

Ureparapara

*An Ethnographic Study of Kastom, Spirits, and
Everyday Life on the Island of Ureparapara, Vanuatu.*



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Master Thesis

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UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

Spring 2018

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2018

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<http://www.duo.uio.no>

Print: Representeren, University of Oslo

Abstract

This ethnographic thesis is based on six months of fieldwork on the island of Ureparapara in 2017. This island is located in the Pacific Ocean and is part of the Banks group, north in Vanuatu. A minimal amount of ethnographic literature is available from this island, so the purpose of this thesis is to embrace as many interesting topics as possible.

The everyday life on Ureparapara will be demonstrated through various topics, such as *kastom*, religion, beliefs and life cycles, amongst others. This thesis provides general information concerning climate, language and economy. It explores how the system of kinship on this island can be a matrilineal puzzle, due to its virilocal residence patterns and matrilineal descent. Descriptions of different life cycles such as birth, marriage and death, and descriptions of the various relationships serves as examples of the intricate system of kinship. Religion as an eminently collective experience will be explored by describing the various Christian denominations that were present on Ureparapara during the time of my fieldwork, and how they manage the collective dissociation or association in everyday life.

In this thesis, I will discuss how healing water and holy water affect the people who believe in its powers. I argue that this belief, together with the belief in magic and the presence of spirits and certain *kastom* rituals, is part of the construction of the person on Ureparapara. The term and concept *kastom* will be explained in relation to gender, female grade taking, tourism, and how it might be changing. I argue that this change is due to an increase in tourism, which leaves the people on Ureparapara in a Catch-22 paradox, as their desire for technological development conflicts with the financial rewards of tourism centred on traditional lifestyle.

Acknowledgements

There are many people both in Norway and Vanuatu who made not only this thesis possible but also my dream of doing this kind of research. I want to thank everyone in Vanuatu who helped me during my stay and contributed with their stories and knowledge. I must mention my closest family and the ones who meant, and still mean, the world to me. Mama Melody, papa Nicholson, my sisters Rona and Jenny, my brothers Jeff, Jerry and Jean Claude. Angkel Robin, aunti Rosina and their children. Angkel Ninian, aunti Grace. Tawi Evelyn, abu Saniel, abu Rambo, abu Willie and abu James. Sai, Kenken, Edwin, Andrina, Alice, Stein and John. To everyone in Divers Bay, I am eternally grateful to all of you. You all occupy a special place in my heart. I must also mention my family in Lehali, the Harrison family.

This fieldwork would not be possible without the guidance from my supervisor Thorgeir Kolshus, who encouraged me to conduct this fieldwork on Ureparapara, and helped and supported me every step of the way. Thank you for your guidance, patience and support. I want to thank Tom Bratrud, for your guidance, support and all efforts made during this whole process. Thank you Ingjerd Hoëm, for helping me in the difficult process of sorting out my thoughts and mind after returning to Norway.

Thank you Director of Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta, Marcellin Abong, and the National Cultural Council for supporting my research and giving me a research permit. Thank you Henline for helping me with all arrangements concerning permits and visas.

I wish to thank everyone in Sola who helped me at my arrival and my departure, special thanks go to Joe, Anna, Stewart, Robert, Deacon Newton, Bishop Patterson Worik and mama Wennie. Special thanks go to Aimee, Armin, Elna, Joy, Kristi, Maam, Salome, Viktoria, Zoe and the crew on the Pacific Hope, you were a true blessing. Everyone on S/Y Nerthus, I am eternally grateful to you. JP and Marie on Domino, thank you for getting me safely to Sola on my way home.

My family in Norway, mamma Britt Karin Flaata, pappa Trygve Brunvoll, mormor Marie Flaata, and all my siblings. You are my everything, and I could not have done this without your support. I love you.



Figure 1: Angkel Robin checking the fishing net. (private photo)

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In loving memory of papa Luke, Harold and Roy.

1. Introduction

The arrival

Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight. (Malinowski, 1984, p.4)

Sola, a small town located on the island of Vanua Lava, was the final stop before traveling by dinghy to Ureparapara. My initial plan was to stay in Sola a couple of days to prepare my ride, gather equipment and, last but not least, make contact with the people on Ureparapara to prepare them for my arrival. A letter from my supervisor addressed to his contact in Sola was my security, and I was hoping it would be helpful in the process of making contact with local people. Unfortunately, when I arrived at the airport after a rather shaky landing, nobody knew who the man addressed on the letter was. I caught a ride with two younger men into town, where they dropped me off in front of a small yacht club. The owner was in his garden, so I sat on the beach for many hours before I was given a temporary bungalow. After a lot of crying and sweating, I went to see the bishop. My supervisor knew the bishop from his own fieldwork, and the bishop promised he would help me with the organizing. After not hearing anything from anyone, I walked back to the bishop and told him I was ready to leave. He sent the deacon to do the organizing, and the next morning I was ready to leave Sola.

Before leaving Sola, I did not have contact with anyone on Ureparapara. After a three-hour boat ride in amazing weather, I arrived. The captain asked me where I wanted to be dropped off, I answered: where the people are. There was no sign of people until we came closer to the beach. Curious faces, people yelling “*waetman, waetman*¹” and children running towards the dinghy was how I was welcomed. Since I arrived on a Sunday, the church service was just finished, and everyone was standing on the beach watching me arrive. The paramount chief, Chief Nicholson, came towards me, presented himself and invited me to his area for a talk. Strong men carried my luggage (I objected, but they would not listen) to the chief’s area. After only ten minutes, everything was decided. I would be adopted by the chief and his family, I would stay in one of his bungalows for free, and if I wrote anything about

¹ Bislama for white man.

the secrets of the *tamat*², he would send me home with the first boat available. Welcome to the family.

During the first week, we organized a meeting with all the women since my research was supposed to be mainly about them. The turnout was weak, about twenty women showed up. The explanation I got for the rather poor attendance was that many people thought I was a terrorist, and therefore they were scared of me. It took approximately four weeks, hard work, and a lot of explaining before they changed their minds about me being a terrorist. Later, I asked my family why people thought I was a terrorist; the answer I got was that I was white, I was a woman traveling alone and according to them, many terrorists send their wives to perform terrorism. I had also arrived with a bush knife (machete) and while some people thought I brought it to work in the garden, most people said that white people do not work in the garden. When I finally proved that my intention was not to terrorize them, but rather to learn from them and live together with them for a long time, I was accepted in the community. Unfortunately, some people thought I was writing a travel guide and that my stay would help them economically since the whole world would read about them, and therefore visit them. I blame language for this misunderstanding. By using words and phrases like “published thesis”, “available for everyone to read” and “almost no information available”, I made myself misunderstood and misinterpreted.

Aim of the thesis

During this fieldwork, my intention was to gain knowledge of the people on Ureparapara, their lives, history, *kastom*, religions and beliefs and practices. The aim of this thesis is therefore to spread the knowledge gained, and to provide the information available at the time of my stay to other scientists, for further research in the future. This is an ethnographic thesis, which purpose is to embrace as many topics as possible, of interest to both social science, and for the Ureparapara people themselves. As the title suggests, I will show how *kastom* is practiced and embodied in relation to gender, life cycles, rituals, and how it might be changing. I argue that this change is a consequence (positive and negative) of tourism, which in turn places the people on Ureparapara in a Catch-22 paradox³, where the invention of tradition might serve as the solution. Their desire to develop the island in terms of technology

² The secret male society *tamat* on Ureparapara is the making of the headdresses which are worn by the men during *kastom* dancing, and the activities and objects related to it.

³ Heller (1961) coined this term in his novel *Catch-22*, and it can be explained as a paradoxical situation which the individual cannot escape from due to contradictory rules.

and availability might be in conflict with their ways of earning money through tourism, which I will discuss further in this thesis. The construction of the person in conjunction with spirits, magic and belief will be accounted for. These concepts as well as others mentioned above, are part of this ethnographic thesis where I aim to describe and elucidate the everyday life on Ureparapara.

This long-term fieldwork was the first one conducted on the island of Ureparapara. A minimal amount of ethnographic literature was available from this island, only a few brief paragraphs in the early ethnographic works of Codrington (1891) and Rivers (1914). Even so, much literature has been written from neighbouring islands in the province of Torba, as well as other parts of Vanuatu. Kolshus' (1999, 2007, 2008, 2016) research from the island of Mota, Eriksen's (2008, 2009, 2012) research from the island of Ambrym and from Port Vila, the capital city of Vanuatu, Hess' (2009) research from the island of Vanua Lava, and Jolly's (1994, 1996) research from South Pentecost, have all been of great value before, during and after my fieldwork.

Thesis structure

Chapter one is an introduction to the field site which includes general information on climate, language and economy, and an account of the methods used when conducting this fieldwork.

Chapter two describes the system of kinship on Ureparapara, and how the different kin relations are bound to certain rules and expectancies. I will show that the preferred post marital residence is virilocal, while descent is matrilineal, and that this combination might pose a challenge in terms of inheritance of land rights. Further in the chapter, I will explain how life-cycle rituals in relation to birth, marriage and death are carried out.

In chapter three I will give short descriptions of the various Christian denominations that are present on Ureparapara, the Anglican Church, Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. I will explore the question concerning to which degree religion can be said to be an eminently collective thing, by showing examples of how the people who choose not to be part of the main denomination, manage the collective dissociation in everyday life. I will later discuss how healing water, holy water and magic can affect the people believing in it. Further, I will argue that the embodiment of magic, spirits and certain *kastom* rituals are part of the construction of the person on Ureparapara.

In chapter four, *kastom* as a term and as a concept will be explained and discussed in relation to gender, changes concerning gender and past time female grade taking, and

tourism. I will argue that the people on Ureparapara are in a Catch-22 paradox, and the use of the terms “modern” and “primitive” will be explained and discussed.

Chapter five will consist of concluding remarks, before an epilogue marks the end of this thesis.

Ureparapara

Long time ago, Ureparapara was one round island with a volcano. There was one man and one woman. They lived close to the volcano, and they used to listen to the noise of the volcano. They never slept well since the volcano always disturbed their sleep, both day and night. They came up with a plan on how to end the noise from the volcano. One day they went to the garden where they gathered taro and firewood, and when they came back to their house they prepared one *nalot*⁴. They put it together with some shell money, some more taro, and kava⁵. They walked into the hole of the volcano, to the place where the volcano has its fire. They threw all the food into the fire, and then they said: “we want to make *kastom* to you, so you stop making such big noise all the time. Every day and night we do not sleep good”. Inside the volcano, there was a man and his woman. The man’s name was Tande, the woman’s name was Limoa. They formed one stone. Tande was the first one out in the morning, early when the daylight was weak. He walked outside to the hill and threw the stone, which broke the harbour in Divers Bay. He broke it, so the water came inside and washed the volcanos fire dead. And then he walked far away from Ureparapara. Limoa came out and she walked over the hill, the daylight was still weak, and she stopped. She stayed by the reef. (story told by Chief Nicholson)

This is a *kastom* story⁶ describing how the island Ureparapara got its current shape due to the destruction caused by the active volcano. The story above was told by chief Nicholson, my adoptive father on Ureparapara, but many people told me this story when I was recording *kastom* stories, both in Divers Bay and in Lehali. The story illustrates not only how the people believe the island got its current shape, but also the aspect of the matrilineal kinship system. While the man left the island, the woman remained on the reef. As I will show in chapter two regarding kinship and life cycles, the ideology in this *kastom* story concerning matrilineality might be evidence of a possible change in past residence patterns and further, it might show a change in gender roles as men now can be argued to be more rooted while women are mobile.

⁴ Dish made with mashed breadfruit and coconut milk.

⁵ Kava is a drink which is known for its sedative effects. It is made from the roots of the kava plant.

⁶ A traditional story/ folktale.

Ureparapara is located in the Pacific Ocean and is one of many islands in the republic of Vanuatu. This island is part of the Banks group and, together with the Torres Islands, this province is named Torba. The Banks Islands were the first part of Vanuatu discovered by the European explorer Pedro Fernández de Quirós in 1606. They were first mapped by William Bligh of the British Navy and named after his botanist, Joseph Banks. Ureparapara is inhabited on the East side of the island, by the bay. The bay is called Divers Bay (Dives Bay for the locals), and the main village is called Lesereplag. Earlier, there was another main village called Lear, but the people moved closer to the bay so Lear is not a main village anymore, only few people live in that area. On the West coast of the island, there are several smaller villages called Lehali (the main village on the West coast), Wat, Moi, Leqyangle and Tanno.

The population on Ureparapara consists of 506 persons in total, with 299 people living in Divers Bay, and 207 people living in the villages on the west coast.⁷

⁷ Number of population recorded in June 2017.



Figure 2: Map of Vanuatu. (Wikimedia Commons)

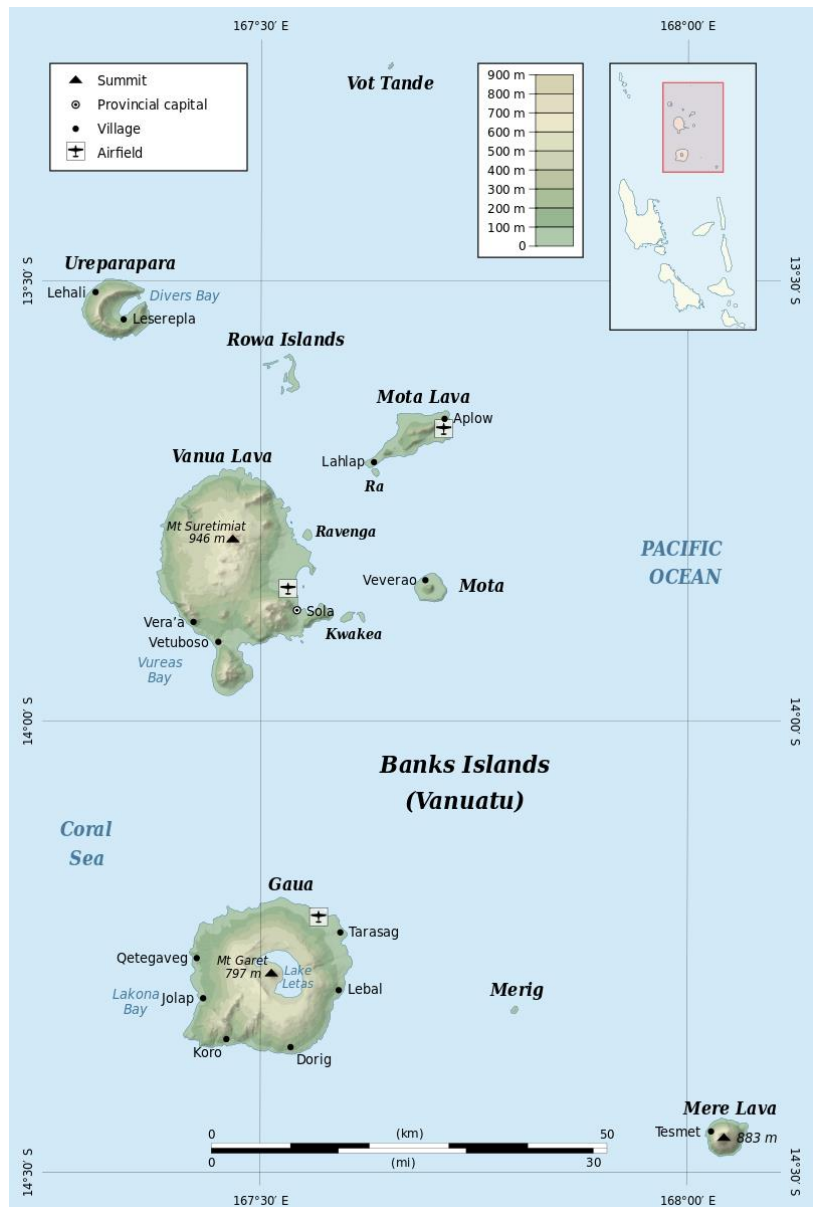


Figure 3: Picture of Banks Islands. (Wikimedia Commons)

Climate

The climate in northern Vanuatu is tropic and the temperature during the wet summer is high, with the average temperatures reaching 28 degrees and humidity measuring about 80%. The summer is from November to March, while winter is from April to October. The average temperature during winter season reaches about 23 degrees. Cyclone season is mainly from December to March, with a lot of rain and heavy winds. In Vanuatu, I experienced three cyclones, cyclone Donna⁸ being the most serious one. At its strongest, the cyclone was a category 4, and became the strongest tropical cyclone ever recorded during the month of May in the Southern hemisphere. Ureparapara is a remote island and is difficult to reach. The weather decides when you can leave; the weather decides when you can return. Did the ships bring fuel? Is the dinghy working? Without an airstrip, only planes that can land on water will be able to arrive. Poor phone connection, which is only available on specific places on the island if the weather allows it, makes communication a challenge. The climate determines the people on Ureparapara's schedules, and the environment defines their lives, not only the agricultural aspect, but also their social life and relations. The environment can be part of the construction of the person, and an opportunity for men to showcase power, as I will show later on in this thesis in chapter three.

Language

Bislama is the national language in Vanuatu, and it is one of three official languages in Vanuatu, the two others being English and French. Bislama is a Creole language, most words of English origin. Meanwhile, more than 100 languages are spoken in Vanuatu, and many of the languages have different dialects, which makes Vanuatu a diverse country within the linguistic field and tradition. Two main languages are spoken on Ureparapara. In Divers Bay they speak Vaberhu (Löyöp, Vapmien⁹), which derives from the Reef Islands or Rowa, a cluster of small islands (now unpopulated) located between the islands of Ureparapara and Vanua Lava. Many of the people in Divers Bay originate from Reef Islands. I was told that on the West coast of the island they speak Lehali (Vapdaö¹⁰), the original language of Ureparapara. The two languages are much the same, so they can communicate and understand each other, even when mixing the languages. Most people speak Bislama when

⁸ More on this cyclone in chapter three.

⁹ Löyöp means "Divers Bay". Vapmien means "our language".

¹⁰ Vapdaö means "language of the island".

communicating with people from other islands and even with visitors from Lehali. The people on Ureparapara learn English in both kindergarten and at the local school. This made communication much easier than I first envisioned, as I am able to speak Bislama, and a small amount of the local language Vaberhu/Vapmien.

In this thesis, all terms given in Bislama are in *plain italics*, while emic terms in the local language of Ureparapara as well as local/emic terms from other islands in Vanuatu, are in *italics and underlined*.¹¹ I want to apologize in advance for any words spelled incorrectly in the local language of Ureparapara.

Economy and copra

The economy on Ureparapara is primarily based on agriculture, fishing and tourism, like most other islands in Vanuatu. They export copra (dried coconut) which is bought directly from each family, and transported in large bags with ships that pass by irregularly. The copra is not an easy job and the profit the families are left with, is not much reward for the heavy work.¹² The process requires teamwork, and most families help each other to make the copra. They pack the copra in large bags, which the copra ships provide, and when the copra ships come for pickup, they weigh the copra and determine the value before they return to shore and pay out the money. One bag of copra usually equals around 3,000 vatu¹³ (28.15 USD). In case of cyclones, coconut palms often get destroyed, and it takes a long time before the coconut is ready for the copra stage again. Heavy rain during the summer is a challenge because the process of drying the copra takes time. Sending the youth to boarding school is an expensive investment for the family, so the money they earn from selling copra is much needed. The money is also used and/or saved for clothes, tools and expenses for different rituals including weddings, funerals and village parties.

In 2013, the French Embassy gave Ureparapara a community boat with two engines- also funded by the French Embassy- to facilitate the fishing activities and transportation of the local people in Divers Bay (French embassy in Port Vila, 2014). This yellow dinghy is most often used for transporting students to the boarding school on the neighbouring island of Vanua Lava, transporting local priests and teachers to other islands when they have courses or meetings, and this time for transporting a young anthropology student to and from the

¹¹ Except proper nouns and proper names.

¹² For further explanations on the process of copra, see Caillon (2012).

¹³ Vatu is the currency of Vanuatu.

airport in Vanua Lava. This kind of transport is an expensive affair. The fuel costs 300 vatu per litre (2.81 USD) and, with a maintenance fee, in total, the trip will cost 28,000 vatu (262.69 USD). If the weather is good, the trip from Vanua Lava to Ureparapara takes approximately three hours, whilst in bad weather it can take five or more. One roundtrip costs 28,000 vatu, but since most people go away for several days, this is the cost for only one way, and they have to pay 28,000 vatu for the return to Ureparapara as well.

In Divers Bay, there are a couple of shops/kiosks owned by different families. These shops sell baby powder, local tobacco and biscuits/crackers; sometimes they have rice, sometimes they have vodka or whisky, and matches to light fire or to light the *rol* (local tobacco). Sometimes they have canned meat or corned beef. The diet on this island consists mainly of root vegetables like taro, manioc, and sweet potato. They grow all these foods in their own gardens which are located up in the hills near the bay. Fish and crab are the main sources of protein, and on special occasions they might slaughter a chicken or even a pig or a bull. When it is possible, they eat rice which they buy from copra ships, supply ships, or tourists. The families go to the gardens together, and it requires teamwork if they want the garden to be a success. To make a garden, they need to clean the area, burn it, plough it, clean it again, and after collecting everything they want to grow, they need to dig and sow the seeds and offshoots. According to one family member, most families have several gardens, often all members of the family have their own garden which is important in case of emergencies such as cyclones or other disasters.

School fees are one of the main motivations to earn money in this society, and the people in Divers Bay also have to pay different fees for welfare. This includes a fee for the aid post where the families can get medical supplies and help, a fee for the new water system, and a “fee” that they collect through fundraising for the teachers at the local school every semester. I refer to it as a “fee” because of the way these fundraisers are conducted.¹⁴ In Divers Bay, a new water supply system had just been installed at the time of my arrival. The new gravity fed water system was funded by the New Zealand High Commission and a contribution from Ureparapara area council development fund. This meant that they had running water close to their homes and at different places in the village. The water was good for drinking, but after cyclone Donna it was too dirty and polluted to drink without filtering it

¹⁴ Every household was more or less obliged to contribute with money to the fundraising cause.

first. While cleaning the water tank, everyone filtered the water in filter buckets provided by missionaries from the organization YWAM¹⁵ (Youth With A Mission).

Methods

In the preparations for this fieldwork, I read research from other islands, mostly from the northern islands, which are close to Ureparapara. I read about *kastom* laws, limitations for women, and gender differences. My supervisor, Thorgeir Kolshus, and research fellow Tom Bratrud prepared me for a different life. As far as they knew, women were not allowed to smoke tobacco or drink kava in the northern islands. I expected strict rules of clothing, as Hess (2009), who conducted fieldwork on Vanua Lava, states that “Wearing trousers may at first sight seem an issue of gender only, but in urban as well as rural Vanuatu women wearing trousers can be perceived to threaten men’s rank and their presumptions of power as well as their gender” (p.50). With this in mind, I expected to enter a male dominant society.

When I arrived, the first thing I saw was an old lady smoking a huge *rol* with island tobacco. Later that night, I saw women drink kava. The women on Ureparapara seemed free to do whatever they wanted, with some exceptions. Women wore shorts under their skirts, which I was told was against *kastom* in the earlier days. The reason for this change was an anti-violence program which the government had published. To prevent rape, women should wear shorts under their skirts. I usually wore long skirts, which most of the people in Divers Bay thought was unnecessary and stupid because of the heat. They encouraged me to wear shorter skirts and to wear shorts and lighter clothes around them, especially in the area where I stayed with the chief and his family. Our area was our home, and in our home, we could do whatever we wanted to do.

I was prepared for fieldwork with no phone signal, no electricity, and no electronic devices. After my arrival, the chief, who also became my adoptive papa, showed me some movies on his laptop. Almost everyone had a phone. My cousin even had Norwegian songs like Admiral P with the song “Engel” and Adelen with the song “Bombo” on his phone. They showed me African music videos and Hollywood movies. Movies and music are spread by using memory cards which fit inside the phones; they borrow from each other and share by using an app for transferring files. When someone goes to Sola on Vanua Lava, Mota Lava, or other islands, the music and movies circulate, and this is probably how a reggae version of

¹⁵ More about this organization in chapter three.

a Norwegian Eurovision contest song, ended up on Ureparapara. Sometimes the movies and songs are complete versions, other times only parts of the movie are available, sometimes they are even missing the climax or ending. The difference in the opportunity to be critical to information distributed became clear one day when visiting the local kindergarten. I was sitting outside with a man who was in his mid-forties. In the sandbox, I found a plastic figure of Stitch (from the famous Disney movie Lilo and Stitch). I told the man that this figure was named Stitch:

Man: Do you have those animals in Norway?

Katrine: No, it is an alien from a movie.

Man: Do you have aliens in Norway?

Later, he asked how the war between America and Russia was going. He had seen a movie about this war. When I told him that there is no war between these countries (not yet, at least), and that movies are rarely real but can sometimes be based on real life events, he did not believe me. After my mother and I watched Hercules (the American version from 2014), I told her that one of the actors actually lives in my city in Norway. She answered, “But he died”. After recovering from the small shock this put me in, I explained that actors who die in movies do not die for real. Never. This time, it was mother’s turn to be shocked. This case is an example of how the possibility to be critical to knowledge and information gained, is extremely difficult on a remote island like Ureparapara.

While most anthropological fieldwork consists mainly of participating and observing, the amount of waiting and sleeping and doing nothing cannot be emphasized enough in the writings. As Malinowski (1984) points out, “I had periods of despondency, when I buried myself in the reading of novels, as a man might take to drink in a fit of tropical depression and boredom” (p.4). Yes, being bored is a huge part of fieldwork, the reason being that while the fieldwork might be a new experience for the fieldworker, feeling important and interesting, the locals have their own lives and schedules of the day. It does not stop even though the fieldworker arrives. Nor should it, as the fieldworker’s job is to join in on the activities and observe. But when no one wants you to join in on their everyday activities – because you are seen as weak and as fragile as a vase made out of porcelain – the fieldworker must accept the timeout that is given by the locals.

Most days, my fieldwork consisted of raking the leaves off the ground, doing laundry, walking around in the village looking for people to talk to, and sleeping. Walking only for the purpose of taking a walk was a waste of time in their opinion. Coming from Norway, where

we like to “gå på tur” (take a walk), I found this tropical island was the wrong place to do such a thing. My family explained why. Firstly, I was exposed to the sun, which was bad. Secondly, I used energy, and for what? Nothing! There was no purpose for my walk, therefore it was unnecessary. When I explained that it was nice to walk to clear my head, the response was only shaking heads and looks of “what is wrong with you?”. After a few months on the island, I understood the meaning of their head-shaking. With small amounts of food every day, in combination with extreme heat and some physical work, I could only afford to use minimal amounts of energy on unnecessary activities. Nevertheless, the methods used during my fieldwork were participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and writing notes.

As a woman in the field, I expected to be excluded from many male activities, just as Jolly (1994) experienced during her research. While being a woman did lead to some restrictions in participation, information about secret male activities was given to me nevertheless. I could just not observe it directly. I thought it would be easier to gain access to the female society, and in some parts, it was. But I was welcomed to join the men in many activities, as well as the women. I actually found men more interested in participating in my research, giving information, and being open about the society than some of the women. Scepticism was probably the reason because, while many of the men have been off the island, a lot of the women have stayed at home.¹⁶ This distinction could also be observed when tourists arrived. The men paddled out in their dugouts, while the women stayed in their house or in the garden, letting the men welcome the visiting white men.¹⁷ The men were the representatives for their families, as well as for the community. This might be due to language barriers, not in the way as Jolly (1994) experienced, where men tried to prevent women from learning Bislama (p.8), but rather with English. The majority of the women (and girls) on Ureparapara spoke fluent Bislama, and most of them spoke English as well. But when the men are the ones representing the community and their families to tourists, the women do not get to practice their English, and they use local language instead. The consequence of this might be that their English vocabulary is forgotten, and the men who use it often are in the best position to be representatives because of their ability to speak to tourists. It is much easier to speak a language that you feel secure of rather than being bad in a different one. As for me, I spoke English for several months before finally daring to speak

¹⁶ For instance, to work as season workers on farms in Australia or New Zealand, or to work in the capital city Port Vila.

¹⁷ More on tourism in chapter four.

Bislama with the risk of being made fun of. When I eventually started to speak Bislama, it made it possible for me to speak to several people who did not speak fluent English. By speaking Bislama, I also made myself vulnerable. This made it possible for others who were scared and embarrassed to speak English, in fear of being laughed at, to communicate with me. We learned from each other. I improved my Bislama, and they improved their English. A consequence of my fear of being laughed at might be that some information was unavailable to me, as I avoided speaking a foreign language. When I eventually dared to push my boundaries, new relationships flourished. Through these different relations, the opportunity to gain information on various topics emerged, and as I will show in the next chapter, relations and relationships have different rules applying to them.

2. Kinship and Life Cycles

Finding my place in my *tribe*

I was officially adopted by the chief's family merely three months before my fieldwork ended. From the very beginning of my arrival, I was told I would be adopted by the paramount chief and his family. It was difficult to call two strangers mama¹⁸ and papa, and in the beginning, it felt wrong. After a few weeks, they had proven to me that they loved me as much as they loved their own children and treated me the same way too. The following quote is an extract from my field diary, written a week after arriving at Ureparapara:

I managed to throw up on myself while I was squatting over the hole, which makes the toilet. I have diarrhoea. I started crying and went to talk to mother about the incident, and she told me to take a shower and go to bed. Because of bad weather, the water was turned off, so my brother brought me a bucket of water, which I poured over myself while crying inside the small shower house, which was made out of sticks of bamboo. It is horrible to be sick when you are far away from home. Mother was sitting inside my house, watching me and taking care of me all night long. She held my hair while I was throwing up, and other family members came to see me during that night. It is amazing how much they care about a stranger who just arrived a week ago. (Field diary, 07.02.2017)

This incident made it easier to call these people my family. Looking back at it now, maybe I misinterpreted the care given, as sign of exclusive affection and even love, when maybe it was the natural way for them to care for any visitors, and not a sign of acceptance and relationship exclusively for me. But in that moment, nevertheless, it felt like motherly love.

The adoption

Adoption is very common on Ureparapara and elsewhere in Vanuatu.¹⁹ Children are being adopted by sisters who do not have any boys of their own to help with physical work, and small girls to help with work in the home. In many cases, when the child is an adult, he or she will still visit their birthparents, and in some cases even move back home to them. Kolshus' (2008) following statement confirms my observations on adoption during my own research

¹⁸ Only here will the term mama be used for my adoptive mother, as the term mama, according to Kolshus (2016), is an abbreviation of the Mota term for father's elder brother and is used when addressing a priest in the Anglican Church (p.168n).

¹⁹ See for instance Kolshus (2008), Hess (2009), Eriksen (2008).

on Ureparapara: “childlessness or having only either boys or girls is a typical motivation, and in these cases, there will rarely be many objections to an adoption request” (p. 71). Further, Kolshus describes three different types of adoption observed on the island of Mota; *ramramwö*, *rsarsag*, and *taptapui*. Even though these terms were never mentioned during my own research, the differences between the types I argue, is to a certain degree applicable on the system of adoption on Ureparapara as well. *Ramramwö* is the first form of adoption where the child, usually still an infant is “[...] transferred from one set of parents to another and is given the same rights and obligations as the family’s original members enjoy” (Kolshus, 2008, p.63). In this form of adoption, the identity of the birthparents is usually kept secret from the child, and the child will, in theory, never know about any other parents than the ones raising him or her. I observed this form of adoption in a case where the adoption was aborted due to delays in the process, and the child suddenly became too old to be adopted. The child had reached an age where he could recognize his birthparents, which made the “transaction” more difficult for all concerned, including the potential adoptive parents. The second type of adoption is *rsarsag* which according to Kolshus (2008) is “[...] when a woman gave birth, it was the man who first paid the midwife for her services who gained social parentage for his wife and himself” (p.64). I did not observe or hear about this type of adoption during my stay, but that does not mean it does not exist. The third form, *taptapui* “[...] does not involve the transfer of a person between families, merely a seemingly informal extension of parental affiliation. This is usually a relation between a single adult and a child” (Kolshus, 2008, p.65).

As Weiner (1988) explains how the adoptee always stays in contact with the birthparents, even returning to live with them when they are older (p.37n), are in most cases on Ureparapara, occurring in the third form of adoption, *taptapui*. Still, there are some exceptions. One family had adopted a child when he was an infant, and the child was not aware of being adopted, as in the form of *ramramwö*. When older, he was told who his birthparents were and chose to move back to his birthparents, but even after his return, he continued to help his adoptive parents with work and tasks when needed, and even stayed in their home if he wanted to. This made the relationship between the adoptive parents and the birthparents special, in the way that they shared something important, a son.

Adoption of foreigners and adults visiting from other islands and countries is a common sight on Ureparapara, as well as other islands in Vanuatu. Hess (2009) argues that the adoption of a newcomer is not only a form for inclusion and security, it also enables appropriate interaction and relations with other people than the immediate family (p.17).

Adoption of foreigners is also an opportunity to make new connections, to other islands as well as other countries (Hess, 2009, p.36). One such case observed on Ureparapara was when the new Anglican priest arrived, who formerly had resided on a different island, where he also had married a girl. When they arrived on Ureparapara, the first thing the priest's wife did, was to approach one of the families in the village and ask the mother to adopt her as her daughter. When the mother had said yes, and the ceremony was completed, the girl was quickly integrated into the local community and had the possibility and the right to claim help when needed because of her new relations in the village. These relations are not restricted to the island; it is a complicated local and international web of relationships and bonds made by adoption which, in turn, is made possible by the development of the island, where the possibility to retain contact by the use of cell phones, together with the increasing volume of tourism, contributes to the bonds made. The same rights this girl was entitled to after being adopted, I too gained by being adopted by my family on Ureparapara.

My adoption ceremony was special to me because it made the relation to my *tribe* official. A *tribe* on Ureparapara consists of all the persons belonging to the same matrilineage. The adoption was the ritual that made me a true member of my *tribe*, *Veppdewei*. I was dressed in *kastom* clothing, a skirt made of pandanus leaves and a headdress made of fresh flowers. I also wore my shorts and t-shirt underneath, while the others who participated wore their everyday clothes. While my mother, brothers, sisters, and one *angkel* were standing under a gate that was made of three poles that represented our house, a family member made a speech about the adoption and the importance of family. My *angkel* followed with a speech about our *tribe* and the different members belonging to it. After they finished, it was my turn to give a speech, to show gratitude to my new *tribe*. After a lot of crying and explaining my gratefulness, I was escorted by my father who was standing on his side, not part of our *tribe*, over to my mother's and my *tribe*. Everyone belonging to *Veppdewei* placed their hand on my mother's shoulders, which connected and unified them. While they were standing as one unit, I received a basket full of flowers as a present, which represented every member of *Veppdewei*. The basket represented the house or the *tribe*, and in return I gave my present, a small amount of *vatu*. It was up to me to decide what I wanted to give my mother as a present, but I figured that since I did not have anything that would be of use, money was always needed. After the exchange of gifts, my mother took my hand and guided me, welcomed me, into our representational house with the rest of the *tribe*. We shook hands, kissed cheeks, and the night went on as usual. Nothing notable changed after the adoption except for my newly gained possibility to reach out to my family on other islands

and even countries when needed. Life went on as before the adoption, but for me I could finally state that yes, I was now officially a *lipien aō*²⁰ or in Bislama, a *woman parapara*.



Figure 4: From the authors adoption ceremony. (private photo)

²⁰ [a'ø]

Relationships and rules

Behavioural rules and requirements which follow certain relationships are mutual for the parties involved. On Ureparapara, this was evident through relationships characterized as joking relations and avoidance relations. The family rules were sometimes unclear to me, but what became very clear was my relation to my papa, the chief. There were many things that I was not allowed to do in our relationship. For instance, I was not allowed to ask my papa to do something for me or to share food or drinks I already had tasted, and I could absolutely not complain to him if I was unhappy about something, such as if my brothers went inside my house without asking me first. All of these gestures had to go through my mother first, and then she would talk to him. Even if he wanted my food which I already had tasted, he would tell my mother and I would give it to her, and she would give it to him. This was so, even if we all sat together at the table facing each other. I often forgot many of these rules. If I were his real daughter, meaning not only staying with them for six months, the punishment, according to him, would be eating dry coconut and dirt. The reason why everything had to go through my mother was because of the matrilineal organization of the *tribe*. My papa and his *tribe Kalio*, were not my family, my mother and her *tribe Veppdewei*, were.

Joking

Every morning, a man called Stalin called out to me “*Gudmoning, olfala*²¹ *woman!*” I answered with “Good morning”. After several months, I asked my mother why he was calling me *olfala woman*. She laughed and said that he is one I can have fun with, or joke with. We are related in that way that we can joke with each other, so I was told to answer him, calling him *tamaire*, which means *olfala man*. He was surprised and laughed, and after that we joked all the time. He would say that he needed a woman to take care of him; I would answer that my door was closed, whereupon he said that he would knock on my door anyway. This might sound creepy to some, but since I by then (far too late) knew the relation and its limits, it was all about following the rules of that kind of relationship. Radcliffe Brown (1940) describes the term “joking relationship” as a relation between two persons who are permitted or required by custom to make fun and tease each other, where neither part involved can be offended by it (p.195). Hess (2009) writes about joking relationships on Vanua Lava, describing it as the opposite of the avoidance relationships (p.31). My

²¹ *Olfala* means old, and the term is used to address someone who is older.

knowledge of the rules in joking relationships on Ureparapara is rather scarce, and the only such relationship I had was with the person in the story above.²² Still, this relationship shows how joking and even laughter is required and expected by *kastom*. At the same time, the following story in the subchapter below shows how joking and laughter can be the utter most symbol of disrespect.

Tabu/ avoidance

Once when I ate dinner with my father and his other daughters, he suddenly stated that he would *pispis* (piss) himself during the night in his sleep, and then he laughed at his own statement. My first reaction was to laugh with him, since (at least I thought) he made fun of himself and being self-ironic. When no one else laughed, I looked at his oldest daughter who shook her head, signalling that I should not laugh either. I asked why, and my father told me that when he makes fun of himself, nobody who should show him respect is allowed to laugh. Hess (2009) describes a similar situation from Vanua Lava, when other people joke about a person in the presence of someone who is not allowed to laugh at this person (p.30).

The *tabu/* avoidance form of relationship on Ureparapara, which is the most respected and practiced one, is the one between in-laws, especially between ego and ego's same sex sibling in law (ego's spouses siblings, same sex as ego), and ego and ego's parents in law (ego's spouses parents). These in-law relations are recognized especially in their name avoidance, that is, the prohibition by *kastom* to say and even write the other's name. It is a form of respect, and on Ureparapara the Bislama term *tawi* was used for same sex sibling-in-law, as well as for opposite sex sibling-in-law. MB's wife was in a mutual no-name relation with the nephew/niece of her husband.

The space above the head of a person who you are in a *tabu/*avoidance relationship with, is *tabu*. On Ureparapara, this *tabu* and private sphere was important especially concerning *tawi*, MB and MBs' wife. After a huge fight between a married couple in the village, the wife put a *tabu* on another woman, who had a baby and therefore breastmilk, not to feed her child while her husband took care of the child. To assure that the woman did not give any milk, she told her that she forbade it, on the other woman's MB wife's head. This meant that if the woman broke this *tabu* by breastfeeding the other woman's baby, she would have to pay a fine. It was *tabu* for the other woman to help, and since the space above and the head itself is *tabu*, the other woman had to respect it. She had to stay away from the baby and

²² See Radcliffe Brown (1940) and Hess (2009) for more elaborating explanations.

the husband who was given the job to take care of the baby throughout the day, so that he could understand how hard his wife was working every day, taking care of all the children and doing the housework.

Angkel

A person's mother's brother, is called *angkel*. The importance of knowing the family members, what to call them and my position and relation compared to theirs was a challenge. The *angkel* is important, and as Hess (2009) argues, the *angkel* must be respected all the time, but he is also ones' closest ally (p.35). She emphasizes that "the maternal uncle not only stands for, but embodies the matriline, and therefore his sister's child is part of him and he is part of the child" (p.48). When a boy is turning into a man, there is a ritual to show this transition, and the importance of the *angkel* is visible through this ritual. The ritual is called the haircut. A boy's first haircut is special and will only be conducted by one *angkel* during a big celebration or a party. It is usually conducted when the boy is about twelve or thirteen years old. Until the first haircut is properly performed, the boy is not allowed to cut or style his hair with razors in any way. The *angkel*, the boy, and his parents will discuss and decide together how his hair will be cut, in what shape and length. Everybody will be watching while the *angkel* fulfil his duty. It is an honour to cut the boy's hair, turning him into a man. When he is finished, everyone will clap and celebrate the transition of the boy. The *angkel's* relation to his nephew is not only visible through this ritual of transition, but also through his duties to care for, give guidance to, and provide his sister's children with food or help when required.

If I wanted something, I would ask my *angkel*, and in most cases, he had to help me. The *angkel* is also the one who will punish you if you are disobedient to your father(s). One night, while loosely conversing with the family about old traditions and *kastoms*, one man told me that there used to be different ways to punish a person for being disobedient. These were the strictest punishments, and they are not used today. The first method was death by suffocation. The disobedient would lie on his back on a flat stone. The *angkel* would place a long stick on the throat of the disobedient, and the *angkel* would jump on the ends of the stick, which would either break the neck of the disobedient or the disobedient would die from suffocation. The second method was death by bow and arrow. The *angkel* would shoot the disobedient with his bow and arrow, using poison on the arrowhead. The poison would kill quickly. The third method was death by poison. The disobedient would drink or eat, or be

forced to drink or eat, poison. Since my *angkel* taught me how to shoot with bow and arrow, and I knew what an excellent archer he was, I did not disobey my father very often, just in case. The following story from Divers Bay is about a girl who was punished by her *angkel*:

A girl from the village was climbing a tree, collecting fruit, when a *tamat*²³ dressed in his *kastom* headdress suddenly passed under the tree. The girl was terrified, and stayed in the tree quietly, not moving a muscle. The *tamat* did not notice the girl, but a person from the village had seen what had happened. If you are a woman, it is *tabu* to let a man, and especially a *tamat*, pass under a tree while you are sitting in it, so the punishment was death. Her family was poor, and they were not able to pay the fine to save her life. Her *angkel* had to punish her by jumping on the stick which was placed on the girl's throat, and she was suffocated. (Story told by informant)

If anybody had warned the girl in the tree, or the *tamat* who was passing under the tree, of the other person's position, this situation would have been avoided. But no one was close enough to warn either of them. The reason for this *tabu* was, according to one man, that you might see the girl or woman's genitals. During a visit, the bishop had a different reason, and said that the reason for the other man's version was because he had a dirty mind. The real reason, according to the bishop, was menstruation and the *tabu* and *kastom* of women's monthly bleeding, which will be elaborated further in chapter four.

Birth

Her water broke at 05.00 in the morning. She was calm and controlled while she gathered everything she needed. Together with her mother, her husband's mother, and the midwife we walked to the beach, over the coral reefs, and followed the beach towards the aid post. She had to stop a couple of times to catch her breath, but she walked all the way by herself. She had to pay 500 vatu to the midwife and for borrowing the aid post during the birth. When she finally arrived at the aid post, her husband came with a mat for her to lie on which she put on top of the large bed which had no mattress. Her mother helped her shower, pouring water over her outside, while her husband and her father made a fire in the small hut which served as a kitchen, outside the aid post. They boiled the water and left. Since giving birth is a women's *kastom*, the men are not allowed to be nearby while someone is giving birth. At 07.15 a small baby boy was born. After the baby was born he was given to his grandmother who washed him before he fell asleep. The mother was given something to eat, and she showered and rested a bit before she finally held her baby and fed him.

Afterwards, she put him inside a small mosquito net and they both slept and rested for some hours. After a while, her husband and daughter came to see the baby. The father was proud and happy, especially because they now had a son as well. They named him Stein.

(Field diary, 18.05.2017)

²³ In this story, the *tamat* is the initiated person wearing the headdress.

Whilst the first name is a name they choose freely, the child will also inherit his father's *kastom* name. When choosing first names, they often take inspiration from movies and visiting tourists, which results in names like Rambo, Stalin, Jean Claude, and Stein. The mother and the baby slept at the aid post for one night before returning to the village the morning after, the midwife carrying the baby all the way. After their return to the village, life goes on as usual. The mother stays with the baby but is soon to be seen walking around in the village with the baby tied to her body with a *lavalava* (sarong). When she is tired, her husband will help with the baby as much as needed. He will help with the cooking, cleaning and gathering of food while his wife stays at home during the first days after giving birth, to recover. A few weeks after birth, the baby and family have to "give thanks" to the church. This is not the baptism, but a thanksgiving for the new life that has arrived. The baptism will be performed when the child's parents decide the date together with the priest, in the Anglican Church in Divers Bay.

As mentioned, giving birth is a woman's *kastom*, and it is *tabu* for men to participate in or even be close by the area when it is happening. If the nurse or midwife is a local man, the women have to look after the woman giving birth, and the man will only give advice and teach his wife about childbirth and how to be a midwife.



Figure 5: Maternity bed at the aid post. (private photo)



Figure 6: The baptism of Stein Lino. (private photo)

Marriage and the matrilineal puzzle

When two people want to be together as a couple in Divers Bay, the first and most important step is to get engaged. The engagement usually takes place at the girl's family's house, where a fee (part of bride price) is paid to the girl's family. This step and *kastom* is important, because only after it is paid, will the girl be allowed to stay in the boy's home with his family where she will help out in the home, cooking, gardening, cleaning and doing the laundry. After the engagement, she will after the engagement be a helpful contribution to the household. When she has moved to the boy's family, she will live and sleep together with the boy's mother, father, and siblings in their house. The engagement ceremony I observed took place at the boy's *angkel*, who was the adoptive father of the girl, as she came from a different island.²⁴ The boy's father paid the amount of 3,000 vatu to the *angkel* as the first payment. After a while, this engagement was broken off, and the girl's family had to give back the money to the boy's family. It was not seen as a serious breach of commitment or contract, but as a simple breakup between two young people, and the girl moved back to her adoptive father. This specific *kastom* is not gendered, as it is part of both men and women's life and applies to all.

In theory, a man will be MB/*angkel* for his sister's children, and ZS will inherit from his MB, which will keep the land in the *tribe*. When a woman moves to her husband's family, as on Ureparapara, the woman's children's right to the land belonging to their *tribe* through matrilineal descent, can be difficult to pass on. It will be necessary for the woman's son to move back to the MB residence to inherit the land. As Jolly (1994) argues, "The logic of inheritance and of residence discriminates against women in their control over land" (p.61). Descent through women provides access to land, but as women move to their husband's home, their children will be raised away from their own matrilineages land (Scott, 2007, p.22). Richards (1950) discusses the problems of similar systems of inheritance in some of the African contexts she analysed, which she named the matrilineal puzzle, as the combination of matrilineal descent and virilocal residence pattern can be a challenge and problem concerning the rights of succession (pp.246-251). Ureparapara is not unique in its combination of virilocal residence and matrilineal descent. The Tolai, a matrilineal people living on New Britain, an island located outside Papua New Guinea mainland, settled patri-virilocally. Upon the death of a father whose son had grown up in his homestead, the son

²⁴ The *angkel* adopted this girl when she was an adult because of an incident with her family at her birthplace, a different island.

would have to move to his MB's homestead where he would have rights to land through his matriline (Epstein, 1968, p.6). The preference of virilocal residence might spread the members of the matrilineal *tribe* throughout the country. Allen (1981) emphasizes how this spread can lead to the crossing of major linguistic boundaries(p.17), which in turn can make it more difficult for the matrilineal successor to return to an island and a community which he has little or no connection to, only through the bloodline and his ancestors.

If there is an ongoing change in the kinship system on Ureparapara, six months of fieldwork is not enough time to observe it. The intricate web that makes up the kinship system on Ureparapara is far too complex to create a structured overview of it after six months of research.²⁵ At the same time, trying to describe, systemize, and make this system of kinship fit into already existing fixed categories of kinship and descent, to make it easier for us researchers to grasp, might leave little room for new categories of systems to arise and develop. That is, if categories and systems are necessary to understand the relations between other people. With this being said, I would encourage further research of kinship on Ureparapara in the future.

As the *kastom* story in chapter one illustrated how the island got its current shape, it also showed that the woman stayed on the island while the man left. She was rooted, he was mobile. On one hand, this understanding and ideology of male and female is in conflict with the present residential pattern which, as I have shown, is virilocal. The women on present day Ureparapara, I argue, can be understood to be mobile while the men are rooted. On the other hand, if what is meant by this story is that a woman (who has moved to her husband) becomes, as Bolton (1999) claims, deeply affiliated to the place she moves to, and becomes rooted to this new place through marriage, rather than birth(p.49), the background of the story (which is unknown as far as I can tell) requires that the woman in the story originated from a different island and moved to her husband's island. Bolton (1999) suggests that the women on Ambae who move to their husband's place create by doing so the possibilities of new relationships and contacts for their own *tribe* (p.49). She further describes how kinship on Ambae is organized matrilineally, residence post-marriage is virilocally, and transmission and holding of land are predominantly male practices. Still, women have rights to land which they access through male members of their descent group. Both men and women have access to pieces of land which is gained through their relation to other relatives, and is most often

²⁵ Not exclusively on this island. Kolshus (2008) describes his frustration when analyzing the "Mota Kinship System".

used for gardens (Bolton, 1999, p.49). This access to land for both men and women can serve as an answer to my question on how the oldest son in a family can inherit land from his mother at the time of her passing away.

On Ureparapara, blood money can show how the *tribe* is organized through the matriline. If anyone in the *tribe* hurts themselves and bleeds a lot, they will have to pay blood money. Blood money can be a small amount of vatu, kava, food, or different products. The blood money will be paid to ego's Z, MB, M, B and everyone else in the line of the matrilineal descent. I thought blood money was paid so that the *tribe* would help the wounded. This was not the case. There are two reasons why blood money has to be paid. The first reason is that the person has spilled blood of the *tribe*. The person has to pay for hurting the *tribe*, spilling the *tribe's* blood. The second reason is that since the person spilled the *tribe's* blood, he or she will have to make amends for the wound to heal. So, in order for the wound to heal, the person has to pay for the damage. If he or she does not pay blood money, the wound will not heal, probably be infected, and in some cases this can cause death. One man had been out on the reef one day, and accidentally tore several tendons in his leg. My brothers went to his house later that night to get their payment – kava and tobacco.

Death

A man had been sick for many years, but during my time on the island he got gradually worse. On the day of his death, surrounded by family, the man got cold and started to breathe slower and his family thought this was it. But suddenly, he started to talk again, and he looked better. They helped him walk outside to his chair, which was made out of fishing net and wood, and he sat down, smoked a *rol*, and passed away. They placed him inside on his bed, covered his mouth with bandages, filled his ears with cotton and closed his eyes. His hands were folded across his chest and he looked at peace. They covered him with sheets and everyone in the village came to grieve and express their compassion with the family. (Field diary, 13.06.2017)

As Jolly (1994) observed in South Pentecost, when a person dies, a loud and ritualized sobbing amongst the people present begins, and it can continue for hours (p.164). During the three funerals I experienced, the deceased's immediate family never attended the ceremony in church. The reason was that the family did not want to disturb the priest's speech and the funeral ceremony with their loud cries and sobs. Codrington (1891) wrote in a short passage about Ureparapara how "[...] the first fire for the death-meal is lit on the day after the burial [...]" (p. 272). When a person died during my own stay, the meal took place on the day of the funeral. The funeral was implemented at the day of the death, or if a person died during night

time, the day after. In both cases, the first death-meal was arranged and carried out at the same day as the funeral; everyone gathered to cook and eat together with the family of the deceased. After a person has died, the whole village will get together on the fifth, tenth and hundredth day after, to cook and eat together and remember the deceased. According to *kastom*, when a father passes away, his sons will not shave themselves, cut, or brush their hair, nor will his daughters brush or cut their hair. They will decide themselves if they want to cut, brush, and shave again after either five, ten or hundred days after their father's death.

When someone's parents die, their valuables will go to the first-born son, whereas he will share the inheritance with his younger brothers before finally sharing the rest (if any) with his sisters. On Ureparapara, the father usually owns coconut plantations and holds knowledge of magic and other male-exclusive secrets, while the mother owns the land. On the island of Mota, it is the same as land is transferred matrilineal, while trees belonging to the father go to his children, as well as knowledge of traditional medicine (Kolshus, 2016, p.162n). As Kolshus (2008) argues, "Owing to the growing need for money, the patrilineal inheritance has become much more important than it once was [...]" (p.74). On Ureparapara, this was visible through the efforts made by one family to plant and uphold the oldest son's coconut plantation.

When a new born baby died, we heard the heart-breaking screams from the mother all over the village. They made a tiny casket for the baby, with a small blue cross on top. Usually they do not use caskets, but mats in which they roll the deceased person. Rivers (1914) noted that the information about Ureparapara was scarce at the time of his writing, but he found evidence that "its culture differs in several respects from that of the rest of the Banks Islands" (p.425). This differentiation was especially due to the fact that the dead were buried in the upright position, which he further connected to the cult of the sun and migration from the island of Rowa to Ureparapara.²⁶ This connection made by Rivers (1914) might be a speculative and far-fetched one, as the liability and accuracy concerning his research and methods has been criticized.²⁷ The funeral ceremony is usually conducted in the Anglican Church in Divers Bay. This church, together with the other denominations present, will be accounted for in the following chapter. Further, I will show how a person's death can lead to a different ritual, which is, in turn, part of constructing the person, as the spirits of the deceased become present shortly after someone passes away.

²⁶ Found on the island Rowa, the home of the malo-saru. See Rivers (1914) for further elaboration.

²⁷ See for instance Kolshus (2014).

3. Religion, Spirits and Beliefs

Defining religion

According to Durkheim (1915), religion can be defined as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them” (p.47). He continues this definition by adding to it that “by showing that the idea of religion is inseparable from that of the Church, it makes it clear that religion should be an eminently collective thing” (p.47). This definition of religion is relevant for this thesis, and as I will show in this chapter, religion on Ureparapara can be seen as a collective thing that the society revolves around. By saying that religion first and foremost is a collective thing, questions concerning denominations other than the predominant Anglican Church arise and will be discussed in this chapter. When religion is a collective thing, what happens with the ones who choose to stand outside of the main denomination? This question will be explored further during this chapter. As well as defining religion as an eminently collective thing, Durkheim also emphasizes the importance of magic in relation to religion. By asking the question concerning the ability to separate and define magic and religion by themselves, he argues that both magic and religion have elements of the other in it (p.43). In this chapter, the blurry lines between religion, magic, and *kastom* will be explored in light of certain events and observations during fieldwork in Vanuatu. First, a very short historical background on Christianity in Vanuatu, followed by a short introduction of the different denominations currently being practiced on Ureparapara.²⁸

Christianity in Vanuatu

Christianity in Melanesia has been debated by many anthropologists.²⁹ When the new constitution was written in 1980, Christianity was intertwined in this new and independent nation. The national slogan “*Long God yumi stanap*”, which translates to “In God we stand,” shows how the rhetoric of politicians and leaders during this period was influenced by Christian values (Eriksen, 2009, p.179). Father Walter Lini, an Anglican priest, became the first Prime Minister of the independent Vanuatu.

²⁸ For further readings on Christianity in Vanuatu, see for instance Kolshus (2007), Eriksen (2008), Hess (2009).

²⁹ See for instance Barker (1992), Robbins (2007), McDougall (2016).

In the ongoing debate on Christianity in Melanesia, Robbins (2007) argues that Christianity has been disregarded in anthropology as it is not seen as “cultural” (p.6). When anthropologists ask the question of which belief is new and which belief is old, Christianity might be easier to regard as the new belief, and therefore not as exciting as the old. But as Robbins (2007) emphasises, “[...] in spite of people’s claims to be Christian, many of their propositional beliefs are demonstrably old” (p.15). As I will show further in this chapter, Christianity and *kastom* are both present on Ureparapara, and the introduction of Christianity had consequences. When it comes to the belief in small *devels*³⁰, as they were called, I was told that in the earlier days, people could see these small *devels* all the time, and even talk to them. But after the introduction of Christianity, and when people started to read the Bible, the small *devels* became more and more distant and absent. Even so, my informants assured me that they are still present, but people can simply not see them anymore because of Christianity. Robbins (2007) writes how the Urapmin see themselves as Christians, and that they no longer follow the ways of ancestors, there is a clear distinction between past and present according to his informant (p.11). The distinction between past and present might demonstrate how *kastom* can be argued to be “the new”, as it now is being used (and maybe created³¹) for tourism and moneymaking. Christianity might be seen as “the old”, meaning that it is not a new and non-cultural belief, as regarded by earlier anthropologists.

Anglicans

In the Anglican Church in Divers Bay, the service starts every morning about 07.00 and lasts until 09.00, with public announcements stating when the service is finished. The church is divided into a male and a female side with designated benches for each gender. Clothing in church service is important. One girl had a t-shirt with a naked woman on it, looking like a pin-up model, while one of the priests removed his cloak and revealed his t-shirt with the words “ALL BOUNCERS ARE PUSSIES” printed in large capital letters on it. When I asked about the shirts, they told me that it is not what is written or printed on it that matters, but rather that it is clean. All social arrangements are directed by the Anglican Church. The village is divided into separate areas, and the work tasks are being distributed to the different groups/areas. The same arrangements concerning the areas and work tasks apply to community work as well. As Hess (2009) observed on the island of Vanua Lava, community

³⁰ *Devel* is the Bislama term for evil spirit, or spirit of a dead person.

³¹ More on tourism and *kastom* in chapter four.

work at the village level is usually a set day during the week where the whole community is expected to work (p.39). In Divers Bay, it was expected that at least one person from the household would participate and contribute in the designated work of the week, like cutting grass or building a new house for a teacher. While public healthcare and work connected to the local school concerns everyone, work connected to religion only applies to the ones belonging to the same denomination. During my stay in Divers Bay, a new building connected to the Anglican Church had to be built. After the groups and work tasks had been organised, everyone started on their designated jobs. The majority walked to the outer end of the bay where *laem* was being made for the local cement by burning a special kind of coral which is called *laem* (limestone). When it has been burning/melting for several weeks, it turns into a black substance which looks like molasses. When it is done they



Figure 7: Making laem. (private photo)

bring it back to the village, using their canoes to transport it, before mixing it with sand, which makes the cement. These activities, both social and work related, bring the people together through their religious beliefs. Since the Anglican Church is the dominant one in Divers Bay, only a few people stand on the outside, which becomes apparent whenever arrangements, and especially the social ones, take place.

On Sundays, all the children between the ages of three and fourteen attend Sunday school which is scheduled simultaneously with the service in church. When Sunday school is finished, they enter the church for communion and receive a blessing. When everyone else have finished their communion, all the women with infants go inside and receive communion and blessing, before leaving the church again, to wait outside for announcements. After the children are done with their communion, they go and sit with their parents, boys with the men, and girls with the women. The younger children are allowed to move between the male and female side of the church if they want to. Kolshus (2016) notes how one informant of his had been Anglican her entire life, but she had never understood much of the mass or the liturgical procedures, but the worst was that the clergy did not seem to mind the ignorance of the people in church (p.172). This statement is similar to what I experienced myself while attending church in Divers Bay. The priest spoke very softly, and I asked the old women sitting on the bench behind me if they could hear anything the priest said, and they answered that not really. But they knew the routine, when to kneel, when to say Amen, and when to sing. The priest's low voice, together with the noise from the small children made the whole service difficult for an "outsider" to follow and understand, which obviously applied to others as well.

The Melanesian Brotherhood is an exclusively male group, where the members are called Tasiu, and they wear special uniforms. While there was no Tasiu in Divers Bay, several Tasiu came to visit from other villages as well as islands, often because their family resided in Divers Bay. According to Hess (2009) the brothers are known to have special powers and are asked to help out in conflicts (p.41). I did not observe any situation where the Brotherhood help was needed, only once did I hear of a Tasiu praying for a pregnant sick woman.³²

³² More on this case in the subchapter regarding medicine.

Seventh- day Adventists (SDA)

In Divers Bay, up in the bush, a different church has its location. It is the church of Seventh-day Adventists. It is built on one household's property, and the man of this family is the preacher in this church. Several families belong to this church, this one specific family was the only one I observed whenever I attended their services. Their relatives on the other side of the island, in the village of Lehali, are also Seventh- day Adventists and have their own church on their land, where the man of the household is the preacher in the church. As far as I observed, the greatest difference between the Anglican Church and the Seventh-day Adventists on Ureparapara was the day of the Sabbath, which is on Sunday for Anglicans and on Saturday for SDA. While the Anglicans would go to their gardens on the day of Sabbath to collect food, SDA were strict on the restrictions and kept the Sabbath holy. They did no work and only relaxed all day. The food will be gathered, and everything will be prepared on Friday. Their diet is also strict, and follows the kosher restrictions described in Leviticus 11, which means abstinence from pork, shellfish, and other animals that are described as unclean.

These are the instructions regarding land animals, birds, marine creatures, and animals that scurry along the ground. By these instructions you will know what is unclean and clean, and which animals may be eaten and which may not be eaten. Leviticus 11: 46-47. (Teen Life Application Study Bible, 1996,2004,2007)

Seventh-day Adventists as a denomination was introduced to this family around 2015. Hess (2009) describes how SDA on the island of Vanua Lava, are rejecting *kastom*, both good and bad, in favour of more “global modernist development values and Christianity” (p.157). The SDA families I observed on Ureparapara did take part in *kastom* rituals like *meimowol*, as I will describe further in this chapter, and I never heard them say anything which indicated that they were rejecting *kastom*. What I did observe was how they differentiated themselves from the Anglicans in their way of worshipping and interpreting the Bible. The fact that the Anglicans would work on Sabbath was ridiculous to the SDA. They never attended any of the many social arrangements arranged by the Anglican Church. Their Sabbath made it difficult to socialize with others, since others were “free” on Sundays, while they had to work again, gathering food. This, in combination with their absence from several social arrangements, made me wonder if they ever felt alone, like outsiders. But this was denied by the family, who told me that they have each other, and their faith, and they were never denied access to

any arrangements made by the Anglicans, but to them, joining would be wrong as they did not comply with the Anglican Church's ways.

Jehovah's Witnesses

Further up in the bush there is another church, the Jehovah's Witnesses. Only one family is a member of this church, and here, as with the SDA, the man of the household is the preacher. I was told that close to Lehali, the village on the other side of the island, there is a family who calls themselves Jehovah's Witnesses, but since the man and woman are not married, they only live together and have children, they are not recognized as members by the church, and therefore they live by themselves in a small "village" consisting of two small households. I was told that if they were married, they would be recognized as members of the church and would be able to join the others in services or even events and conferences in Port Vila.

According to Jehovah's Witnesses' ethics and moral, all sexual relations outside of marriage is a sin, therefore a reason for expulsion, as in the case of the family in Lehali. One member was very engaged in science and shared with me all of his pamphlets called *Wekap!* which are illustrated religious magazines distributed by Jehovah's Witnesses. The first one he gave me focused on teenage depression, because he could see that I was missing my family in Norway.

As with the SDA families, this family did not attend any social arrangements by the Anglican Church, for the same reason, that they did not comply with their beliefs. But even though they were the only family who identified as Jehovah's Witnesses, they told me they were never alone. This denomination has a worldwide web of members, and the family told me that they occasionally go to conventions and conferences in Port Vila and Luganville, and sometimes they even get visits from other members from other islands or countries. They look at this network as their family who will help and support them if they ever need it. This family was raised in the Anglican Church faith but felt unsatisfied with the answers given by the priests when they asked about the Bible. After a visit from a relative in 1994, who was a witness, their questions had been answered to their satisfaction and they decided to convert from the Anglican Church to Jehovah's Witnesses. After the new constitution was written in 1980, the law stated that they could choose their own religion, and this family felt that the Anglican Church could not answer their questions about death and life after death, amongst others. After reading the Bible with the Witnesses, he understood that many of the messages in the Bible were symbolic, and not to be read literally. Also, Jehovah's Witnesses will not

participate in war, which means that many members have been arrested for disobedience when refusing to enroll in the army. They are different from the Anglican Church in their way of worshipping in service. They do not bow to a cross, since the Bible says that they should not worship images or idols, and they do not kneel as the Anglicans do.

The Missionaries

In the early morning on the 29th of April, everyone gathered on the beach where the tourist area is located. During the early hours, a large ship had arrived and anchored up in Divers Bay. Everyone was excited, who was it? And why were they here? After some waiting, an inflatable dinghy drove out from the ship and around in the bay for a short while before returning to the ship. After a while, people could see the inflatable dinghy heading towards shore with white people on board. When arriving on the beach, they announced that they were missionaries from YWAM³³, a “global movement of Christians from many cultures, age groups, and Christian traditions, dedicated to serving Jesus throughout the world” (YWAM, 2017) They told me during an interview that they were there to provide healthcare and to support the people in their faith in God. During their five days stay, they also arranged a service in church one night, inviting everyone in the village to join. The missionaries played guitar and sang and even invited the children to sit up front with them, finishing the service off with inviting people up front to testify. They organized a health education meeting, combining it with a small workout session, focusing on stretching and bending in the right way, and also how to brush your teeth. They went out on private sessions, where people could request home sessions with praying. Some of the people who were sick or for any reason could not come down to the village welcomed the missionaries into their homes, receiving prayers and hopes of healing. These private sessions are reminiscent of the prophetesses who Eriksen (2012) encountered in the Bible Church. The prophetesses would pray and hold their hands on the sick person’s body, asking the Holy Spirit to enter them so that they could cure the disease. These prophetesses claimed that they could cure anything, even cancer, and this healing was possible through collective effort, encountering the Holy Spirit as a group (p.116). During their private sessions, the missionaries would hold hands, pray, sing, and lay hands on the sick, which is similar to the prophetesses’ way of curing sickness.

³³ Youth With A Mission.

Since their goal was not only to spread the gospel, but also give health care, they set up a clinic in the copra/crop storage shed, (the shed was funded by USAID³⁴ and SPC³⁵ in 2014/2015). Several stations serving different purposes like blood pressure measurements, examination of wounds or spots conducted by a nurse, physiotherapy with teaching of exercises, and also a station with prayer. When people had been examined by the nurse, she evaluated if they needed to see the doctors when they would arrive in a couple of days. When they arrived, they had only one short day to examine and prescribe and give out medicine, because of the cyclone described in chapter one. Together with the doctors, the missionaries evacuated the island and headed towards safer locations. Before leaving, they gave out everything they did not need themselves, such as kitchen equipment, band aids, some clothes, some food, and even water filter buckets for the school, the church, aid post and one for the village.

Healing water, holy water and the power of believing

During the announcements after the morning service in church, the word healing water caught my attention. The news had arrived on the radio, that a woman had discovered water with healing powers on the island of Espiritu Santo. The healing water could make the blind see again, the deaf could hear, and the paralyzed could walk. I was told that this woman had had a vision, a vision that showed her the healing water. She was diagnosed with breast cancer, and the doctors had told her that there was nothing left for them to do. After having this vision (in some versions it was in a dream, in others, during daytime) she told her children about it, and they encouraged her to travel to Espiritu Santo to find what she was seeking. She found the place where the healing water was located, drank some water, and returned to the hospital. The doctors then told her that the cancer was gone, she had completely recovered, and they could not understand how it was possible; it was a true miracle. Soon, everyone knew I was travelling to Espiritu Santo in a couple of weeks for a three-week field break and asked me to bring bottles of healing water back when I returned. Most of the people I talked to about this water believed that the healing water truly had miraculous powers, but they all pointed out how important it was to believe. If you did not believe and/or did not have faith in God, it would not work.

³⁴ The United States Agency for International Development.

³⁵ Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

When I arrived in Espiritu Santo, I was excited to see this miracle that everyone was talking about. People were arriving from other countries to experience the gift from God. The airport was crowded with nuns, priests, wheelchairs, and a large amount of water containers made out of plastic. I asked people about this healing water which served as a miracle, and everyone told me that they had not seen any miracle happen for themselves, but they all knew someone who had seen a true miracle happen after drinking or swimming in the healing water. In most stories I was told, it was people who were paralyzed who had arrived at the location in wheelchairs, but when they had left, the wheelchairs were left behind. They could walk again.

When arriving at the scene, a large sign was put up with rules concerning the water source. After some people had brought water from the source and sold it for money, it seems the most important rule was that it was not allowed to sell the water, or to make money of it. It was a gift from God, a miracle, and therefore not a source of income for anyone. It would not work if people paid for it. Another sign was put up at the “entrance”.



Figure 9: Sign at the entrance by the road. (private photo)



Figure 8: The entrance closer to the water. (private photo)



Figure 10: The altar. (private photo)



Figure 11: People sitting in the pool where the healing water blends with the ocean. (private photo)

People were everywhere, from the main road down to the source of water. They had made a pool where the water was blending with the ocean, so that people could swim in the healing water as well as drink it directly from the source or from the large plastic containers that they had filled up with water. When there was a high tide, and the source was under water, people could still drink healing water from the large buckets. Above the small pool where the healing water came from, they had made an altar in the mountainside where pictures of Jesus and God were placed together with flowers. I was told that many people who had taken pictures of the altar could see both Jesus and angels in the pictures. After waiting in line for a long time, it was finally my turn to try this healing water. I drank some, and it tasted like mild saltwater. I also rubbed some on a wound I had on my arm and filled up six bottles to bring home to Ureparapara. Compared to others, this was a small amount, as they filled up large containers and buckets to ship to their relatives on different islands. A lady who was in charge of keeping the place in order, welcomed me and was happy when I told her I came from Ureparapara. She said that one bottle would be enough to heal blindness if the person was strong in his faith and believed in the healing powers of the water.

When I returned to Ureparapara with several bottles of healing water, I gave it to the people who had requested it. I was later told that none of the persons who needed it the most had tried it. The reason being that if the person “has magic,” it can kill them since the water is holy and a gift from God. I was even told that if any of these persons who “has magic” would drink it, and then die, it would be my fault since I gave it to them in the first place. The punishment for that would be to pay the fee of 100,000 vatu (approximately 966.56 USD), a fine which in Mota is called *sako-sako*, according to Kolshus (2008, p.69), which would be the price for a human life, as a compensation for the loss. Others told me that this was a lie, because if they choose to drink it, it would be their own fault, and also since they had asked me to bring it to them. After a while, the news spread that the woman who had found the healing water, had died. She had died from cancer. I asked people if they still believed in the powers of the healing water, I was told that she did not die because the healing water did not work, she died because God decided it was her turn to die.

The vision that the woman who found the healing water had is similar to what Eriksen (2012) experienced in her encounter with the newly established charismatic churches in Vanuatu. The way the pastors of these churches spoke of their encounters with God and the Holy Spirit in their dreams (pp.112-114) is comparable to the woman’s vision of the healing water. These pastors’ encounters would be interpreted as signs or messages to become leaders of new churches, they were the chosen ones. As for the woman who saw the healing

water in her dream, it was not to become a leader of any church, but to find the miracle God had provided her, and to share it with other faithful followers. Scott (2012) experienced a similar situation as his informant, Suri, had spiritual gifts for healing. Not only could he heal, he could pray over water and forgive sins as well. Suri received these gifts through dream visions, but because only bishops and priests are empowered to perform these works of the Holy Spirit, he was told to refrain from using them (p.8). Praying over water makes it holy, and the holy water serves as a healing source.

Holy water from baptism and healing water has the same effect on sickness. After one baby was baptized, the family took the holy water with them. Unfortunately, the sister of the baby carried the holy water, and fell, so the water spilled. She was punished. Jolly (1996) argues that the locals' belief in the holy water as a source for both curing and death was not just their own powerful imagination, but the powerful imagination of the priests as well (p.247). As Kolshus (2016) observed on the island of Mota, every family would keep a small bottle of holy water in their house, as it served as an all-purpose medicine (pp.167-168). This can be seen as a way to heal or make someone sick, by persuasion. The power of the mind and believing can make people both healthy and sick. With this being said, it is not a question if the healing is "real" or not, the question is rather who is to blame if it does not work? As with the healing water earlier mentioned, the one providing it would be to blame. In the case of holy water, the one praying over it would, in theory, be the provider. I did not observe any cases where holy water was being used for healing during my stay, so this question and small discussion is only a theoretical one.

***Kastom* medicine and Western medicine**

Kastom medicine (*kastom meresin* or *lif meresin* in Bislama) is traditional medicine, which uses *kastom* leaves as the main component. Different leaves are used for different problems, as the following list demonstrates. The translations are my own, but it is written how my informant wrote it, both the names as well as what to use it for.

Name:	Use for:
<u>Tapdo</u>	<i>Yu save drink blong posin fis /You drink this for poisoned fish.</i>
<u>Penmat</u>	<i>Meresin blong blak majik / Medicine for black magic or a very big wound.</i>
<u>Tiewewal</u>	<i>Yu save drink taem blood blong yu I no big wan/ Drink if your blood is small/lack blood.</i>
<u>Qoñmu</u>	<i>Yu save drink taem body blong yu I hot tumas/ Drink if your body or stomach is too hot.</i>
<u>Hafp</u>	<i>Meresin blong ol pikinini star long 1 to 6 years. 10 I save drink blong gof. Smol baby I kasem fiva / Medicine for children from one to six years. After the age of ten It can be used against cough. For babies it can be used against fever.</i>
<u>Yenramapdin</u>	<i>Yumi save drink mo holem bel blong mama taem basket blong pikinini foldaon / Drink this when pregnant so that the place where the baby is inside do not fall down.</i>
<u>Doyo</u>	<i>Hemi wan meresin blong pun I brok / Medicine for broken bones.</i>
<u>Nanae</u>	<i>Hemi blue wota hemi blong stopem blood /Blue water that will stop bleeding.</i>
<u>Suisal mo soyo</u>	<i>Hemi olsem pafum blong kastom tanis/ A kind of perfume for kastom dance.</i>
<u>Ratup mo doñ</u>	<i>Tufala rop blong kilim/posin fis/ A rope to kill/poison fish.</i>
<u>Yeñrataqap</u>	<i>Hemi meresin blong drink taem yellow pispis/ Drink when you get yellow urine.</i>
<u>Vono woñ</u>	<i>Hemi wan meresin wea mifala I stap drink blong blokem kansa long mifala / Drink to block out cancer.</i>

Figure 12: List of kastom medicine

The bishop arrived from Sola one night, and after some shells of kava and some local *rol* (island tobacco) he told the people in Divers Bay not to use too much *kastom* medicine. He said it is bad for the liver and that people can, and have, died from it. When he was visiting, one pregnant woman was sick. One of the brothers from the Melanesian brotherhood went over to pray for her. When they told the bishop, his answer surprised everyone. He answered “Why? That boy is not God, he cannot do miracles”. Everyone got angry that night. Why would the bishop say something like that when he is the one teaching these boys what to do? One day, I was told that the *kastom* doctor was on his way to help a family member with his sickness. He had a toothache and it bothered him every night. I was excited to meet this doctor, but when he arrived, I realized that it was my youngest brother’s friend, only twelve years old, looking his age in a t-shirt and shorts. It was a romanticized delusion of a *kastom* doctor that was in my mind, not the reality. This *kastom* doctor was a doctor because he was the one who found the leaf that helps for toothache and other mouth related problems. He came over to the house, chewed the leaf and gave it to the man. It might be worth mentioning that his troubles with the tooth did not end here, and after a while he had to use Western medicine for the pain.

In the same conversation with the bishop when he warned the people about the use of too much *kastom* medicine, he also warned the people on Ureparapara about using too much Western medicine, especially the use of penicillin. The people reacted in anger, because if they were not supposed to use *kastom* medicine, and not Western medicine, what would they use? Nothing? At the aid post in Divers Bay, penicillin is given out for all sorts of sickness as far as I could see. Kolshus (2016) emphasises in his research on *mana*³⁶ how penicillin was regarded as having *mana* when it first arrived in 1970, but now, people say that it has lost its *mana* because of its inefficacy due to penicillin-resistant bacteria, and with no other varieties of antibiotics available, people seek traditional treatments or help from the Melanesian Brotherhood or the clergy (p.163). As earlier mentioned in this chapter, the pregnant woman who got sick received prayers from a Tasiu, but she was later transported to Lehali where a nurse was working in the aid post/dispensary, and she received medication. Sickness can often be seen as a work of magic, and magic became visible after some months on the island.

³⁶ According to Kolshus (2013), the terms *mana* and *manag* are phenomena’s that has something to do with “special ability”, “power”, or “empowering”. This concept or term was not mentioned during my own fieldwork. For further elaboration, I recommend reading Kolshus’ research on the topic.

Magic

When first arriving at Ureparapara, I asked if there was black magic on the island. The answer I received was simply, “No. Not anymore. Never.” After a while, the word *kastom majik* (magic) caught my attention a couple of times. After a month, the chief returned from a visit on the island of Gaua with some news. There was still magic on Ureparapara, and someone had used it on him, making him lazy and tired. The people on Gaua also told him who the person that used the magic against him was. He kept this to himself, saying that if anyone of his sons found out they would kill the man responsible. Jealousy due to ownership concerning rights to land and property was the reason for this magic being thrown at him. With this news in mind, I started to ask people about magic using not only the term black magic, but *kastom* magic, good magic and bad magic. I never figured out the differences between the categories, but I was told that one man had been struck by *kastom* magic.

Magic, *kastom* magic, black magic, good magic and bad magic. This concept has many names and is difficult to divide into separate categories, other than good and bad. All my informants used the names on this concept randomly. When it was considered to be bad, they used the terms black magic, bad magic and *kastom* magic. When it was considered to be good, they used the terms magic, good magic and *kastom* magic. One example of black magic/bad magic was when the intention was to harm or even kill a person. To do this you had to catch a lizard, put a stick in its mouth and light a fire beneath it. When it started to shake, the person you wanted to kill would also start to shake. When the lizard died, the person would also die. A different way to use black/bad magic was using leaves. There was a certain *kastom* leaf that you could chew on, and spit against a person you did not like, or you would want to harm. After you had spit the leaves towards the person, he or she would not be able to recognize you, and you could fool the person, tricking them into anything. This magic is *kastom* magic, and on Espiritu Santo, I heard a story about a woman who had been struck by *kastom* magic:

A woman had been paralyzed for many years, and the medical story was that she got paralyzed after an infection in her body. She was still able to move her arms, but not her legs, which she was missing very much. The woman herself, later on told me that it was due to *kastom* magic that she was paralyzed. An old woman living on the other side of the island, could not walk because of an accident in her youth. She was jealous of the other woman and made her paralyzed, not able to walk, by using *kastom* magic. After the old woman who could not walk passed away, the paralyzed woman asked her family for help, and they chewed *kastom* leaves and spat it out and saw that it was the old woman who had made her paralyzed. Satisfied with this story about *kastom*

magic, I was surprised when a man in the town of Luganville on Espiritu Santo told me a different version. The paralyzed woman had been working as a nurse in a small village on the island, where she had fallen in love with a doctor. The doctor was not interested, so the woman decided to try to use *kastom* magic to make him fall in love with her. While mixing the love potion together, she spilled the potion on her legs, which made her paralyzed. It was her own *kastom* magic that made her unable to walk. Not anyone else's. (story told by informants)

People often told me stories of their own experiences with magic. One man told me about a time when he was living on a different island, and he was sharing an apartment with a family from the island of Epi³⁷. He had a dream that a *devel* lured him towards him, and in the dream the man suddenly threw his arms out and screamed for Jesus. He then woke up by the door. He went to bed again and heard through the wall that the Epi family was whispering. They had used magic on him. The day after, the family from Epi was gone. They never returned. The man told me he thought they disappeared because they failed in their try to chase him away with magic. I was told that on the island of Gaua³⁸ they have much black magic, and many ways to figure it out if someone has been, or is going to be, struck by magic. One was using a coconut and putting a leaf inside, then wash the person with the leaf from head to toe, before putting the fluids from the leaf inside the coconut and place it beside the persons bed for one night. In the morning, they would put the coconut inside a taro leaf and look. They would then see what was inside the coconut, they might find insects or a half fruit or the persons hair. And then they could tell you what would happen to you if and when someone uses black magic on you. A different way is that someone spits leaves on your forehead, and then goes to sleep. During the night you will dream about the magic, and then be able to see who has been using, or is going to use, magic on you. This was the method they used on Ureparapara. And I was told that black magic is present on all the Banks Islands.

³⁷ Island in Shefa Province in Vanuatu, known for the use of magic to harm others in the past.

³⁸ Island in Torba Province in Vanuatu.

After hearing this sudden statement, I had some questions for my informant:

Katrine: When I first arrived here and asked you if there is black magic here, you said no?

Informant: Because we never knew before. So, when I went to Gaua, and the people in Gaua found out. When we came back, we saw. So before, nobody here was able to find out that the black magic was here. That we have black magic on Ureparapara. But now, the people in Gaua told us.

Katrine: But you did not see it? You are not sure?

Informant: We are not sure if we have black magic or not. But the people in Gaua, the *kleva*³⁹ people in Gaua, they said: “you have black magic on Ureparapara”.

When a man is too old to use his magic, he will give it to his firstborn son. He cannot give it to his daughter, because the magic will make the girl infertile. As shown in chapter two, magic is something that belongs to the person and not the *tribe*, and it can therefore be inherited from the father. Bonnemaïson (1991) found during his research on the island of Tanna, that magical acts constitute power, which belongs to the masculine world. He categorises men and women in the context of magic into two distinct concepts of hot and cold, where men belong to the hot and women to the cold (p.84). This distinction shows how magic (and hence, power) belongs to the men (hot) and is forbidden for women (cold). The fear of infertility as a consequence of possession of magic on Ureparapara, might be interpreted as a way of controlling the power, and a contributor in constructing the person. Possession of magic, and magic related to the environment, can also be part of the construction of the person which I will explore further on in this chapter.

Cyclone Donna

It was announced on the radio that the cyclone was on its way, with update every five hours if the radio was working, on how the situation was developing. During the church service, which I was told not to attend so I could prepare myself for an evacuation, they were praying. Everyone secured their windows using sticks and clothes and my family moved all our belongings inside the newest and strongest house in our area. Since our area was close by the water, and the rise of sea levels was seen as a threat, my family decided it would be best if we evacuated up into the bush where we had relatives with stronger houses with better protection from the trees surrounding them. Before leaving the village in the middle of the night, we shut all doors and hammered nails in them so nobody would go inside whilst unguarded. This

³⁹ Can be translated to a diviner.

was also done to protect the houses against the strong wind. When we returned, we noticed that someone had climbed over the wall of the house and gone inside. Nothing was missing as far as we could see, but it felt uncomfortable knowing someone had been inside our house. Looking at our area the day after we evacuated was horrible. Our small kitchen had fallen apart, the chickens nest had blown over, crushing the eggs inside. Large branches from the huge banyan tree had been broken off by the strong wind. In the village, branches from the trees and even roofs from the houses laid spread around on the ground. The boathouse where the community boat was stored, and the welcoming area for the tourists had fallen apart. Many of the gardens were ruined by the extreme amount of water running through them, and many of the coconut and banana plantations were run to the ground by the wind. The beach was full of garbage that had drifted ashore during the night, whilst much of the beach had been dragged out in the ocean, making it difficult to access the school which was located at the far end of the beach. Usually, the children would walk along the beach when going to school, but after the cyclone they had to walk through the bush. The clean-up took some time; a chainsaw had to be used to cut the large branches before carrying them away and burning them. We took apart the small kitchen, and removed every nail carefully, to keep them for later projects. The tourist welcoming area was left broken. It was important that the emergency crisis evaluation team, who came by boat from the island of Vanua Lava, would be able to see some of the cyclone's destruction, so that the government would grant the help needed. When it was safe and clear to move back home to our area, we shared our first meal together again, stating that we were together again as a family. Most of the other families in the village stayed in their houses. Not everyone has the possibility to escape to safer grounds.

While waiting for news from our family on the other side of the island, in Moi, everyone was nervous. Cyclone Donna had hit the other side the hardest, and Moi had been caught in between two large landslides, with no possibility to escape. The trail over the hill to the other side of the island was ruined and trees blocked the path, so it took some time until it was clear and safe to walk. When a family member from Moi finally arrived, he told us that the children had been terrified and one of the girls had gone into shock and they had to tie her to her grandmother's chest to keep her calm. Luckily, everyone on Ureparapara survived the wrath of cyclone Donna.

In 1972, another cyclone had hit Ureparapara hard and a copra ship was wrecked on the reef. They used the materials from the wreck to build the Anglican Church in Divers Bay. Luckily, Donna did not hit Ureparapara as bad as the Torres islands, which got battered. Still, most gardens were destroyed, which made both gathering food and the possibility to make

money almost impossible. About a month after the emergency evaluation teams had been there, a ship came with rice and tinned fish intended for a different ceremony related to the death of Baldwin Lonsdale, the president of Vanuatu. We were told that the government had to prioritize the Torres islands above all else, so the ship called Southern Cross, a vessel serving the Anglican Church of Melanesia (ACoM), anchored in Divers Bay for one night, on their way to the Torres islands. The bishop came by for a visit during this time, telling everyone that the emergency food for this crisis would now consist of locally produced food, like dried chicken and dried cassava. People seemed annoyed, they wanted rice. The bishop answered; “we do not grow rice in Vanuatu!” The government, according to the bishop, had decided that after cyclone Pam⁴⁰ in 2015, where everyone was given rice, the number of people with diabetes increased rapidly, which made it an expensive affair for the government. Therefore, they would no longer provide rice in these situations. Rice is what the government and health programs refer to as fast-food. But the people on this island felt that rice was easy cooking and fed many people, while dried meat and vegetables would not be enough. They also asked the question “where are these locally produced foods – produced? When crops are ruined by the weather, where are they produced?”. Good questions, but no answers were given.

After the cyclone, I was informed that one man in Divers Bay had the power to move cyclones away from the island by changing its direction. This man had bought this power, or good magic, from a man on Espiritu Santo for 15,000 vatu (140.73 USD), after cyclone Pam hit Vanuatu in 2015. The man he bought it from claimed he had used the magic during cyclone Pam, calming the cyclone down and changing its direction. The man who was now in possession of this magic explained roughly, without spilling any secrets, how it works. He has to listen carefully on the radio to find out the cyclone’s direction, before chewing on certain *kastom* leaves and spitting them towards the direction of the wind and cyclone. He had performed this ritual before cyclone Donna arrived, and it was because of this that the cyclone did not hit Ureparapara as hard as other islands. This power and ability to control the weather and the environment is also known in the Torres islands, located north of Ureparapara.⁴¹ The ability and power to control and influence weather can be seen as a way of constructing the person, a concept which I will explore further in the following subchapter.

⁴⁰ A severe cyclone which hit Vanuatu in 2015.

⁴¹ For further readings see Mondragón (2004).

The construction of the person

Personhood and agency has been researched and debated for many years,⁴² as well as the debate on individualism versus dividualism in Melanesia.⁴³ While I am aware of the debate and the importance of these terms and concepts, I choose not to discuss them further, but rather to describe one ritual on Ureparapara where these concepts might be applicable and valid for future research. I will argue that this ritual is important in the construction of the person in Divers Bay.

When a child, exclusively boys, die, there is a ritual called *meimowol* following the incident. The parents will decide together with one of the chiefs, who is the connection to the spirits, which day they want the ritual to happen. It will be five days, ten days or one hundred days after the child died. Often it is conducted on the tenth day after the child died. On the appointed day, the parents will be able to speak with their deceased son again, through the *meimowol*, as everyone else talks to deceased children through the walls of the house on this night. This ritual only applies to young boys, and it can be seen as a ritual that applies to those who have not yet been initiated into the secret male society called *tamat*, which on Ureparapara is the making of headdresses⁴⁴. Therefore, it can be interpreted as a ritual to initiate the young deceased boys, even after their death. On the day of the ritual, every family in the village will prepare food for the ritual and for their own dinner. When the sun starts to set, every female, child and uninitiated in the family will either go back to their own house or get together with females, children and uninitiated from other families inside a bigger house. When the sun sets, the *meimowol* can be heard from the graveyard, howling loud in sorrow over the lost child. This can be seen as a warning signal for the women, children and uninitiated that they should get ready and hide inside the houses. The men who have payed *kastom* to the *tamat* will drink kava together and stay outside while the *meimowol* walks around. The *meimowol* cannot hurt these men since they have paid *kastom* to the *tamat*. When all the women and children who are inside the house have covered up windows and peepholes, the *meimowol* will bring all the small *devels* which imitate the deceased children with him to the village. The *meimowol* himself has the loudest cry, which can be heard all over the village. The small *devels* will walk around in the village, visiting every house where there are people inside. Everyone is obliged to turn off every light during this ritual, so the

⁴² Bateson (1987), Turner (1969), Bourdieu (1977), amongst others.

⁴³ Strathern (1988), Hess (2009), McDougall (2016), amongst others.

⁴⁴ The secret male society *tamat* on Ureparapara is the making of the headdresses which are worn by the men during *kastom* dancing, and the activities and objects related to it.

women and children sit inside in complete darkness, waiting for the *devels* to visit them. When the small *devels* arrive, the women can recognize the crying of the deceased child and when one of the small *devels* announces that he has arrived outside the door, the women will ask who he is. They usually guess the right child on the very first try. They will then proceed to ask what he wants, whereupon he will answer, usually he will answer *rol* or food. When the women and the *devel* have come to an agreement of what he will receive, the women will ask him to perform a dance and a song, before pushing the food through a crack over the window, using a stick or their hands. Someone said that if you use your hands, and the *devel* touches your hand, you will feel that he is ice-cold and wet. Like he has been in the ocean because that is where he comes from. He comes in with the sea worms. The big *meimowol* can kill you if you go outside during the ritual. He is a strong *devel*. One time when a child had died, many people hid together inside a house. When they thought it was over, they brought out their food and started to eat. Suddenly they heard loud sobbing from the old station, coming towards them. They ran for their lives and left all the food outside. After all the small *devels* have visited every house, the *meimowol* will bring them with him back to the graveyard. Before returning to the place they came from, they will have a feast together on the beach close to the graveyard, enjoying all the goods they have gathered during the evening.

I argue that this ritual is part of constructing and defining the person after his passing, through what can be seen as an initiation into something(?) that is an exclusively male “domain⁴⁵”. It is not only a construction of the newly deceased person, it is also a construction of all the deceased persons who “went” through this ritual after their passing in the past times. This construction of the others becomes apparent in the way the spirits or ghosts of the deceased persons (mainly uninitiated boys) are given a voice during the ritual, and Codrington (1891) found that one object in particular, which made an impressive sound, was believed to be the cry or voice of the ghosts (pp.79-80). Amman (2012) uses the term “*tabu* sounds” and argues that they symbolize “the powerful acoustic personification of spirits” (p.225). People hearing the “*tabu* sound” are supposed to believe that the sound is an expression made by the spirit directly, it is the voice of the spirit, and not a sound that is being expressed through an instrument by the spirit. Deacon (1934) found one specific sound which was supposed to be the voice of a ghost, and the nature of this sound was secret for

⁴⁵ I choose to use the term domain since my knowledge on what this exclusiveness implies or signifies is non-existent. This lack of knowledge is due to the limited information available to me as a woman, in the case of the male exclusive activities and rituals.

women and small boys (p.569). As earlier mentioned, on Ureparapara, women and uninitiated boys and men were not allowed outside when the ritual of the *meimowol* took place. Only men who had paid *kastom* to the *tamat* could be outside when the *meimowol* was present. This is also a way of constructing the person, as the men who are initiated are ascribed some sort of exclusive power. By having paid *kastom* to the *tamat*, they are immune to the dangerous *meimowol* and its powers and the small *devels* and can walk freely amongst them. Even though the initiated men are free to walk around during this ritual and not to be afraid of the *meimowol*, there are other spirits present on Ureparapara, from which not even the initiated men are safe.

The secret life of spirits

The presence of spirits became more visible after the death of three people, all during my last month on the island. During my stay, people had told me stories of different spirits and even stories about a mystical creature called *depunpun/debunbun/the bunbun* which can be translated into “the small one”. This creature was explained to me as a small person who looked like an elf with small feet. When walking the trail which leads to the other side of the island, there is a large rock where a small footprint is engraved in the stone. This is said to be the footprint of *depunpun* and it is important to step on this footstep the first time passing it. If not, the trail and paths might disappear, and you will get lost in the bush with your bad dreams. If you see a yam grow in the garden, you have to dig it up straight away, if you leave it, the yam will be gone when you return for it. This is said to be the work of *depunpun*. One informant had been to his garden and he knew about a small water source beneath some rocks. When finished drinking, he did not put the rocks back in the right place, and when he walked away he could hear the sound of rocks being moved around and placed back in position again by *depunpun*.

On Ureparapara, people talked about two different spirits which a person holds, one good and one bad. When a person dies, the good spirit will go to heaven, whilst the evil spirit might stay in the village. This is the reason why many people are scared when someone dies, since the evil spirit which might stay in the village makes sounds which appear as the deceased person’s voice. Kolshus (1999) has argued that on the island of Mota, people conceptualise two souls. One is in the body from birth, the other enters the body with the ritual of baptism. Upon death, the person’s baptism soul will go to heaven, while the other

one becomes a *tamate*⁴⁶. On Ureparapara, the term “soul” was never used in my presence, but the term “spirit” was used when deaths occurred, which is similar to Kolshus’ findings on Mota. The spirit’s presence after a person’s death has some similarities to Malinowski’s (1992) research on the kosi, the spirit of the dead in the Trobriand Islands. Firstly, he separates between two different spirits. The baloma, which is the main form of the spirit which goes to Tuma (an island where the spirit goes after death), and the kosi, a spirit which leads a short existence after death near the village and in the usual whereabouts of the dead man. He describes the kosi as the ghost of the deceased person which might be met near the village or seen in his garden. Sometimes the kosi can be heard knocking on his friends’ or relative’s houses, for a few days after death took place. Malinowski describes how people are afraid of meeting the kosi, even though not in deep terror, as the kosi most often frighten people as a practical joke and play tricks, but he is harmless. Still, people can hear him in the night, laughing (pp.150-151). Malinowski has a different perception of the kosi than Weiner (1988), who in her research writes that this spirit can cause illness and death to survivors (p.42), which Malinowski in his writings dismisses. The concept of the kosi spirit is similar to the way the spirits occur right before the passing and remain for some days after a person’s death in Divers Bay. On Ureparapara, when a sick man got worse, his relatives joined him in his house. Two boys were outside when they suddenly heard a loud cry which sounded like the sick man; “owooooi, owooooi”, and came from the river, behind the kitchen. But the sick man was on his bed inside his house. They said it was an evil spirit, the sick man’s evil spirit, that was now present. In Divers Bay, it is said that right before someone dies, the dying person gets angry at the ones visiting. After the sick man died, his children did not enter the house where he died, because the priest (who was also some kind of healer) had not been there to bring the sick man’s evil spirit with him, removing him from the house. They believed he was still inside the house.

Codrington (1891) emphasizes in his research that the Banks Islanders believe in two kinds of intelligent beings different from the living, and what separates these two kinds of beings is their life before becoming spirits. The first are ghosts of the dead, the second are beings who never were human (p.219). Further, he is careful in his use of the term “spirit” when defining these higher beings (pp.248-289). I too will be careful in my assumptions about the Ureparapara spirits, which is why I will continue to use the term “spirit”, and not “soul” or “ghost”, when referring to the ones on Ureparapara. As with the kosi spirit, after the

⁴⁶ *Tamate* is the term for the secret male associations on the island of Mota (Kolshus, 2007).

death of one man in Divers bay, his spirit had remained in the village, or rather, in the area where his garden was located. One day, a woman came running to the village, shouting out for help. One lady needed to be carried down from the bush where she had been in her garden, because she could not breathe or walk. Several women went up in the bush to bring back the lady. Meanwhile, another woman came running with a small girl saying that the priest had told her that the little girl, together with her mother and the baby, needed to stay inside their house, because an evil spirit had gone inside the lady who got sick in the bush. This priest had a gift which made it possible for him to see when someone was sick because of *kastom*. The priest would spit *kastom* leaves on the victim, and he/she (victim) would start to shake and shout out words. The reason why the lady got sick in the bush was because the evil spirit of the deceased man had entered her body. This happened because the deceased man's family had gone to the grave to visit "him" one day earlier, since the granddaughter wanted to "see" her grandfather. When they left, the evil spirit of the deceased man had followed his granddaughter, so when the other woman went to her garden close by the deceased man's garden, he had gone inside her body. Because it was *kastom* she was sick from, it had to be "finished" (meaning that the *kastom* which caused sickness was still inside her and had to be completed in some sort of way) before the priest could pray for her to help her get well again. This might imply that it was not the *kastom* sickness itself that the priest would heal, but rather the side-effects which were generated from the *kastom* sickness. The priest saw it straight away that it was the deceased man's evil spirit that had entered the lady, and he asked the deceased man's family if they had visited his grave the day before. They answered yes, whereupon he said to them, "Yes, that is the reason." This case of *kastom* sickness and the treatment of it is similar to what Deacon (1934) observed about the medication of illnesses caused by magic on Malekula, an island located further south in Vanuatu, and wrote, "What magic has caused, magic must cure" (p.692).

Codrington (1891) notes that people in the Banks Islands distinguish between two different types of possessions, first one being a ghost which enters a body for a particular purpose, the second being a ghost which enters a body for no apparent cause, other than being homeless in the place of the dead, which makes him a wandering ghost (p.219). When a disabled boy died, only eight years old, his evil spirit had also been out and about. One day he had followed another child, which he used to play with when he was alive, along the

beach.⁴⁷ The child came running home, hysterical and crying. The priest then asked the deceased child's mother to go to his grave and talk to him, to tell him that he could not follow people anymore, but stay in his grave, since this place no longer was a place for him to stay in. The mother went to his grave and talked to him, and later, she came to me with eggs which she had retrieved from her deceased son's chickens, which he had told her to give to me as a present. This might imply that the spirit of the boy stayed, since the mother could communicate with him. These deaths happened a few weeks before my departure, and since there has been close to no contact after my return, I do unfortunately not have any knowledge of how these cases with spirits developed or ended.

A different kind of spirit which is apparent on Ureparapara are the ones that take the shape of small children. These spirits were also called small *devels* by some, and "elves" by others. Earlier, children used to play with these spirits down by the water, and the parents could see the spirits too. An old lady had been to her garden and brought with her some leaves of pandanus on the way home. While walking, she pulled the leaves behind her and small spirits jumped on the leaves, so she would drop them on the ground. They played around with her all the way home to her house before disappearing. These spirits can take the shape of anything, cats, dogs, or humans. Usually, they take the shape of young boys, the same face and voice and the same body. One man told me that they have these spirits or elves in their garden. They often play with water, so if you leave a dish with water they will most likely appear, running in front of you on the trail. They are wet and slippery like oil, so it is impossible to catch them. A boy had been seen fighting on the beach with one of them, a long time ago. One informant explained to me that "these [beings] in our language are called *mei*, and in Bislama they are called *sisnek* or *snek blong solwota*. It is a child from him [the seasnake]. Or some kind of dwarf". They love to dance on top of the *doti* (dirty) which is where garbage and leaves are put to be burnt, and they love *smol ren* (drizzle). I was told that when it was *smol ren*, I would be able to hear some sort of clucking outside my house, which was the presence of small *devels*. As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the introduction of Christianity made these small *devels* or "spirits", which can be argued to be a part the concept of *kastom* magic, invisible for most people, as they started to read the Bible. The statement which was made by a man in the village, might demonstrate how the lines

⁴⁷ Deacon (1934) observed a similar case on Malekula when the locals believed that the ghost of a deceased man had followed his widow back to her home (p.563).

between religion and magic appear to be blurry, as the introduction of Christianity only made these elements of magic invisible, and not disappear completely.

The fear of these spirits is apparent on Ureparapara, and people often hear and experience different warnings or signs when something bad is going to happen. A family was in the garden one day, when they suddenly heard a loud howl coming from the bush. Since nobody else was around, they all agreed it was a bad sign and needed to hurry on home. The children were scared. A similar warning was experienced by a man who was staying in a different house close to his garden, the same day as the other family was in their garden. There were many leaves on the ground inside the house, and in the middle of the night he was awakened by the sound of footsteps on the floor inside the house. He went back to sleep, and in the morning, he looked for footsteps but could not find any. He thought to himself that it was a sign that someone had died. The day after these incidents occurred, a seven days old baby died. This fear is visible through the consumption of food as well. As Deacon (1934) experienced in Malekula, people were afraid of eating anything that could have been touched by a ghost, as hysteria and other kinds of sickness was said to be caused by this contact (p.549). In Divers Bay, a family had to move from their house because of strong *kastom*. It was believed that a *kastom* spirit resided in the area where their house was located, and they moved further away. But one day, the daughter in the family had gone to their garden which was close by their old house. They cooked the food and went to bed. While they were sleeping the spirit came inside their house and ate from their food, directly out of the pot. When the girl ate the food from the same pot the next day, she got sick. She suffered from asthma and had hysterical seizures/fits (which might be the result of not being able to breathe normally). The girl's sickness continued for the time I was present in Divers Bay.

Qat the *kastom* God and his wife

In northern Vanuatu, in the Banks Islands, there is a *kastom* God called Qat. I was told two different stories about how Qat was the reason for the headdresses being a male *kastom*:

Long time ago, the headdress belonged to Qat's wife. Qat's wife had made this headdress, and one day, when the men were dancing their *kastom* dance, Qat's wife saw them dancing. One of Qat's disciples saw the wife looking, and Qat made a trade with his wife, that she would have the dance, and he would have the headdress. They switched, and that was how the headdress became male, and a part of the secret male society in Ureparapara and Banks Islands. (story told by informant)

In this story, there was a trade between Qat (male) and his wife (female), so the dance and headdress switched owners. It does not explain how the men today have ownership of both headdresses and *kastom* dance, unless the dance Qat's wife received was one of the female dances in Ureparapara today. The next story illustrates the male ownership to both headdress and dance more fully:

One day, Qat's wife was in her house weaving, and Qat went to work in the garden. One day, his wife wanted to weave something, and she made one headdress. When Qat came home, his wife hid the headdress so Qat would not see it. Qat went to the garden, and when he came home he knew that his wife was hiding something from him. He told her he would go to the garden, but instead he hid, before going back to the house to look. He saw his wife make something, and he went inside again. He asked his wife what she was making, and the wife answered that she was making one headdress to put on her head. Qat answered that the headdress looked very nice, and that it was no longer a headdress for her, but for himself. He told her that he would use the headdress and make a dance that would belong to it. His wife gave it to him, and then Qat said that now the headdress is *tabu* for women. It is *tabu* for women to see how the headdress is being made, as well as the dance belonging to it. He told his wife this: "Before, the headdress belonged to you, my wife, but now, it will belong to me and men." Therefore, the dance is called *danis blong* Qat, when the men dance with the headdress that looks like fish. (Story told by informant)

What both of these stories have in common, is that Qat's wife, a female, created the headdress which today is exclusively a male object as well as the making of it. This is not a new phenomenon, as Tuzin (1997) argues that certain paramount cult objects related to the Tambaran, a secret men's cult in Papua New Guinea, were invented or discovered by women (p.159). Codrington (1891) narrates how the bull-roarer, an instrument used during certain secret rituals, was created by a woman and stolen by two men who were members of the Great *Tamate* in Vanua Lava (p.80). This instrument is still used during certain rituals which only men are allowed to observe and take part in. The women, children and uninitiated are scared of this sound and believe that the sound is what the men say it is.⁴⁸ According to Kolshus (2007) there are stories in Melanesian ethnography about how male secret societies were originated or heavily influenced by women, and according to his informants on the

⁴⁸ I promised the men not to expose or reveal any of their secrets about this sound or the ritual where the sound is being used. I will keep my promise.

island of Mota, it was a woman who initiated the first *Tamate* association (p.109), which is consistent with my findings on Ureparapara.

4. *Kastom*, Tourism and Catch-22

***Kastom* – an introduction and a note on terms**

According to Bolton (2003), “*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” (p.XIII). And *kastom* according to Akin (2004), is a “Melanesian Pijin word (from English ‘custom’) denoting ideologies and activities formulated in terms of empowering indigenous traditions and practices” (p.299). In this chapter, the meaning and embodiment of *kastom* on Ureparapara will be explained and discussed, not only by itself, but also in a combination with tourism, and how these concepts affect each other. A discussion of the invention of tradition will follow, as tourism requesting the “primitive” seems to be in conflict with the development and future goals that the people on Ureparapara have set for themselves. This conflict puts the people on Ureparapara (and probably other remote islands) as well as other “primitivized” cultures, in a difficult situation (see for instance Bruner, 2001). I must emphasize that throughout this chapter (as well as other places in this thesis), I will use the term “primitive” as MacCarthy (2016) uses it;

[...] not as a characteristic of people in actual fact, [...], I use it as a way in which people characterize themselves and Others in juxtaposition to notions of what is “civilized”, [...] and [...]it is a key tool in branding tourism in so-called exotic locations. (p.7)

The terms “modernization”, “modern” and “modernity” were used by the Ureparapara people as a contrast to the terms tradition and *kastom*. “Modern” meant “Western” or “white man culture”, whilst “tradition” meant *kastom*, or their own knowledge and practices. During this chapter I will not use these terms carelessly, but as the people on Ureparapara did. They only serve to illustrate the contrast proclaimed by the people, as emic terms, and not as scientific and analytical terms. I will not use quotation marks when using these terms further in this thesis, as it might be distracting for the reader.

***Kastom*, laws and a society in change**

Hess (2009) describes how Christianity affected *kastom*, as it separated *kastom* into two distinct categories, where bad *kastom* is seen as having destructive and antisocial potential, whilst good *kastom* contains public activities and skills in arts and crafts, leaving the good *kastom* in combination with Christianity as the understanding of a general indigenous way of life (p.157). Christianity has been a driving force when it comes to defining *kastom*, not only for missionaries and other outsiders, but for the locals themselves.

On Ureparapara, both good and bad *kastom* were being talked about, but in the sense of bad *kastom* it was usually when talking about magic, as I have shown in chapter three, or something that was influencing the society or individuals negatively. First and foremost, when talking about *kastom*, the rules and laws of how to behave and interact were important. As shown in chapter two, relations to kin was object for both fines, punishments and benefits. During my fieldwork, many people were fined for bad behaviour and for breaking *kastom* laws. For instance, when one informant told me some of the *tamat* secrets, the person made me promise not to tell anyone that the person had told me about it. Because it is *kastom*, the person would be fined if anyone found out that the person had been sharing secrets with a woman and an “outsider”. Another person had to pay a huge fine of killing pigs, payment in form of kava, and money for telling a girl some *tamat* secrets, on how to make the headdresses. The rumours had spread that he had told someone, and the other members of the *tamat* had started to investigate. From these examples it seems like the ones paying fines usually are men. That is not the case. Women too have been fined for *kripim* (creeping or searching for sexual partners secretly) on men. In the cases I observed, the fine was usually set to 6,000 vatu. These cases are examples on how fines are given when people do not conduct themselves properly according to the societies expectations, or breaking *kastom* laws. But even during ceremonial dances, *kastom* can be bad when the rituals conducted before and after, are not properly carried out. After the men have performed their *kastom* dance, the area used needs to be cleansed before any woman or uninitiated person can walk there. The cleansing is conducted by pouring kava on the ground before bringing the headdresses back to the *kastom* house/*tabu* house. I was told that after one performance they had not done it correctly, and a woman had walked over the area and she got sick. Her body swelled up and she had to stay in bed. The men conducted a new cleansing, and the woman got well straight away. *Kastom* dancing is performed especially when tourists are visiting, or on special celebrations. *Kastom* as good is represented through skills in traditional arts and

crafts, and through gratitude and reciprocity. On Ureparapara, shell money is still being made, and only few people have the knowledge and equipment to do this work of art. Shell money is still being used as gifts, part of bride price or as a wedding gift, when wedding off family members. As for gratitude, *kastom* is shown especially in the case of helping each other. One example being that when someone has helped someone else with work in their garden, it is *kastom* that the person who helped will eat with the ones he or she helped. Reciprocity is *kastom*. When the village was visited by some yachters who repaired their community boat before leaving, the village threw a huge party for them, with speeches and shaking of hands. This was their way of saying thank you, showing the yachters how grateful they were.

Akin (2004) writes about *kastom laws* among Kwaio people in the Solomon Islands, and how the line separating *kastom* ideology and everyday religious practice, has blurred (p.308). Kwaio ancestors are concerned with enforcing taboos that regulate female bodily wastes such as menstrual blood, urine and vomit. The women who violate these taboos are often blamed for community problems and especially serious male illness and are thought to place a burden on their communities. Akins' (2004) research shows that *kastom* can be interpreted as a locus of control, where the *kastom* laws and taboos violated by women are the reason for ancestral punishment, which then occur as community problems. *Kastom* is not simply *kastom*, it can be created, and in the case of Kwaio, *kastom* is created to control the women. I will argue that *kastom* as a locus of control, can be seen through the ways parts of *kastom* is gendered on Ureparapara.

Gendered *kastom*

It is important to emphasize that the women on Ureparapara seem to be freer in terms of restrictions, compared to women on other islands where the male dominance is strong.⁴⁹ With this being said, there is in many ways a distinction between the genders on this island.

Kastom is gendered, and as Bolton (2003) emphasizes, *kastom* in Vanuatu was, until the early 1990s, primarily referred to as male practices and skills. The distinction between the men as “public” and the women as “private” contributed to the male as the dominant holders of *kastom*, as *kastom* itself was thought of as connected to the public domain (p.57). The foundation of the Women’s Culture Project in 1992 established a distinction between women and men’s *kastom* by redefining the meaning of *kastom*. The new definition was referring to

⁴⁹ See for instance Hess (2009), Jolly (1994).

both women and men's knowledge and practices, but this redefinition also stated and still states, that there was, and still is, a distinction between the women and men's *kastom* (Bolton, 2003, pp.169-172). Women have their own *kastom*, and men have theirs, but there is also *kastom* that is common for both genders, as shown in chapter two, practices concerning marriage is a kind of *kastom* that is common for all.

On Ureparapara, the gendered differences in *kastom* were especially visible through giving birth and the making of headdresses. Giving birth is the women's *kastom*, making headdresses is the men's *kastom*, and it is *tabu* for one gender to take part in the ritual of the opposite gender. The *kastom* clothing is different for each gender, as well for the ritual tattoos (during ceremonies and dances). Women are not allowed to go inside the *kastom/tabu* house, while the men are not allowed to pass under a woman's clothes hanging on the line for drying. It is *tabu* in the same way as women cannot climb or sit in trees above the heads of men walking beneath it. If anyone violate any *tabu*'s, they will have to pay a fine. As earlier mentioned, Akin (2004) argues that *kastom* laws among Kwaio people are used to enforce taboos to regulate and control women, especially concerning female bodily wastes (p.309). Jolly (1994) shows through her study that there are few strictures on women during menstruation, even though it is called the sickness of women (translated). She continues by saying that;

There is no seclusion hut for menstruating women, and no woman stops working during her menstrual period. The husband can still sleep in the same hut as his wife, and some women suggested she can cook for him. The only strongly observed taboo is that a menstruating woman should not have intercourse with a man lest he catch the "sickness", and his penis start bleeding. (p.149)

Her research is from South Pentecost, and there are many similarities to Ureparapara with some exceptions in the case of when a woman is menstruating. On Ureparapara, when a woman has her bleeding, she is (according to several male informants) not allowed to cook.⁵⁰ The reason for this being that in their *kastom*, a woman's bleeding (menstruation blood) can be used to destroy a man's life. It is the same as black magic, where it can be put in someone's food, and then by consuming it, the person will die. At the same time, it must be said that several of the women I talked to told me that they only use their monthly bleeding as an excuse to get out of their kitchen duties for a short while. According to the women, the

⁵⁰ Hess (2009) observed similar beliefs on Vanua Lava, where menstrual blood is believed to make men sick, therefore, women are required not to cook for the men during their menstruation (p.48).

men do not know, or care, when the woman is menstruating. Still, this can be seen as a way or an attempt to control women by saying that they are polluted when menstruating. At the same time, if the women only use their bleeding as an excuse to have some time off, I will argue that they, the women themselves, have the power and control. One has to wonder, as shown in chapter three, a woman cannot “have” magic. Can menstruation then be interpreted as the female body’s way of rejecting magic?

One informant told me that the reason why *kastom* on Ureparapara is not very strong anymore is because the chiefs do not have their own *kastom* laws to enforce. Many years earlier, each *tribe* had their own chief and the chief practiced his own *kastom* rules within the *tribe*. It was stricter, and as an example, women could not drink kava. Only older men drank kava, and when he only had a sip left in his shell, he would throw it on to the ground and by this act, made the place where he threw it *tabu* for women to step over. With this case in mind, the question of who is enforcing the laws is important. And this too, is gendered. Women cannot become chiefs, because the chief’s ways are *tabu* for the women to see. Women are, according to one informant, allowed to do almost everything, with some exceptions like going into the *kastom nakamal*⁵¹ where the headdresses are made, seeing the equipment used for the making of headdresses, and even a woman’s animals are restricted from this *nakamal*. If any of these restrictions are breached, huge fines must be paid to the *kastom nakamal*, and will be used by those initiated inside the *nakamal* to buy tobacco, kava or other things they might want to enjoy. But it has to be used in the *nakamal*, and only there.

During my stay, there were two chiefs in training to become village chiefs. This training occurs when someone is at the first step of the grade taking. They have to prove themselves as proper men to be a chief of the village, a spokesman on both the inside and outside of the community. When a man does not fit the expectancy, he is cut off. He is then no longer a trainee, which can be caused by violations on different rules, both by himself or even his children. The titles high chief and paramount chief are not old, but new terms and according to White and Lindstrom (1997) the missions imported a hierarchy where the titles deacon, elder, pastor and mama (Anglican priest) were introduced, and Christian leaders were promoted to be elected as paramount chiefs (p.213). White and Lindstrom further argue that there were events and interests of the post contact colonial society that shaped the identity “chief”, as documents from the 1950s show that local leaders earlier were referred to as “assessors” or “bigmen” (p.212). The chief’s job in Divers Bay on Ureparapara is mainly to

⁵¹ *Nakamal* is a meeting house.

resolve disputes and deciding fines according to the offences and breaches of rules occurring from time to time. If the indicted person resists the fine and punishment given by the chief, or fails to pay his fine, he or she will be relegated from the island, and sent to Vanua Lava where the police is located. When tourists are approaching, the chief is in charge and will usually be the village's public face, which also means that the chief's appearance will be the first impression tourists get of the people on Ureparapara. This combination of responsibilities and duties makes the position as a chief not merely a position to show off prestige, it is also administrative leadership both inward and outward of the society. Even though women cannot become chiefs, in earlier years they had their own system of grade taking, exclusively for women. There were only few people who could remember parts of this system, so the information available was therefore scarce. Still, the information I gathered on this system is not only important as an example of gendered *kastom*, it is important to spread and maintain knowledge of a system that has had some significance in the past.

Woman grade taking

While the male grade taking is an ongoing ritual on Ureparapara, it is accessible for men exclusively. Blackwood (1981) emphasizes that even though rank taking is predominantly a male domain, women too are able to take grades in some areas (p.36). The following story from Ureparapara shows how grade taking was not completely a male domain in the past. Women too, could become what was called High woman:

When I was brought up, I did not see the women ranking anymore. It is called women's grade taking. We do not use it anymore. But I know a little about this grade taking. I heard from my uncle, he told me a little bit about it. The woman stayed inside the *nakamal* for only four days. After, they killed one pig and washed the woman with the pig's blood. She then slept with it on for one week. After one week, they brought the woman to the water and made her swim [wash herself]. When she had washed herself thoroughly, they took her to the women's *nakamal*. They made a big meal and covered up the meal in the hole for the *laplap* [underground oven], when it was ready they took it out and distributed it to everyone and ate together. After the meal, they tattooed the woman's face and hands. They would dress her up in *kastom* clothing, and then she would go on top of one stone and receive her a name. Her name was Kolieng. Then she ate wisdom leaf. (story told by chief Nicholson)

This story shows the ritual one woman had to go through to become High woman. The significance of this system, as well as the consequences of it, what it meant or implied for the

women who became High women to achieve higher grades, was unfortunately not known to my informants. When asked why the women's grade taking stopped, the answer was that when the last High woman died, the system died with her. The female grade or status taking system is to be found elsewhere in Vanuatu as well.⁵² As Bolton (2003) found on Ambae, once a woman is married, she can fully participate in adult life, which involves participating in a women status-alteration ceremony called *huhuru*, which refers to the dyeing of textiles (p.102). The female hierarchical system can also be linked to the meaning of a person's spirit, as Amman (2012) argues that after a woman's death, her spirit will be more powerful if she is high ranked, than the spirit of a lower grade woman's spirit. The reason for women to try to achieve higher grade, is to be more respected and to gain influence in the society she is part of (p.223).

I argue that the use of the term *kastom*, and the embodiment of the concept, is being shaped to fit into this society's development and to benefit the people on Ureparapara. One informant told me that "according to our *kastom*, men are superior to women". This informant and his generation, he told me, was raised with this view on gender. Still, he told me that the line between the genders are getting blurrier every day, because of the influencing forces of modernization [white man culture] that interferes with the old *kastom*, like new religions and denominations described in chapter three, together with new opinions and even laws. He saw this change as positive and inevitable.

***Kastom*, modern life and the invention of tradition**

Invented tradition is a set of practices where repetition of behaviour that has been imprinted with certain values and norms, automatically implies continuity with the past (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992). This concept, I argue, is visible on Ureparapara. It is visible through the organizing of activities before tourist arrivals. The invention of tradition was an influential debate during the 1980s and 1990s in Pacific anthropology.⁵³ Keesing (1989) stated that "visions of the past are being created and evoked" (p.19), discourses on the understanding, embodiment and execution of *kastom* is rhetorically evoked, recreated and idealized, and in many ways derived from Western ideologies. On Ureparapara, this occurring concept is neither a scheme, nor an attempt to trick the visitors, it is merely a response to what tourists

⁵² Jolly (1994) refers to several types of female grades, both in Malekula, South Pentecost and other islands in Vanuatu.

⁵³ For instance, Keesing (1989,1991), Linnekin (1991), Trask (1991).

request and demand, and a possibility to earn money. It is then up to the people on Ureparapara to offer it to them, by showing *kastom* dancing, local string band music, island food and, last but not least, the welcoming ceremony where they run into the water where the tourists walk in, dressed up in *kastom* clothing which has been made the night before, pretending to be “savages”, scaring the visitors.



Figure 13: Cruise ship tourists arriving in Divers Bay. (private photo)

That is what the tourists want. It must be said, that even though the *kastom* clothing the locals wear when the tourists are arriving are put on to impress the tourists, these clothes are indeed their *kastom* clothes, and worn in different ceremonies, rituals and special events. As to my knowledge, the clothes could be worn by both initiated as well as uninitiated men, boys and women, though different style in clothing for men and women. The clothes did not represent any rank, title or membership, rather, it was the activity done while wearing it that was of importance. One such ceremony or event, when uninitiated boys as well as initiated wore the clothes, was the launching of the five-year-plan and the new water system. The people on Ureparapara would often discuss what they should do and change so that more tourists would come to their island. Since Ureparapara is remote, it is not very often that visitors come on a cruise ship, and it is the cruise ships they make money out of. When discussing the five-year-plan for the island, the main theme was how to get more tourists and what tourists need to be comfortable while visiting. Flush toilets and showers for the visitors were important, and the

new water system would make this possible, as well as giving the locals and the tourists opportunity to enjoy clean water and food.



Figure 14: Young boys performing kastom dance. (private photo)



Figure 15: Chief David presents the five-year plan with kastom dance. (private photo)

The cruise ship tourists

To avoid any accusations of generalization of tourists, I must underline that the ones I mention in this thesis are the ones visiting Ureparapara during my own fieldwork.

The cruise ship tourists would be part of a planned and all-inclusive cruise, where everything was planned out and prepared, and they would announce their arrival two weeks before arriving, which is announced on the radio. The upcoming two weeks after the announcement, everything else is paused and the organizing and preparation for the visitors begin. Everyone who is to participate in the events is divided into groups, where the work is divided on the participating members of the group. The largest groups were the dancers, the kitchen group and the cleaning group. The male dancers would rehearse several dance routines, and also prepare the headdresses in the men's *kastom/tabu* house. I was not allowed to join this group since I am a female, therefore my knowledge on their preparations is rather scarce. But as MacCarthy (2016) emphasizes in her research from Papua New Guinea, when “group tours are scheduled, a number of dances are inevitably included in the program” (p.109). It is not fake, nor a scheme, it is a way for the people on Ureparapara to use their *kastom* and culture to make money, in return, the tourists will be left with experiences and memories of something cultural and exciting. It is a peculiar form for reciprocity where the two parts involved might not fully understand what the other part wants or/and gains from the reciprocal relation. The kitchen group was responsible for the preparation of food, mainly to serve the tourists on the day of arrival. During the weeks of preparation, they made a plan, delegated tasks, and joined in on other tasks when possible. The menu they prepared consisted of typical *island kakaē*⁵⁴, like Vanuatu's national dish *laplap*⁵⁵, a similar dish called *simboro*⁵⁶, *aepopol*⁵⁷ (which are both much the same as *laplap* except for the way of preparing it), *nalot*⁵⁸ and last but not least, lobster. The lobster-case is interesting and will be elaborated later in this chapter. The cleaning group was in charge of cleaning and preparing the tourist welcoming area. The cleaning consisted of cutting grass, rake and broom the ground and to hang flowers and decorations everywhere in the area where the tourists would be entering. They also made an arch out of stems from leaves and covered it in fresh flowers. When these tourists arrive, the people who are part of the performances during the visit,

⁵⁴ Translates to island food.

⁵⁵ *Laplap* is prepared by grating breadfruit, bananas, taro or yam roots into a vegetable paste, before wrapping it into banana leaves and cooked in an underground oven covered with hot stones.

⁵⁶ Similar to *laplap* but rolled into small parcels wrapped in island cabbage and cooked in coconut milk.

⁵⁷ Similar to *laplap* and *simboro*, but rolled into small balls and cooked in coconut milk.

⁵⁸ Dish made with mashed breadfruit and coconut milk.

become what MacCannell (1992) has called the ex-primitive, where the locals play the primitive for profit (Bruner, 2001). When cruise ship tourists arrive, everyone is following a pre-planned program, first they are welcomed with string band music and salusalu (flower garlands), some free time where the tourists take pictures of the people and the village, the men perform their dances, women perform theirs, and when finished, the tourists will have the possibility to buy carvings from a small improvised sales stall, before returning to their ship. When the visit is over, the participants of the different activities will share the outcome, a predetermined amount that the tourists have paid to the leaders of the cruise ship beforehand. After one visit, the participants were left with a very small amount, since people from Lehali and other villages had come to perform as well.

The yachters

The other type of tourists was the tourists who were travelling to the island on their own initiative, not part of a group and had the freedom to stay as long as they wanted. The yachters had often been travelling for many months, even years already and were used to meeting new people and cultures without the need to see any performances. Neither would they, since they never announced their arrival, which made preparations impossible. When yachters arrived, the race began. Everyone jumped in their dugouts, eager to be the first one out to welcome the tourists. The ones approaching first were also the ones who probably got gifts from the tourists, in form of cold drinks, candy and fishing gear. The first ones out would also guide the tourists on where to anchor up for their stay. These tourists would come ashore when they wanted, and they had the luxury, same as the cruise ship tourists, to retreat back to their boats whenever they wanted. I will argue that what separates these tourists from the cruise ship tourists is that they are what Feifer (1985) has called post-tourists (pp.259-268). The post-tourist, according to Urry (1990);

[...] knows that they are a tourist and that tourism is a game, or rather a whole series of games with multiple texts and no single, authentic tourist experience. [...] that the apparently authentic entertainment is as socially contrived as the ethnic bar, and that the supposedly quaint and traditional fishing village could not survive without the income from tourism. (p.100)

In the case of Ureparapara, the village would though survive without the income from tourism, but the income makes it easier to afford sending children off to school. So, these yachters are aware of the performance that the local people put on for tourists, and they

accept it. In case of the yachters, the payment for being a tourist on this island is often given in form of clothes, food and even services like fixing the community boat or someone's solar or other electric equipment.

The lobster-case

The evening before the expected arrival of the cruise ship, one of the men came to me and asked for advice. He wanted to know if tourists liked lobster. Coming from Norway, where (at least I have heard) lobster is an exclusive dish, I answered him that yes, the tourists would probably love lobster. Several men went out on a night-dive to catch lobsters, which took them all night. In the morning they proudly showed me all the lobsters they had caught and prepared for the tourists, hoping that some of them maybe would buy some. When the tourists arrived, the men were eager to show them the lobsters, but the tourists just waived their hands in front of them, rejected the offer and dismissed the men. When I asked the tourists if they had tasted any of the local food prepared for them, they told me that they had been warned against eating anything or accepting anything from the “natives”⁵⁹, and that they would soon go back to the ship where a large buffet of international dishes awaited them for lunch. I told them that the men had been out all night catching lobsters for them, but they only shook their heads and told me that they were a bit disappointed because they had seen several “natives” with cell phones. And of course, a huge disappointment was seeing me. A white person. Since it was raining on this day, many of the tourists did not come ashore, I was told that they did not want to get wet, and therefore chose to stay in the comfort surroundings on the ship.

This case of the lobster can be seen as an attempt of disempowering the people on Ureparapara. When in modern countries, lobster is seen as an exclusive dish, a delicacy even. But when offered this dish on this remote and primitive island, it was degraded to something that not only could, but would, cause sickness. At this point, they are disempowering the locals by taking from them the possibility to offer something exclusive, and the possibility to showcase themselves as people on an island which they try to develop in means of accessibility and tourism.

⁵⁹ Native is the term the tourists used about the locals. I choose to write it in quotation marks, as the use of the term shows a certain way of speech amongst the tourists, both here and in the following sub-chapters.

Catch-22

The people on Ureparapara use their culture, *kastoms* and traditions to perform in front of tourists whom in turn, pays for the primitive performances. It is a demand and supply kind of relationship. The challenge occurs the moment tourists demand something that the locals cannot supply, like the luxury of a hot shower or a flush toilet. The locals then start to arrange for this demand to be something that they can supply, making the tourists experience more comfortable and luxurious. But in reality, the tourists never really wanted them to become more modern in the first place. They want to experience the primitive life, and the shower and flush toilets would ruin their experience of an “authentic primitive” island. While yes, it would be more convenient, but as Bruner (2001) uses the concept of the questioning gaze to describe the tourists doubts about the authenticity of what is being presented to them (p.889), flush toilets and showers would probably make the tourists question the authenticity of everything experienced during their visit. Bruner (2001) elaborates on Rosaldo’s (1989) concept of imperialist nostalgia, by saying that;

Western peoples yearn for the ‘traditional’ cultures that the previous generation of Western colonists had intentionally destroyed. [...]. Tourism performances, throughout the world, regularly reproduce stereotypic images, discredited histories, and romantic fantasies. (p.886)

Especially this reproduction of stereotypic images can be seen in the part where tourists arrive, and the men run out in the water acting like “savages”. Whilst the people on Ureparapara create new goals for themselves and the future, such as technological access, economic stability and better access to other islands, the tourists want to see them as primitive. Since much of the traditions are disappearing because of the influencing forces of modernization [white man culture] that interferes with the old *kastom*, they cannot go back to the past way of living. Nor can they move too much forward towards their goals. I argue that this situation is an example of the Catch-22 paradox because the people on Ureparapara make money out of showcasing their traditions and therefore need to maintain certain traits from the past. Becoming “too modern” might ruin their possibilities to earn money from tourism.

The tourists who are only interested in the primitive traits of the culture, can also alter the meaning of activities or things they observe during their visit, to make the experience more exotic when recounting their adventures to others. Greenwood (1989) argues that under circumstances where tourists do not reimburse the locals for their services, and later alter the

meaning of activities experienced, the local culture do not profit culturally from visitors, and is being expropriated (p.173). Such a case was observed when the cruise ship tourists visited. Several of the women on Ureparapara had tattoos, some had a symbol on their forehead. Before leaving, they asked me about the tribal symbol that several women had on their forehead, if it was a symbol of their *tribe*, or a sign that they were outcasts or in other ways special. Instead of asking the women, they simply made up stories in their heads, making it exciting and exotic. When I revealed the truth, that they simply thought it was cool, I could see the veil of excitement disappearing from their eyes. When yachters arrived, they took it upon them to lecture the “natives”, especially on nutrition and health. Since they were travellers, they had lots of experience with primitive people, and knew how to “help them” as one stated. Some yachters told me that “you have to treat this people as children, because they have a primitive mind”. When lecturing the adults in Divers Bay on the negative and dangerous consequences of smoking island tobacco, drinking coca cola (when tourists once in a blue moon provided a can or two for them), and using too much sugar in their tea, the reactions from the local adults came after the yachters had left. “Who are these people, thinking it is their right to lecture us, adults, on what do to?”. I did not have an answer. I was too embarrassed on behalf of the yachters. My thoughts were the same, “who the hell do they think they are?”.

Making the primitive

When yachters came to visit, they immediately asked if there was a *kastom* or cultural village on the island. I asked them what they meant by that, whereas they answered a village where “authentic culture” could be seen. This puzzled me, as the village they had just arrived to, was exactly that, as far as I could see. What is more authentic than seeing the local people’s real life? After visiting one such cultural village in Port Vila, the capital city of Vanuatu, I understood what they had meant. What they had asked for was a village, set up for tourists, with the locals dressed in *kastom* clothing all day, no cell phones, no sneakers or flip-flops, with makeup on their faces looking as “tribal” as ever possible. This kind of cultural village is an act for tourists who wants to see primitive people. It is what can be called a human zoo (Blanchard, 2008), an urge to see “Otherness”, and as MacCarthy (2016) argues, it is “a romanticization of places where the environment provides much of people’s daily needs” (p.60), and a possible driving force for this romanticization is the modern eco-movement and concerns about climate change (p.60). Bruner (2001) states that;

[...] postmodern tourists, and ethnographers, have not entirely overcome the contradictions of their modernist and colonial pasts. Many postmodern ethnographers, it must be recognized, still struggle with an inequitable colonial relationship and vast differentials in wealth and power between themselves and the people they study. Further, ethnographers, as those who write, control how culture is represented. (p.899)

It must be recognized that tourists, and anthropologists, are part of how the people we visit are being represented to the world, in cases of remote islands, where the locals do not have the possibility to control the information being spread by the visitors.

Becoming modern

Ureparapara is the location of The Nowon and Votwos, architectural structures earlier used for ceremonial purposes in relation to grade-taking, killing of pigs and ceremonial dancing. These historical sites were in 2005 proposed for inclusion amongst the World Heritage sites of UNESCO. They are located approximately 100 to 150 meters above sea level, on the northern side of the island, on the mid-slope plateau, close to Lehali. Nowon are the ornate facades of the raised stone foundations to men's houses (*gamal*) while Votwos are earthen platforms, where a man of rank would stand and address his community as their leader. (UNESCO, 2005). If included on the World Heritage sites of UNESCO, Ureparapara might become a destination not merely for tourists seeking the "untouched" but also by people interested in architecture, history and archaeology.

Before my arrival I had already done some research on this site, and I was determined to see them with my own eyes. Unfortunately, the landowner where the site is located demanded payment, a total of 50,000 vatu. This amount is reasonable when a group of tourists have to share the cost, but for me that was too expensive, and people I talked with on Ureparapara about this reacted in anger and accused him for exploitation. Still, they assured me that on my walk from Lehali, back to Divers Bay, I would be able to see smaller versions of Nowon and Votwos located close by the trail. These constructions, including the big ones on the UNESCO tentative list, are not being used for any purpose anymore. According to my informants, they are old ruins that only serve as a source of income for the landowner, as well as the rest of the people on Ureparapara when visited by tourists. Still, when reading about them on different travel agency webpages one description of Ureparapara caught my attention. The following description is from a company selling luxury cruise destinations:

Its small population is infrequently visited, mainly by yacht cruisers and a few small cruise ships. The inhabitants are therefore generally excited and pleased to receive visitors, and respond with greetings in the form of folkloric dancing. [...] The lagoon offers excellent snorkeling, and the interior of the island contains some very ancient structures called Nowons and Votwos that are stone-and-earthworks remains of prior communities. These are still used for ceremonial purposes in grade-taking sacrificial ceremonies. [...]. (Seabourn, 2001-2018)

This agency proclaims that the ancient structures are still being used, and here I must underline their main selling point as I see it: “in grade-taking **sacrificial** ceremonies”. The word sacrificial can give the impression of “primitivism”, an impression of being able to see “savages” conducting sacrifices on the top of the mountain ridge. It is advertising of this kind, which contributes to the continuing distribution of local people as primitive.

Health is being advocated and campaigned for as one important component in the development of Ureparapara. During six months on the island, a health team from Vanua Lava came twice to visit the island. The first visit was to vaccinate infants and toddlers to avoid childhood diseases such as measles and whooping cough. The nurse was a ni-Vanuatu woman, who’s origin was Ureparapara, but currently resided on Vanua Lava. The second visit was to teach the local people about the dangers of fast-food⁶⁰ (rice and noodles) and diabetes. According to The Guardian Australia (Roy, 2017), the province of Torba aims to impose restrictions on importing foreign junk food, as a preventative measure against illnesses associated with a Western junk food diet. A focus on locally grown, organic food is being campaigned and argued for. As mentioned in chapter one, the bishop argued for healthier food as well. A focus on health and wellbeing can be argued to be a positive outcome of development, as access to information becomes available.

⁶⁰ Food that is imported and has little nutritional value.

The following interview is an example of negative consequences of tourism. Some of the people on Ureparapara expressed their despair, when tourism leads to the introduction of formerly unknown, and at the present time illegal substances:

Katrine: I heard your son used to smoke marihuana in Santo, do you think it has something to do with his anger?

Informant: I do not know, because this is the white man culture.

Katrine: What?

Informant: White man culture? Foreign? We know tobacco, leaf tobacco we plant in Vanuatu. Marihuana, where does it come from? We know that a lot of the marihuana being sold in Vanuatu is from white people. The white people come here and sell marihuana. They come on the yacht too and give marihuana to the young boys. They came from Israel.

Awkward silence

Informant: Forgive me for saying white man. We plant our own tobacco and our own drink. But now, life is changing. Because people go out in Santo and collect different [drugs] and bring it back to the island.

Informant: We like to have modern things, but we like to have the good ones. Like communication.

This interview shows how the people on Ureparapara is experiencing both good and bad effects of the development of their island. While tourists are requesting *kastom* dance when they visit, some visitors are able to observe and take part in the *public danis* (public dance), where everyone dances around in a big circle. This dance is called *elrediti* in Vanua Lava and Mota Lava, which according to Amman (2012) means “ ‘repeat something until the end’, in fact, the dance song consists of phrases that are repeated over and over” (p.148). The dance circles around some of the initiated men who sing *kastom* songs and makes *kastom* music on a sounding board (Speiser, 1991, p.377). This public dance is *kastom* on Ureparapara and is not connected to any denomination, which makes it available for everyone regardless of gender and age. As with *kastom* practices related to marriage described in chapter two, this dance is common for all the people on Ureparapara.



Figure 16: Initiated men makes music on the sounding board and other instruments. (private photo)



Figure 17: Sounding board in Divers Bay. (private photo)

Knauft (2002) emphasizes how studying social change “seems impossible without documenting earlier conditions—the “before” that implicates the “after (p.11), and that the past as well as the present should “have the same tension in our work as they do in the lives of the people we study” (p.18). To study changes in a society, the past and the present need to be accounted for. In this chapter, I have tried to demonstrate how *kastom* on Ureparapara is changing in terms of tourist performances, and also in terms of gender and power relations. Gendered *kastom* is still visible on Ureparapara, but the line separating the genders is getting blurry as modernization [white man culture], in terms of new religions and denominations, laws and opinions, is interfering with the old *kastom*. This might imply that the notion of what is old and what is new, is influenced by the increase in tourism, that demand or desire a certain “modern primitivism”. It is the locals who then interpret and respond to these demands in their own understanding, creating and/or updating traditions to fit the expectations from the world outside Ureparapara. I have argued that the people on Ureparapara are in a Catch-22 paradox, and that it is a consequence of the increase in tourism that seek the primitive experience. This desire for experiencing the primitive might be in conflict with the locals’ own desire of developing their island, in terms of technology and availability. It is in this way that the people on Ureparapara seek to develop their island, by reinventing *kastom* and updating certain practices, in their yearning of becoming modern [white man culture]. The following quote marks the end of this chapter as it embraces the main points I have tried to make, concerning the past, presence and future and how the lines separating the old and the new, might be non-existing:

Where does it go, the past? [...] Perhaps it spins new webs upon older ones that are never quite lost but never really found again. The past gives up some things and makes others its own; it becomes the same and yet very different from what it was. (Knauft, 2002, p.4)

5. Final Thoughts

In this ethnographic thesis, the aim has been to show how the everyday life on Ureparapara unfolds, and how the people in Divers Bay live their lives. I have demonstrated this through various topics, such as *kastom*, religion, beliefs and life cycles amongst others. Chapter one began with my arrival story and continued with general information concerning climate, language economy and methods used to conduct this research.

In chapter two I have attempted to show how the system of kinship on Ureparapara is similar to what Richards (1950) has called the matrilineal puzzle. The similarities are evident through the matrilineal descent combined with virilocally post marital residence. I argued that this combination might pose a challenge in terms of the inheritance of land rights. The different life cycles described such as birth, marriage and death, together with the description of the various relationships, served as examples of this intricate system of kinship. I would like to encourage further research on this system of kinship on Ureparapara.

In chapter three I described the various Christian denominations that are present on this island, which is the Anglican Church, Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists. I explored religion as an eminently collective thing by using Durkheim's (1915) definition of it, and by describing the different denominations, and how they manage the collective dissociation or association in everyday life. Further in the chapter, I explored how healing water and holy water affect the people who believes in its powers. I have argued that this belief, together with the belief in magic, the presence of spirits and certain *kastom* rituals, are part of the construction of the person on Ureparapara. I chose not to engage in the ongoing debate concerning agency, individualism and dividualism in Melanesia, but rather portraying a case where these terms and concepts might be applicable. I hope that the case might be usable for other researchers who are engaged in the debate.

In chapter four I explained the term and concept of *kastom* in relation to gender, past time female grade taking and tourism. I have argued that the people in Divers Bay are in a Catch-22 paradox, and that this is a consequence of the increasing tourism that seek the primitive experience. I have argued that the result of this increase might be an invention of traditions (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992), which is in conflict with the locals' own desires of developing their island in terms of technology and availability. The cases I have shown, as well as my arguments, can be interesting to pursue in future research, as the development of this island seems to be an ongoing process.

I must admit that six months of fieldwork on Ureparapara was not enough. Therefore, I recommend and encourage further research on all topics mentioned in this thesis, as well as topics I did not include, due to lack of information available, and/or enough space in this paper. I hope that the discussions, cases, questions and topics in this thesis can contribute to, and be useful for, future research in Melanesia and other relatable geographical fields.

Epilogue

Being a bad anthropologist

Before leaving Norway, I was preparing myself mentally on how to be a good anthropologist during my fieldwork. I had certain expectations and perceptions on how I would work to be successful in my mission. I would write notes in a certain way, use the nights to analyse and evaluate the information gathered throughout the day, listen to recordings and write out all my messy notes. When all these plans failed, I felt like a failure. I did not have enough energy to stay up all night to perform these tasks. Without anyone to consult about this issue, I started to doubt if I ever would be able to write my thesis, and even doubting if I ever would be able to complete my fieldwork. After several attempts to eat like the locals did, fish, crab, and *laplap*, Vanuatu's national dish, I felt like a complete idiot and an even bigger failure. I did actually try. I tried my best for two months, losing fifteen kilos during those months, my body got weak and my head was tired. Nothing had turned out the way I thought it would, everything being more difficult than I had ever imagined. I went on a three-week break on a different island called Espiritu Santo, where I contacted my supervisor and classmates to get some advice. I was told that we eat to survive, and to just be in the field observing and participating in the society is what being an anthropologist is all about. Boring days without any extraordinary happenings, is normal. But some days you can get exactly what you have been waiting for. So, my expectation of all days being filled with interviews, special happenings and extraordinary information, was just an imaginary and romanticized dream of how it would be to conduct a fieldwork on a remote island. Returning to the island after my stay on Espiritu Santo was difficult. I had gotten used to eating meat again, to eat all the time, feeling full all the time and being able to contact my family and friends again. Getting used to the island life once again, was more difficult than I had imagined, and I struggled for two weeks until I finally habituated back into old patterns. I realized that the feeling of being a bad anthropologist is probably something most anthropologists experience.

Leaving the field and the notion of time

From the very first day on Ureparapara, I started counting days until my departure. It was not that they did not welcome me, they took me in their care from the first day, and they treated me like family during my stay. But still, I was counting days. Minutes felt like hours, days

felt like months and months felt like years. Time went by so slowly, it felt like forever. Time is something you never think to have too much of. In my life at home I spend hours and hours browsing the internet, Instagram and Facebook, watching television and series on Netflix. When I did not have the possibility to use these medias to fill my spare time, time went by slowly. The only entertainment was watching the waves roll in over the beach, or sitting outside my bungalow alone, thinking about life. Adapting to this kind of lifestyle takes time and effort. To get used to doing nothing for hours, without anything to be entertained by, is boring. My point here is that even though in my regular life and surroundings six months seem like nothing, in some places, six months can seem like ten years when one has a different view on time. As Barley (1983) points out in his chapter about returning from fieldwork, “To one used to the regular pulse of farming life, where one thinks in seasons and the days have no names, urban dwellers seem to flash past in a frenzy of frustrated endeavor” (p. 183). This passage embraces one perspective on time, and how people conceive it differently, depending on what matters in their lives. When time is measured by seasons and when people can harvest different kinds of food, time seems to be less about counting hours and minutes, and more about what you can make out of the time available in that exact moment.

After what felt like ten years, but in reality, only had been six months, the day of my departure was finally close. I was ready to leave the island, to eat Norwegian food again and to see my family in Norway. I was tired. Tired of the island, of people and of being a newbie researcher who felt like a failure all of the time. But no matter how tired I was of everything, saying goodbye to my new family and friends was tougher than I had ever expected. These people had been everything for me for the past six months. They had seen the worst and the best of me. Children called me mother, adults called be daughter, aunt and sister. When the day that I had waited for finally arrived, my heart broke into pieces and my tears contributed to the ocean becoming saltier than it already was. Knowing that it was goodbye without knowing when I ever would see these people again, made it worse than I expected it to be. Without the possibility to call them, skype or even to be sure if they would receive a letter, made the departure even more difficult. It felt like I was in a movie, seeing everyone on the beach, crying and waving. As we sailed out of sight, and the sun rose up over the ridge of the island, in that exact moment – I knew it was over.

The return

It is positively insulting how well the world functions without one. While the traveler has been away questioning his most basic assumptions, life has continued sweetly unruffled. (Barley, 1983, p.187)

I was not prepared for how my return to Norway would be. I had never read anything about anyone struggling to adapt into their own society after fieldwork. To see my family again was amazing, but I kept feeling that something was wrong. I evaluated all my friendships, thinking “why are we really friends?”. I evaluated my life, thinking “what is the purpose of all this?”. I evaluated myself, thinking “who am I?”. Adapting to my home society and culture was difficult. To always be available, the social media, pressure and prejudices, expectations and ideals. And time. I had actually gotten used to time passing slowly. Being back in a society where time is money, time is precious, and time is something that flies by, it felt like I had an identity crisis. At the same time, it felt like I had just come out of prison, or how I assume it would be like for people who return to a society after being in prison. Time went by so quickly, and all of a sudden, I never had too much time on my hands.

After my return, I received a letter from some Norwegians who had visited Ureparapara after my departure. They had seen my bungalow and my pictures, and they had a letter for me written by my family on the island. When I read the handwritten letter, I started to cry. My broken heart broke into even smaller pieces. After two months I started to look at my pictures and notes from my fieldwork. It took two months to adapt and to get the distance I needed. It is difficult to explain fieldwork, especially to people who cannot relate. The emotions, relations, difficulties, ups and downs—and the love. It is exhausting to explain, maybe even impossible

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