The Story of Jimmy* (recounted in chapter two), John often crafts his accounts in such a way that they bear poignant moral messages and encourage his audience to reflect broadly upon the situation of their own being in the world.

For reasons he describes in the passage quoted below, John Leo Tamata returned to live permanently in his Gilau *bwatun vanua* in 1988. Since that time he has taken on a dual role as leader and student in the area. As a *ratabigi* (chief) he represents the subdistrict of Hurilau on the North Pentecost Council. He also spends a great deal of time exploring the knowledge of older Sia Raga men and women, such as Jif Ruben Todali and Eileen Mutona, for those "ways of the place" that brought him back home. As he expressed to me in the beginning of the interview, in doing this he is also strengthening vital ties of place and identity: "I say that I am *man Pentikos* [a man of Pentecost]," he told me, "but if you were to count the years that I have been here, I think that you’d find that I’ve spent more time outside of North Pentecost. But now I’m *man Pentikos*, because I’ve stayed here for a long time."

The following extract, the conclusion to the interview, resonates with the narrative tropes of trajectory and division that I examined in chapter three. Here John conveys a sense of the complex tension that his position entails, as an experienced man of the world and as a man of North Pentecost. Also acutely felt are the oscillating ideological and political-economic tensions which divide and enjoin the different strategies of *alenan vanua* (the ways of the place) and *alenan tuturani* (foreign ways):

J. T.: What happened here in North Pentecost at the time of independence?  

J. L. T.: Well. Some people said that there would be violence, but there wasn’t. In places like Santo, Malakula, and in Vila there was violence. But here, there was just talk. I think because of the strength of *kastom*. Its like, if you want to fight, you know already that if you go somewhere and meet someone who wants to fight you, you’re related in some way, so the fight subsides.

But in 1980 my father killed a pig, a *livada* [circle tusker]. In doing so they gave him a name, Vira Liñ Tuturani. This meant that whites would depart. How should I put it? – so that we separated with the *tuturani*. Afterwards they called him Vira Lini, but his real name was Vira Liñ Tuturani, meaning “he releases the *tuturani.*”

261
In 1980 I went to Vila. I was already married and had my first son. I stayed for eight years in Vila working in government positions. Then I got sick and came back. When I came back I started visiting Vira Livivu [if Ruben Todali]. During the eight years I [had previously] spent in Vila I went on some training courses, workshops and seminars, about rural development, about how to deal with the problems that people face. I found that with the kind of development, as it is called around the world – there are lots of tuturani who agree with the kind of civilization that we are trying to reach. But there are also lots of tuturani who are against it. This made me understand that, “No, these things that we are trying to learn in the tuturani school, there are lots of tuturani who don’t agree with it!”

So this made me come back. I’m not trying to say that the kind of civilization that we have today is no good. But my interest has changed, and I think it is better that we don’t run away from everything. It would be no good if we went so far, reached the target, and then found that the way was no good. Then to try to come back. What would we find? What would we lose? So for this reason I came back.

I could say that there is no future for the world. People talk about peace in the world, but I look around and see that there is no peace in the world. I say this because of many things that I’ve seen. Like in the US. They’ve reached the moon! But there, about 40 million people don’t have a house. How many millions don’t have work? So I see that we’ve moved along this road, and its gone awry already.

But here? In terms of money, there is no money in Gilau. In terms of hygiene we don’t know much. But at least everyone is free. Everyone has a garden. Everyone has land. Everyone has a house, and everyone has food. But if you were in New York city – some people cover themselves with newspaper to sleep in the street.

And still they go to the moon.

In explaining to me the reasons for his return to North Pentecost, John Leo Tamata’s narrative thus incorporated a complex interaction of spatial and temporal movement. The crucial point to John’s narrative was the link between his own physical trajectory of returning home, and the space-time trajectories of “civilization” and “development” that he described as having learnt about in training courses, workshops and seminars in Port Vila. Aleñan tuturani and aleñan vanua provide the sociological bookends to this temporal continuum. Evocatively pictured as a rocket going to the
moon, futurity is exemplified by a negatively framed description of his experience of the United States of America: the hypocrisy of massive socio-economic inequality in a nation of unparalleled wealth and technological achievement. The foreignness of these ways are juxtaposed to the ways of the place to which he has returned. Despite lacking material wealth, these are idealized as a social freedom founded on equal access to resources.

Taking stock of these tropes, John Leo Tamata’s story reflects Western ontological schemes by which geographical space – and associated places of identity – become infused with ideas concerning progress and evolution. As I have argued elsewhere with regard to tourism, within such narratives this opening of temporal space is generative of desire and nostalgia (Taylor 1998: 2). Thus the tourists that visit Vanuatu – though very few visit North Pentecost – carry with them “barefoot fantasies” of a “natural” beauty and authenticity that is seen to be lacking “at home”. Along with the tourists’ physical journey is a parallel journey through symbolic time that reverses eschatological narratives of progress and the Fall. As Curtis and Pajaczkowska have put it, for such tourists:

- The historic past in all its sedimented inevitability is sought in relation to the personal, pre-emptive moment – the Arcadian prelude to industrialisation, the innocent hedonism of the primitive, precolonial world, and the unity of self which preceded adulthood and modern self-consciousness (Curtis and Pajaczkowska 1994: 199).

It is perhaps within the context of this paradigm that the tuturani critics of “civilization”, that John Leo Tamata describes, sound the warning that prompts him to return to North Pentecost. And so not unlike tourists who also seek truth and self-knowledge through space-time travel, John’s journey home follows the trajectory of a moral as well as spatial and temporal continuum.

The passage is situated cross-culturally at a number of levels, three of which are explicit. First, the broader subject matter of John’s discussion revolves around interaction between what are positioned as the vastly differing “ways” of Sia Raga and tuturani. Second, John tracks his own changing sense of identity across the terms of this relationship. Third, there is the context in which the interview took place: between two people, one of whom is Sia Raga and the other tuturani, but both of whom in distinct ways have positioned themselves as mediators between their different “ways of place” (aleña). Thus the interview can be interpreted as having been actualised within the context of what Marshall Sahlins has called a “structure of the conjuncture”, such as
involve the practical realization of “cultural categories in a specific historical context, as expressed in the interested actions of the historic agents, including the microsociology of their interaction” (1985: xiv). Less obviously, and in terms of these considerations, John’s history and explanation (rev bun) also operates through incorporating the narrative tropes and cultural categories of both epistemologies, tuturani and Sia Raga. Thus, it reflects the more subtly dialectical logic of conjunctural realisations in which different structures are made to intersect within the “denouement” of meaningful actions and events (Sahlins 1991: 83).

As well as my somewhat cynical interpretation of John Leo Tamata’s narrative as reflecting Western spatio-temporal schemes, the interview also resonates many of the central Sia Raga narrative principles that I have explored throughout the course of this thesis. The sequence unfolds around a tensely oscillating (wasi) relationship between two “sides” (tawalitu), aleñan vanua and aleñan tuturani. These sides are certainly perceived to be positioned at either end of a space-time continuum or trajectory (hala). But there is also a sense by which the kind of “denial of coevalness” (Fabian 1983) that characterises such constructions of otherness, in Western terms, is transcended. Within John’s narrative both time-places are equally present within the other. Indeed, just as John’s father is able to symbolically “release the tuturani”, each is equally able to exert their agency upon the other.

Although John fears that should the Sia Raga travel too far along the development road they might not be able to negotiate a return journey, for him this situation has clearly not yet been reached. The potential of this social trajectory is mirrored in the recent history of his own personal road (hala); having physically returned to North Pentecost, John has been able to successfully negotiate his way “back” to aleñan vanua (the ways of the place). This movement is made even more palpable through his extended dwelling on the land, consumption of local food crops, and through interaction with the environment and people who live there. In the Sia Raga terms that were discussed in relation to Ruben Todali’s land-tree images in chapter three, John’s sustained and positively “emplaced” pursuit of aleñan vanua has implied a meaningful tracing-back of his welena, or “true ancestral road”. But rather than appearing as a simply regressive movement, this pathway back is at the same time conceptualised as a pathway forward, a positive and regenerative way towards the image of an ideal Sia Raga future.

264
AND STILL THEY GO TO THE MOON

We have now returned to the key themes of movement and trajectory that have been explored throughout the course this thesis. John Leo Tamata’s story richly illustrates that within the contemporary era, or tauva, North Pentecost communities are very much concerned with the definition of their identity, and with maintaining and asserting agency, within the context of a dynamic global economy. Following Clifford (1997) and Gupta and Ferguson (1996), in chapter one I explored the ways in which the generation of the “field” of research that I have presented in this thesis “took place” as a part of multiple and ongoing dialectical processes. These involved negotiation between particular individuals operating within the terms of this linked local-global nexus. In chapter two, *The Story of Jimmy* provided a springboard by which to investigate these networks historically, but also in terms of present Sia Raga cross-cultural understandings and strategies. Here I compared *The Story of Jimmy* with recent events by which particular tuturani, myself included, have been incorporated within the Sia Raga system of graded titles. In doing so I demonstrated the relative efficacy of *kastom*, as both concept and practice, in mediating between what are typically seen from both perspectives as the radically separated worlds of Sia Raga and Western social economy. In seeking to understand the broader political and performative contexts in which *The Story of Jimmy* was repeatedly offered to me I was further prompted to consider particular ethical issues of ethnographic responsibility, such as I have endeavoured to take seriously throughout the course of this thesis. Thus in variously exploring the epistemological bases of Sia Raga historical and sociological consciousness, I have constantly sought to acknowledge, as Thomas has put it, “that versions of the past are always re-created for the here and now, are always politically inflected, partial, and interested” (Thomas 1991b: 298).

The analysis of broad narrative tropes contained within *The Story of Jimmy* also intimated more abstract themes of trajectory of mobility that I argued underlie Sia Raga understandings of history and social practice (in chapters three and four). Exemplified by Ruben Todali’s land-tree images, many of these patterns incorporate ideas of lineal trajectory (*hala*) with those of branching (*mahaña*). These movements provide a basic conceptual scheme which is incorporated within diverse contexts of practice and interpretation. Crucial to these are the inculcation of a series of dialectically related rather than simply oppositional categories, or “sides” (*tavalui*). Like the two Sia Raga moieties, *tavalui* are understood to exist in a perpetual relationship of ambivalent tension, exerting a simultaneous push and a pull that is both negatively constraining and
positively creative. These concepts provide a framework by which to reflect critically on the differing ways of *aleñan vanua* and *aleñan tuturani* (as with the example of John Leo Tamata’s life history, discussed above). They are also fundamental to cosmological understandings of the time-places of *ureure* (the lived world of human experience) and *abanoi* (the ancestral other-world), the related concepts of *gogona* (human restriction) and *sabuga* (sacred restriction) and the social strategies of *silon vanua* (human laws) and *tautau leo* (ancestral laws). Biological insights are also central to Sia Raga conceptualisations of the space-time processes of marriage, exchange and ancestral regeneration. These circular, or more properly spiral processes were explored in chapter four through the relational terms and idioms of kinship terminology. While emphasising the relative rigidity of these concepts at the levels of both abstract anthropological analysis and local ideology, in this chapter I also argued that in practice the Sia Raga “system” is both mobile and flexible, and is continually subject to processes of individual manipulation.

In chapter five I returned to historical themes of mobility, this time focusing on the relationship between people and place, and the movement of people within Sia Raga hamlets and houses. Here I argued that Western dichotomous terms, such as male and female or public and private, do not accord with Sia Raga concepts and are therefore inadequate for explaining spatial practices on North Pentecost. I instead aimed to reconceptualize such practices in terms of local cosmological understandings. Throughout the course of the twentieth century, dramatic changes have occurred in Sia Raga dwelling practices, particularly regarding gendered movement within and between *imwa* (household dwellings) and *gamali* (“men’s houses”). Despite these changes, the continuation of cosmologically-based concerns regarding health, fertility and reproduction has meant that formal and informal regulations pertaining to the gendered use of space remain a crucially important feature of hamlet life. Through drawing comparisons between the female act of childbirth and the primarily male act of killing pigs, I argued that the ongoing regulation of “sacred space” (Jolly 1989) ensures efficacy to fundamental life processes of reproduction and ancestral regeneration. In chapter six I stepped inside Sia Raga houses and explored the multiple meanings and voices that they contain. Within these living structures I discerned a material crystallisation of the major themes of space-time consciousness that have been explored throughout the course of this thesis.

The form of houses, like Ruben Todali’s land-tree images, demonstrates an interpretive paradigm that seems to transcend the problematic theoretical relationship
between events or change, and the anthropological notion of structure, such as is typically understood to exist prior to events, and therefore be static. This, once again, echoes Sahlins’ conceptualisation of the “structure of the conjuncture”. As Biersack suggests:

If structure is embodied in the event, practice is at once an individual initiative assumed with respect to ephemeral circumstances and an instantiation of structure. Something psychic – but at once conscious and unconscious, subjective and objective, a set of collective predispositions and an individualized ground of circumstance-sensitive action – becomes central (Biersack 1991: 19).

Similarly, throughout the course of this thesis I have tried to convey a sense of the dialectical and productive between-ness of Sia Raga cultural categories and interpretive strategies. 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. A “topography of intimate being” (Bachelard 1964), the shape of the house is also the shape of the tree, and of the human body. It is also the shape of the emergent past, as well as the both geographic and social present. Within this shape and form are echoed the ways of the place, such as are held and revealed by the ancestral people of the place, and the Sia Raga people that give life with them.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Neumann, Klaus. 1992. *Not the way it really was: constructing the Tolai past*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.


Rousseau, Benedicta. Untitled. Unpublished MS.


